

Justice Rising

Grassroots Solutions to Corporate Power

A Publication of the Alliance for Democracy

The future of journalism is in the hands of those creating it — and those relying on it.

Kate Maxwell, p. 2

Layoffs at hedge-fund-owned newspapers double those of other newspapers.

Margot Susca, p. 3

Radio is now extremely consolidated by a few mega-corporations.

Sue Wilson, p. 4

We need structural changes if we want an informed public capable of self-governance.

Jack Bandy, p. 5

Corporations make social media anti-social.

Allison Butler, p. 6

We need a deeper understanding of how our media and information ecosystems work.

Mickey Huff, p. 10

Escalating polarization underscores the urgent need to combat propagandist messaging.

Michael Gordon, p. 13

Democratic and engaged journalism requires that people own and control their own media.

Victor Pickard, p. 20

Building a New Media Landscape For a Stronger Democracy



"The issue is not issues, the issue is the system." — Ronnie Dugger



Alliance for Democracy (AfD). Since 1996, AfD has promoted systemic changes focused on liberating our culture, economy and politics from corporate domination and oppressive policies of the wealthy class. Those policies are destroying the planet with corporate profits made at the expense of people. Working with like-minded groups, AfD is building a people's movement to end corporate rule and develop positive alternatives for transformative justice.

AfD's Major Campaigns Provide Resources for Active and Concerned Citizens



Disarming Violence/Establishing Peace. At this critical time, AfD's two-part series of *Justice Rising* lays out the challenges we face to: establish peace on earth; end corporate rule by the Military-Industrial-Congressional-Complex; oppose US militarism, neocolonialism and racism; cut the Pentagon budget and move the money to human needs and climate justice by transitioning from a war economy to a peace economy.



Grassroots Institute: Progressive Solutions for the Common Good. This AfD project organizes local community actions to help solve global problems. Based in Mendocino County, CA, it has eight working groups dealing with issues including the climate crisis, corporate pollution, fraudulent corporate eminent domain claims, educating candidates for local offices, water, forests and affordable housing. It also provides study guides to help communities act on Grassroots Solutions to Corporate Power, and to build an Economy for the Common Good. See grassroots-institute.org



Public Banking. As part of its campaign to end corporate domination of our political and economic systems, the Alliance is sponsoring the Massachusetts campaign to establish the first public bank in the US since the Bank of North Dakota was established in 1919. Led by an inter-racial coalition and supported by experts on the banking system, Massachusetts Public Banking is spearheading the campaign with bills under active consideration in the state legislature. AfD also actively supports public bank campaigns in California and Oregon. See <https://masspublicbanking.org/>



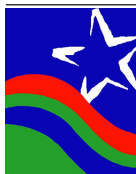
There is No "Planet B." This summer's severe weather events and climate extremes demand ending reliance on oil, gas and coal. The Alliance supports cutting the Pentagon budget to create a truly green, sustainable peace economy, which can fund a massive investment in environmental restoration, and in global peace-building for present and future generations.



Water for People and the Planet. Water, as a basic human right, should remain in the public trust. AfD supports funding affordable water for all communities as reliable public services, and has vigorously campaigned against water being bottled and sold for profit. The water market should be regulated to ensure fair, transparent, and democratic access to water.

AfD Media

AfD's Corporations & Democracy radio program features lively interviews on critical issues you will not hear on corporate-owned media. Listen monthly, live on the 3rd Thursday from 7-8 PM Pacific Time, at KZYX.org. Steve Scalmanini and Annie Esposito look at how corporate rule is at odds with good public policy on a range of issues. Listeners hear what individuals and communities are doing at the grassroots to build better, more sustainable alternatives. Call AfD's office to air the program locally.



Rise of the Phoenix

By Jim Tarbell

We live in capitalism, its power seems inescapable – but then, so did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings.
— Ursula K. Le Guin

Prize winning journalist Chris Hedges points out, “The media landscape in the US is collapsing as journalism outlets at the national, state, and local levels close or cut staff. One-third of the country’s newspapers have shut down and two-thirds of its newspaper journalists have lost jobs since 2005.” Big Tech and Wall Street capitalism, using the power of markets and money, destroyed the media landscape we knew twenty years ago. This has been a long time coming. As the now deceased Alex Carey pointed out, “The twentieth century has been characterized by three developments of great political importance: the growth of democracy, the growth of corporate power, and the growth of corporate propaganda as a means of protecting corporate power against democracy.”

Out of the ruins of traditional media, a phoenix of truth and justice must rise to create a new media landscape. It needs to provide reliable, factual and truthful information helping us to enact public policies that will prevent at least three looming tipping points that could lead to disaster. Those policies need to:

- Create a much stronger democratic political system in which the needs and concerns of all people are heard and acted upon, while preventing authoritarian tyrants seizing power;
- Protect the world from horrific impacts of climate change, while rejecting self-interested, head-in-the-sand politicians who would let the world deteriorate as they retreat to secure enclaves; and
- End all wars, before violent militaries ruin all that humans have built, and destroy the peace, safety and security of our lives forever.

This Justice Rising (JR) helps begin that process by covering how Wall Street financial, and Big Tech corporations caused the demise of the traditional media landscape that is so important for a strong democracy. It also describes the emergence of mission-oriented nonprofit newsrooms, movement journalism, and locally sponsored information sources that are forming the new media landscape. In addition, multiple articles emphasize the need for all people to become critically media literate to find their own truth in the media morass.

It is a big story and a lot of our thanks for making this happen goes to Andy Lee Roth, the Associate Director of Project Censored. He embraced the topic, suggested and solicited the authors of many of

the great articles you will read here, and supplied regular insights and wisdom along the way. Our thanks also go out to all the willing and gracious contributors who wrote the articles.

Many of them also provided multiple hyperlinks which you can access by going to the Alliance for Democracy (AfD) website and checking out the downloadable versions of this issue, which has all of the hyperlinks. Thanks also go out to AfD Co-chairs Nancy Price and David Delk who spent endless hours discussing and framing this issue.

Victor Picard emphasizes in this JR that information is a public good, much like air, water and soil. We have to keep all of these elements clean and pure, or it will be the death of us all.

We can avoid that end by all working together. One of the exciting developments in the emerging media landscape is that collaboration is pulsating through the information sphere. Where once newsrooms fought against each other, local and national newsrooms are working together and allying with nonprofits and Indigenous communities to provide the information we need. On top of that, nonprofit newsrooms free from market imperatives are providing news uncorrupted by concerns of advertisers or wealth-seeking management and owners. And since “fake news” has always been with us, we must train ourselves to find our own the truth through the media morass of propaganda, misinformation and disinformation.

We all must be part of the phoenix rising from the media ruins in order to make ourselves safe from tyrants, cataclysmic climate change, the horror of perpetual war and so much more.



graphic: Greek Theology

We must be the phoenix rising from the media ruins to make ourselves safe from tyrants, cataclysmic climate change, and the horror of perpetual war.

“Critical” Media Literacy

Many of this JR’s contributors use the term “critical” in connection with media literacy. This use links media literacy to critical thinking, including making and analyzing arguments, evaluating evidence, and recognizing bias.

“Critical” also highlights two contrasting approaches to media literacy. After the 2016 moral panic over “fake news,” many corporate entities created lavishly-funded digital, media, and news literacy programs that reflect corporate interests and promote a corporate world view, while avoiding questions of systemic inequality or social justice.

In the face of corporate efforts to co-opt media literacy, advocates of the non-corporate approach to media literacy use the term “critical” to highlight critical difference between corporate and “critical” media literacy.

Critical media literacy consistently highlights how the unequal distribution of wealth, power, and influence contribute to patterns of media ownership, production, and distribution. Likewise, critical media literacy alerts us to the potential of media to reproduce systemic injustices. It also provides vital tools for understanding and organizing the political will to address those injustices.

News Cooperatives Planting the Seeds of a More Democratic Journalism

By Kate B. Maxwell

Bright spots, including hundreds of new digital outlets and a growing number of cooperatives providing an alternative media model, are popping up across the evolving media landscape. They promise a sustainable media future that prioritizes workers and their communities — one that better embodies democratic values. These outlets may differ in legal structure, audience and revenue, but all are focused on ensuring that the future of journalism is in the hands of those creating it — and those relying on it.

With decisions driven by those producing journalism, and those who need it, the profit motive and metrics of success look very different, and so does the incentive to invest in local jobs and communities. Local news cooperatives spend their budgets on reporting that will serve their community, developing sustainable growth by prioritizing steady employment and providing coverage that will center the audience — such as in-depth election guides, public library events, information about food bank access, a database of worker wage violations, a text messaging news service for tenants, or useful information on public health and housing. Moreover, these outlets are more likely to offer diverse perspectives and coverage that serves a broader public interest and the needs of marginalized communities. Co-ops cut out the middleman while prioritizing community needs.

Many cooperative outlets across the country were established [in response](#) to the shuttering of popular media or the extractive practices of owners. These include local publications such as the *Colorado Sun* and *The Racket*, and [national outlets](#) like *Defector*, *The Appeal*, *404 Media*, *Aftermath*, and *Sequencer*. Some were founded by groups of

former coworkers. But there have also been successful startups without a previously established audience, such as [Hellgate](#), [Block by Block](#), [Range Media](#), [Unicorn Riot](#), [Brickhouse](#), [Flaming Hydra](#), Canopy Atlanta and the movement journalism outlet *Press On*. The model is also growing internationally.

The [legal structures](#) and funding for these



graphic: CPA Journal

cooperatives vary. Their funding sources include: relying on revenue from readers; grants from foundations; tax deductible donations; advertising; paywalls; subscribers, or other ways for members to participate. Some are determined to keep coverage free. Some have explored participation and ownership options for their audiences, while others are establishing [shared](#) services amongst outlets, like the *Granite State Collaborative* and *New Jersey News Commons*. Democratic ownership allows journalists the ability to approach both editorial and economic strategies in new and creative ways. They are more likely to [gauge success](#) through impact, trust or sustainability, and more likely to meet audience members where they are — finding ways to remain flexible as funding and technology shifts. They are also more likely to be transparent about their budgets, donors, and editorial approach. Since profits can be dedicated towards a more sustainable model of growth, this structure returns the primary power of the press to journalists working for and with their communities.

A growing number of journalist-run and [civic media](#) organizations, though not formally structured as cooperatives, have turned to increasingly participatory ways of engaging their audiences, like *City Bureau*, *Documented*, *Outlier*, or my own outlet [The Mendocino Voice](#).

Co-op and community-based media outlets are moving journalism in the opposite direction of legacy media by applying the same principles of [democracy](#) and equity to our news outlets that we want to see in our communities. By treating local news as a commons, guided by a belief that essential information our communities need should belong to everyone, these cooperatives are demonstrating that journalism can be transparent, accessible, and accountable to the people it serves.

Hyperlinks for this article at <https://bit.ly/47cSMAO>

Kate B. Maxwell founded and published Mendocino Voice, Mendocino County's Premier online news source. She has worked as a reporter for several Mendocino County newspapers and radio stations. Her work has been published across Northern California. She was a John S. Knight Foundation Senior Community Impact Fellow in Journalism and RJI Innovation Fellowship.

Essential
information our
communities need
should belong to
everyone.



photo: Cooperative Europe

Local News Decimated By Hedge Funds and Private Equity

By Margot Susca

On May 29, the *New York Daily News* union headlined a statement “CRISIS AT THE DAILY NEWS,” after the union passed a no-confidence vote on Andrew Julien, the hedge-fund-owned newspaper’s executive editor.

Some may know the *Daily News* as a tabloid with provocative headlines. To others, the *Daily News* invokes memories of hard-hitting stories that exposed political corruption as reporters helped city residents better understand both their civic and cultural lives. In 2017, the newspaper won the Public Service Pulitzer Prize for work with *ProPublica* documenting abuse of eviction rules. It was a finalist for its 9/11 coverage, after winning the Pulitzer in 1999 for editorials that documented financial mismanagement at Harlem’s Apollo Theater, which helped save that historic institution. Those days are over. One union member said that “Things are so off the rails that the people who run *The News*, a Pulitzer Prize-winning paper, don’t even bother to try to compete for prizes anymore.”

Since 2021, hedge fund Alden Global Capital has owned the newspaper, dismantling its staff and its crucial role in democracy, piece by piece. To research my book *Hedged: How Private Investment Funds Helped Destroy American Newspapers and Undermine Democracy*, I spent years reviewing bankruptcy court filings, records obtained through the Freedom of Information Act and US Securities and Exchange Commission documents to chart Alden’s, and other elite private investment firms’ history and contemporary practices in the American chain newspaper marketplace. Layoffs at hedge-fund-owned newspapers double those of other newspapers despite being owned by firms with billions of dollars in assets under management. While the mainstream narrative is that newspapers are a washed-up business, these investment funds as owners or managers have profited through aggressive job cuts, asset sales, debt financing, and extracting management fees as they publicly claim the market is in transition.

Private equity powerhouse Fortress Investment Group owned or managed the GateHouse chain until 2019. In 2013 — the same year GateHouse filed for bankruptcy — Fortress took a \$149 million dividend payment. In the first years of its ownership, it slashed the company’s workforce by 43%. Between 2014 and 2017, Fortress took \$60 million in fees. By its 2018 annual report, GateHouse CEO Michael



graphic: nycccl.org

Reed, who now heads Gannett, wrote: “We see continued opportunity to allocate capital across these opportunities and return it to shareholders in a manner that creates the best overall, long-term shareholder returns.” He mentioned nothing about local news.

Hedge fund firms Alden Global Capital and Chatham Asset Management separately own three of the most important newspaper chains in the United States. In 2022, Chatham Asset Management, a firm with more than \$9 billion in assets under management, bought the respected McClatchy newspaper chain that grew out of the *Sacramento Bee* into a national chain.

Alden Global Capital made \$170 million in profits from its newspapers in 2017, but those profits are never reinvested into newsrooms. As an example of what happens as hedge funds buy up the newspaper industry, an investigative reporter working for a McClatchy paper in Boise was prohibited from buying Microsoft Excel, a \$150 data-crunching tool.

In addition, weeks after winning a Pulitzer Prize for coverage of the deadly Ghost Ship fire in Oakland, California, staff at the Alden Global Capital-owned *East Bay Times* were laid off. At the *Norristown Times-Herald* in Pennsylvania, also owned by Alden Global Capital, only four staff members remained in 2021, a 91.1 percent drop in just nine years.

More than half of the 1,326 newspapers in the top 10 chains are owned or influenced by [private investment funds](#). The consolidation has resulted in a local newspaper system, owned and influenced by the ultra-wealthy, dismantling the very institution meant to give voice to average citizens in a democracy. The union at the *New York Daily News* described how “the relentless cuts have made it impossible to cover a city of 9 million people. Stories are getting missed, overlooked, ignored.” Maybe that is the point.

Hyperlinks for this article at <https://bit.ly/47cSMA0>

Margot Susca is the Assistant Professor of Journalism, Accountability, and Democracy at American University in Washington, D.C. She is the author of *Hedged: How Private Investment Funds Helped Destroy American Newspapers and Undermine Democracy*.

Investment funds, as owners or managers, have profited through aggressive job cuts, asset sales, and debt financing.



graphic: The Atlantic

Fight for the Air

"Serve the Public Interest"

By Sue Wilson

Just when we thought media consolidation couldn't get any worse, it could, depending on who wins the Presidency — and the Congress — in November.

Media consolidation is fraught with politics. Because radio and TV signals literally travel through our air, the federal government licenses broadcast companies to use our air — but only if they serve our interest — "the public interest." This is not just passing fancy. Since 1934, that public interest obligation has been enshrined in legislation passed by Congress and signed into law by the President of the United States.

Exactly what that means has shifted through the years. Congress changed broadcast law over time so today one corporation may license as many Radio frequencies nationally as it can acquire. Due to that legislation, once richly independent Radio is now extremely consolidated by a few mega-corporations who choose to air chosen musicians and pro-GOP political talk.

Early congressional acts limited TV broadcasters to license just three stations — nationwide. Over time, Congress, instead, created a "National Audience Cap" restricting TV licensees to reach only 39% of the viewing public with their signals to prevent domination of which information the airwave-owning public can access.

For decades, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) sets the Rules for how broadcasters must comply with the laws. One FCC Rule limits the number of local Radio stations licensed in one [Designated Market Area](#) (DMA) to as few as five and as many as eight, depending on community size. Another allows a single broadcast corporation to license just two local TV stations in the same DMA.

Those rules can be changed not only by the whim of who the current President appoints to head the FCC, but by regulators schmoozed by broadcasters into changing rules — like allowing one broadcaster to operate stations licensed by another to conceal who really controls station programming. Today, huge broadcasters like Sinclair and Nexstar control not just the two local TV stations legally allowed in one community, but four - and often three of the Big Four Networks (ABC, CBS, FOX, NBC).

Sinclair is cutting or eliminating local news altogether. They are replacing it with its partisan slanted program "The National Desk" - which now is spreading Republican National

Legislation is the answer — and which legislators are elected in November will be key to whether media works for the People — or for giant corporations.



Sue Wilson at an anti-Rush Limbaugh rally in 2009.



graphic: Broadcast Blues

committee backed anti-Harris propaganda to its local viewers in 86 local areas.

However, the recent Supreme Court decision in *Loper Bright Enterprises v Raimondo* is putting this entire model in jeopardy. SCOTUS decided it is not the job of Federal Regulators to interpret laws, but rather that of the Courts. According to Radio/Television Business Report, "Just 18 days after the Supreme Court's 6-3 decision to end the 'Chevron deference,' the National Association of Broadcasters has filed an initial brief in its challenge to the FCC's local radio and television ownership restrictions."

Now the only way to ensure We the People are served by the airwaves we own is for our representatives to immediately pass real laws to protect our interests. Legislation is the answer — and which legislators are elected in November will be key to whether media works for the People — or for giant corporations.

Legislative Priorities:

- Do not allow one Radio corporation to license unlimited numbers of radio stations nationally.
- Do not allow one TV corporation to license more than four stations in the same TV market.
- Do not allow one TV company to license or operate two, three, even four network stations in the same TV market.
- Discontinue Shared Service and Joint Sales Agreements which conceal who truly controls content.
- Legislate a simple "Right to Respond" so We who own the airwaves can engage in discourse and defend ourselves from personal attacks. Why did the Sandy Hook parents have to sue Alex Jones for defamation to have their righteous grievances heard? Why weren't they simply allowed equal time on the radio?

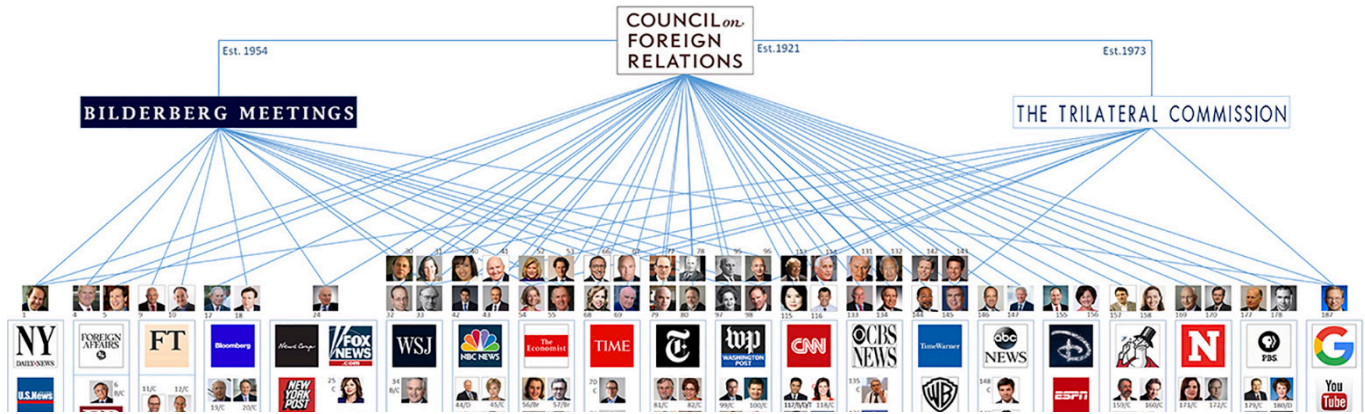
It is our air. Now is the moment to fight for it.

Hyperlinks for this article at <https://bit.ly/47cSMA0t>

Sue Wilson is an Emmy Award-winning broadcast journalist. She is the Writer/Producer/Director of the documentary, Broadcast Blues, and heads the Media Action Center.

The Imperial Press

The American Empire and Its Media



graphic: Swiss Propaganda Research

By Norman Solomon

US mass media mirror the limited ideological diversity of the two main political parties, including the range of viewpoints and the outlooks in commentaries. Media outlets do include a variety of views on many domestic issues, but criticisms of corporate power are rare — and do not often challenge the huge leverage great wealth and institutional concentrations of capital exert over government policies.

With 750 military bases overseas, and a military budget that exceeds the next ten countries combined, the US government routinely sends missiles across borders. The Institute for Policy Studies reported last year that 62 per cent of the federal discretionary budget went to “militarized programs” of one sort or another.

But for the USA’s corporate media, which include not only the avowedly commercial outlets, but also the big “public broadcasting” networks NPR and PBS — the militarized budget and its reflexive political mentality are taken as a given. This is not a conspiracy of a few plotters behind closed doors. The core problem is not individual; it’s structural.

The media ownership worth countless billions and the flow of advertising revenue drive acceptance of the US war train. The military-industrial-media complex is lucrative for all concerned, whether the major investors and CEOs of big news organizations or the corporate institutions they serve. In late April, when Congress approved and President Biden signed legislation to send tens of billions of dollars’ worth of arms to Israel and Ukraine, it was yet another gift to military contractors who thrive on the largesse of the warfare state.

In sync with such profit-taking for war-making, the atmosphere for mainstream journalists on the subject of wars fought by the Pentagon or US allies is: if you are pro-war you’re objective; but if you’re anti-war you’re biased.

Yet there are cracks in the walls of mainstream media. And there are great opportunities to grow independent media systems that treat agendas for peace and

justice as an imperative rather than a danger.

Progressives can and should fight for space in corporate media. Local newspapers as well as TV and radio outlets should be challenged to broaden and deepen their coverage. The true costs of war — human, economic, social and environmental — should gain coverage in human and policy terms. News stories, opinion articles, letters to the editor, broadcast interviews and more should routinely include information and analysis that challenges instead of just reinforces what Martin Luther King, Jr. called “the madness of militarism.”

Meanwhile, building and sustaining alternative, progressive media for the long haul are essential. Though it is hard to match the financial resources of traditional media outlets, the ingenuity and grassroots capacities of progressive organizers have created many outlets that strive for social justice and peace instead of destructive systemic injustice.

Whether facing the conformist militarism of mainstream media or the challenge of countering the propaganda systems with people-powered means of communication, we have enormous opportunities to shake off the passivity encouraged by corporate media and the entire capitalist system. Horizontal communication instead of top-down newspeak is essential to break the money and violence social order.

The great media critic George Seldes said that “the most sacred cow of the press is the press itself.” *While the media establishment keeps worshipping itself, we have vast opportunities to create media for democracy.*

Hyperlinks for this article at <https://bit.ly/47cSMAO>

Norman Solomon is the director of RootsAction.org and of the Institute for Public Accuracy. The latest edition of his book, War Made Invisible with an afterword about the Gaza war, is now available in your local bookstore.

Insistence on horizontal communication instead of top-down newspeak is essential to breaking the grip of a social order based on money and violence.

Isolation media

The Antisocial Impact of Social Media on Democracy

By Allison Butler

Despite the moniker ‘social media,’ these technologies and platforms are anything but social. Though social media technologies and platforms promise users a [sense of community](#), much of the work done on social media happens in isolation and is [viewed negatively](#). Though presented as social, users scroll, like, comment, follow, un-follow, and post, alone, behind a screen. This creates a paradox where digital technologies make space for audiences to share more and more of their lives, while interacting with each other less and less. Indeed, these platforms are more aptly described as “isolation media.”

Users, especially [young users](#), are not to be blamed for this predicament. They were born into this environment, with zero say in its development, and yet they hold the vast majority of the pressure to fill the digital space and follow the digital rules. While users do most of the labor on social media sites, they are often docile bodies in the face of corporate power. Potential social media users have two options: To eschew social media entirely, or to agree, entirely, with the policies and practices of the corporation. Neither of these options have any degree of nuance, flexibility, or plausibility. The problem of social media’s anti-social and anti-democratic principles lies with the corporate owners and managers.

Merriam-Webster defines democracy as “a government by the people,” and “a government by which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections.” Social media organizations do not follow these definitions at all. The “government” of social media is one run by [tech oligarchs](#) where supreme power is vested in the executives and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of complex and complicated privacy policies, terms of service, and creative use of language. It is the platform operators, not the community, who set the community guidelines.

A close analysis of the terms of service and privacy policies of the most popular social media sites, including but not limited to, [Facebook](#), [SnapChat](#), [TikTok](#), and [Instagram](#), demonstrate a clear and unalterable power differential. Social media users of these platforms give up the rights to their face and their likeness, even in death,



graphic: Mark Grabowski

and are responsible for checking the privacy policies to see if they have changed. And, in an even more impossible bind, children under the age of consent for their own social media accounts can have their images posted to other social media accounts; these images are then owned, shared, and profited from by any corporate partners. Even when users delete an account, all their information remains the property of the corporation. No company allows for any legal action in case of anything negative connected with their product, including user death. Any user dissatisfaction is handled either through deletion of the account or through forced arbitration.

These terms illustrate the dismantling of our personal democracy. In a media and economic environment run by private, for-profit companies, user entertainment and satisfaction is a distant third to the desire for corporate profit and user data. User isolation may cause hand-wringing among the non-tech elite, however, this isolation feeds into exactly what the corporate owners desire more of: profit and data.

However, all hope is not lost, if one looks closely. Shards of evidence demonstrate that we may be at a tipping point in social media use; Big Tech companies lay off [large numbers of employees](#) and some people look [beyond the apps](#) to meet people in real life. Not surprisingly, users may combat the isolation and the evident absence of connection they were promised, by coming to their own rescue via community and collaboration.

Hyperlinks for this article at <https://bit.ly/47cSMAO>

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Social media users may combat the isolation and the absence of connection they were promised by coming to their own rescue via community and collaboration.

People are the Answer Not Artificial Intelligence

By Jack Bandy

In 2023, layoffs and closures in US journalism sent an especially clear and worrying message. Besides demonstrating another year of ongoing decline, the 2023 data showed that tech-savvy news outlets were not immune to the crisis. *Vice* filed for bankruptcy, *BuzzFeed News* shut down entirely, and even the mighty *Washington Post* [faced cuts](#).

Although there is no single factor that fully explains the journalism crisis in the US, it is worth giving special attention to technology's role. Most of the time that means "the role of technology companies." After Facebook and Google captured massive audiences using their products, these giant tech corporations started luring businesses who wanted to reach those people through advertising. Newspaper advertising struggled to compete with the targeted advertising [promised by technology companies](#).

As tech companies captured advertising revenue from the news industry, they began to capture other parts of journalism as well. Their aggregation tools displayed headlines and article snippets from multiple news outlets, and readers drifted away from visiting news websites producing the news. Suddenly, much of the news consumption process was also in the hands of Big Tech.

Then came algorithmic ranking. Google moved from a straightforward "PageRank" algorithm to an opaque algorithm that uses 200+ signals to order search results. Facebook started showing posts based on expected engagement, giving posts an extra boost for each "angry" reaction. Similarly, Twitter moved from chronologically-ordered timelines to personalized feeds, and even Apple News, which promised to put "humans over machines," included an algorithmic "Trending Stories" section.

Besides shifts in the quantity and quality of the news that people read, perhaps the most important consequence is the growing power technology companies wield over so many journalistic processes. They have come for news consumption and news distribution, all the while suggesting that newsrooms simply need to learn and adapt to new technology. But even newsrooms premised on technological adaptation have proven unsustainable.

There will likely be a new wave of challenges with "generative AI" tools. For example, Google promises journalists that their artificial intelligence (AI) tools can aid in the [process of news production](#). Journalists can decide for themselves if and how they will adopt these tools, but we should resist the optimistic narrative from technology companies that AI is here to help. There



graphic: Hill Consulting

are several reasons for this.

The first reason is that Big Tech companies like Facebook, Apple, and Google have been sharing the "technology as savior" narrative for decades. And yet, journalism remains in dire crisis. Aggregators did not help, algorithmic ranking did not help, the pivot to video did not help. Why would AI be any different?

A second reason we should resist this technoptimistic narrative is that it masks the real purpose and value of journalism, which is not just the words they produce, but the processes of accountability that they practice. This includes the knowledgeable reporter attending city hall meetings and the editor thinking every day about important events in the area.

There are no silver bullets or quick fixes. You can subscribe to your local news organization and ask your friends to do the same, but we need long-term, structural changes if we want a truly informed public that is capable of self-governance amidst ever-evolving technology. Just as we do with public schools, public roads, and public libraries, we must decide that our communities need information and accountability, regardless of how profitable the endeavor may be.

This is a long game, and it cannot be won with the same individualistic, neoliberal logic that created the crisis. But if we commit to a collective approach, however small it may start and however long it may take, we can slowly work our way toward informed communities.

Hyperlinks for this article at <https://bit.ly/47cSMA0>

Jack Bandy, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Computer Science at Transylvania University. His research focuses on algorithmic systems like Twitter, Apple News, and Facebook.



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JUSTICE RISING is a publication of the **Alliance for Democracy**, whose mission is to end the domination of our politics, our economics, the environment, and our culture by large corporations. The Alliance seeks to establish true economic and political democracy and to create a just society with a sustainable, equitable economy.

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Cover images clockwise from upper left: a graphic from the Atlantic.com depicting the corpses of small newspapers; Sue Wilson protesting Rush Limbaugh; Big Tech bully from Professor Mark Grabowski; Ida B. Wells, revered reporter on lynchings in the south, civil rights hero, Pulitzer Prize winner from *Good Black News*; Central Eye graphic from Media Literacy Now.



graphic: Artist for Assange

Dedicated to Julian Assange

We dedicate this Justice Rising to Julian Assange and the global movement that pushed for his freedom. Julian Assange deserves a hero's award for revealing the dark secrets of the national security state in a democracy where there should not be any dark secrets. His surprise release from prison this Spring resulted from years of support from many groups including the Freedom of the Press Foundation in the US which assembled a huge international coalition demanding his freedom and repeated the demand until he was released, and Reporters Without Borders, the International Federation of Journalists and the European Federation of Journalists, as well as many other groups around the world.

Justice Rising



With the demise of profit-driven journalism, a new media landscape is coming to the fore. This began almost 20 years ago when three-and-a-half dozen, liberal, independent newsrooms came together to form the Media Consortium in a collaboration to give independent media a stronger impact in the world. Media Consortium Executive Director Jo Ellen Green Kaiser points out that they “started building a strong collaborative culture even though they were told that ‘news outlets would never agree to work with each other.’ We proved this ‘common wisdom’ wrong.” As the new media landscape developed in the ensuing years, collaboration became operational across the industry.

Kaiser also saw “racial equity as the most critical challenge facing the progressive news sector.” But she also realized that “Progressive news was largely run by white people, still assumed a white audience, and, though attempting to cover issues impacting communities of color, did not have relationships with those communities.” After several years she came to the conclusion “that the Media Consortium was not the best container for such work.” By 2018 the Media Consortium came to an end unable to collaborate on this issue.

But out of the ashes rose a new social justice journalism not hampered by the traditional “objective journalism.” Objectivity, these journalists pointed out, “is the ideology of the status quo” and that the use of objectivity allowed traditional corporate media “to perpetuate existing oppressions and structural violences.” Social justice news organizations now commit to collective liberation and declare that their work is not neutral, but is in solidarity with the movement as Movement Journalism

Movement Journalism “argues that social justice movements — and grassroots civil society efforts generally — should be as important to journalists as are Wall Street numbers or pronouncements by politicians.” Movement Journalism is about “people coming together to build the power of all people to collectively control the conditions of their lives and communities.” It is “the practice of journalism in the service of...social, political, and economic transformation.” This journalism comes out of the work of Black female journalists, like Ida B. Wells, who risked her life reporting on lynchings in the South in the late 1800s. It “is seen as a critical part of any successful strategy for systemic change.”

Reporting on the horror of Gaza exemplifies the importance of Movement Journalism. The imperial press has long reported wars as current events with no historic context. Movement Journalism presents current events in Gaza in the historical perspective of Israeli oppression of Palestinians over the last century. Only with this framing does the cause of the violence in Gaza become apparent.

Mission-Oriented Journalism is another branch of the new media landscape. It is made up of media organizations concerned about a whole range of political, environmental, economic and cultural issues. Their reporters concentrate on their nonprofits' missions to solve the many problems that face people and the planet. These include:

- Establishing a democracy overseen by We the People with money power vanquished to the sidelines;
- A healthy environment not destroyed by market imperatives that are depleting our resources, destroying our natural systems and poisoning our air, water and soil;
- Bringing peace to the world through cooperation and diplomacy while disarming the violence and corruption of the military industrial complex;
- Instituting an economy that empowers all humans to lead creative, fulfilling, productive lives where we all benefit with a secure and sustainable future; and
- Supporting a culture that is equitable and safe for all.

These are the important changes we need to the media landscape in order to guarantee the survival of our species and the health of the planet.

Ethical Journalism Safeguards Human Rights & Civil Liberties

By Mischa Geracoulis

Exposing corruption and harms to public welfare is a cornerstone practice of journalism, and serves the inalienable human right to know. Enshrined in [Article 19](#) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the right to know and to the free flow of information “regardless of frontiers” are rights fundamental to every other human right. Article 19’s protection depends not on law enforcement agencies but on an ethical press committed to [seeking out and reporting truth](#) and a duly informed public empowered to act on those rights through a combination of freedom of information and news literacy.

In addition, the [First Amendment](#) of the US Constitution protects freedoms of the press, speech, peaceful assembly, and to petition the government for redress of harms from government interference.

Any ideas of human and constitutional rights and personal or collective agency accorded by these documents, however, are moot without the free access to information and the plurality of perspectives that foster citizens’ understanding of issues, especially those that would fly under the radar if not for investigative reporting, and appraisal of government and corporate conduct. Even with unfettered, trustworthy news sources, citizens are still responsible for their own due diligence. Critical media literacy makes that easier.

For example, a critical media lens turned toward corporate news coverage of two prominent, controversial cases—that of Donald Trump and Julian Assange—reveals deep discrepancies in coverage, impacting the public’s right to know, the application of democratic norms, and the rule of law. In service to power, corporate news coverage of WikiLeaks villainized Assange, while normalizing Trump’s involvement in the January 6 insurrection at the US Capitol.

In June 2024, after 14 years of imprisonment, Assange pled guilty to one count of violating the Espionage Act in exchange for his freedom. Assange’s release was long overdue, but the consequences of the plea deal that facilitated it is [a likely chilling effect](#) on public interest journalism.

By contrast, Trump faces [charges](#) of conspiring to overturn the 2020 presidential election and is convicted of other felonies. He continues to skate scott free; his responsibility absolved in July 2024 when the Supreme Court’s far-right majority [ruled to endow former presidents](#) with criminal immunity.



photo: Business Insider

photo: The Daily Beast

An ethical press would have seized on the many opportunities to explain “how dangerous and unprecedented it would be for a president to be able to commit crimes without the possibility of future legal accountability,” [Elie Mystal](#) wrote in *The Nation* in the lead-up to the Court’s ruling. Instead, as Mystal emphasized, most of the establishment press reported “as if this were a normal and acceptable choice for the court and the country.”

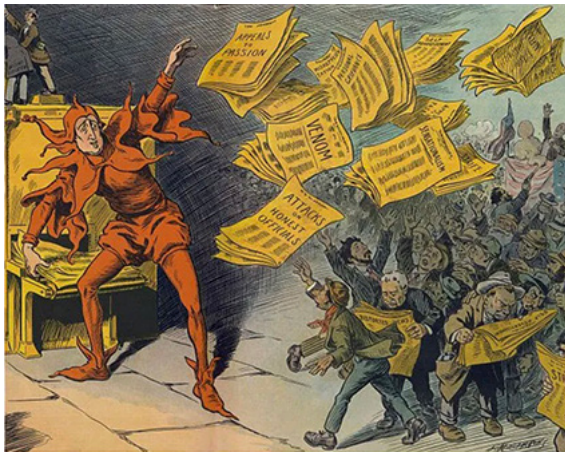
At this stage in the neoliberal game, American democracy is already sufficiently warped by corporate lobbyists and dark money campaign donations. Rescue from this and the compounding damage done by the Supreme Court necessitates the kind of civic action and rights defense only made possible by a press that critiques and publicizes the consequences of government actions and prioritizes citizens’ right to know.

The Supreme Court and the corporate press have made their allegiance clear—it’s not to democracy or the American public. When presidents are exalted above the law, while journalists and publishers are criminalized for doing their job, cherished human rights, civil liberties, press freedom principles, and democratic institutions are jeopardized. But the story doesn’t have to end there. Informed by journalism that promotes freedom of information and public interests, the people still have the power to check imbalances that threaten basic rights and to stake their fundamental claim to democracy.

Hyperlinks for this article at <https://bit.ly/47cSMAO>

Mischa Geracoulis is the Curriculum Development Coordinator at Project Censored, contributor to Project Censored’s State of the Free Press yearbook series, a Project Judge, and serves on the editorial board of the Censored Press. Her writing focuses on critical media and information literacy, democracy and ethics, and press and academic freedoms.

When presidents are exalted above the law, while journalists and publishers are criminalized for doing their job, cherished human rights, civil liberties, press freedom principles, and democratic institutions are jeopardized.



L. M. Glacken's *The Yellow Press*, showing William Randolph Hearst as a jester handing out fake news. October 12, 1910.

graphic: Library of Congress

Fighting Fake News

By Suspending Judgement

By Nolan Higdon

News is as old as humans. Fake news is as old as the news itself. Since 2016, a moral panic over fake news has engulfed the US, due in part to the [lies](#) and consistent use of “fake news” as an epithet by former President Trump, loss of public faith in legacy journalism, and the World Health Organization’s claim of a global [infodemic](#).

Fake news is a part of the human experience. We easily create, imagine, and believe unsubstantiated fake news and other forms of propaganda. People cannot simply eradicate fake news, they have to learn to navigate through it as part of our media ecosystem. In response, experts have developed tools for determining the veracity of content such as the [CRAAP test](#) or the fake news detection kit, in my book *The Anatomy of Fake News*.

However, a person cannot use evidence to prove something is false, if they do not know the evidence exists. For example, many people may have believed Biden’s claim about his uncle (see sidebar) until they realized the available evidence proved it was untrue. In situations where the evidence is not readily available, people are best served by looking for indications of fake news while practicing healthy skepticism.

- Here are warning signs for possible fake news.
- **Censoring “fake news” for democracy?** Those in power utilize censorship to marginalize narratives that challenge official fake news. So when the ruling class prohibits dissenting voices, like its suppression of [RT America](#), [Al Jazeera](#), and [TikTok](#), it is a sign they are protecting their own fake news.
 - **Othersidism** Fake news narratives create [false equivalencies](#), as when they compare Democratic Party concerns about Russian interference in the 2016 election to Republican claims the election was stolen in 2020. The inequality is that Democrats accepted the 2016 vote count, while,

- Republicans denied the actual vote count in 2020.
- **Online proof?** Artificial intelligence (AI) can create fabricated videos, audio, and images. Therefore, online news consumers cannot believe what they see or hear without additional corroborating evidence. They should suspend judgment until further research finds corroborating evidence.
- **Confirmation Bias** Fake news producers prey on existing biases to convince audiences to accept falsehoods. When content supports a user’s world view, it is a possible sign of fake news.
- **Establishment Consensus** Powerful organizations use vast wealth and resources to make it appear that a consensus favorable to their interests has emerged organically. News consumers should suspend judgment until corroborating evidence emerges from independent sources.
- **Legacy Media** has a history of spreading fake news from Weapons of Mass Destruction to [Stop the Steal](#). Audiences need to scrutinize legacy media the same way as they scrutinize any other media outlet.

Savvy, critically thinking citizens understand that it is best to suspend judgment rather than risk accepting and spreading fake news. When warning signs are apparent, and the evidence non-existent or incomplete, citizenry of our fragile democracy must remain skeptical and suspend judgment on what they hear, read, and see until transparently sourced corroborating evidence, free from conflicts of interest, is provided. Otherwise, we risk democracy being cannibalized by disinformation.

Hyperlinks for this article at <https://bit.ly/47cSMA0t>

Nolan Higdon is a founding member of the *Critical Media Literacy Conference of the Americas*, and Lecturer at Merrill College and the University of California, Santa Cruz. Higdon is a regular source of expertise for CBS, NBC, The New York Times, and The San Francisco Chronicle.

Presidential Fake News

“He got shot down in an area where there were a lot of cannibals in New Guinea at the time. They never recovered his body,” explained President [Joe Biden](#) in an April 2024 comment about his uncle, who, while serving for the US military, perished during World War II. The comment created an international incident; [New Guinea](#) demanded an apology as Biden’s account was misleading at best. Existing military documents reveal that the uncle’s plane was shot down near New Guinea, but he actually died by drowning. In fact, there is [no evidence](#) to support Biden’s suggestion that his uncle was consumed by cannibals at all. The story is just another example of fake news, this one coming straight from the President of the United States.



graphic: BruceB



graphic: Carr McLean



graphic: Science News



graphic: OneBraveThing



graphic: Rappler

Critical Media Project

Why Media Matters: Key facets of personal identity — like gender, social class, age, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, religion, and disability — play prominent roles in the media we consume and create, determining how we see, understand, and experience the world and those we encounter in it.

By Alison Trope & DJ Johnson

Critical Media Project (CMP) is an educational initiative grounded in social identity and justice. It is designed to identify and tackle systemic and normalized identity constructs that come to us through everyday life — specifically, our interactions with media. CMP introduces media norms and problematizes stereotypes; it contextualizes them historically and in relation to institutional structures; it opens up the possibility for counter-narratives.

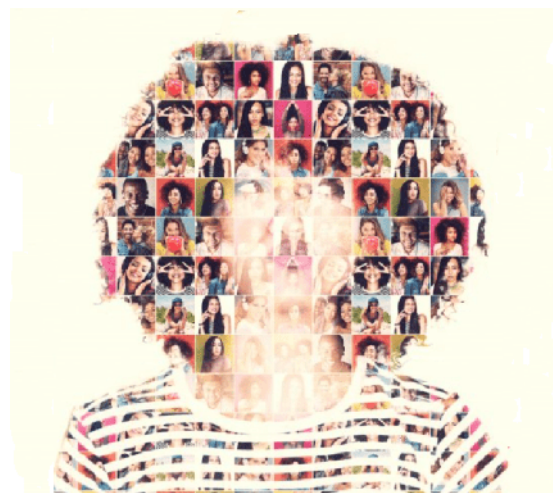
In turn, CMP gives youth opportunities to rewrite themselves and generate new perspectives that affirm their lived experiences and promote self-efficacy. Created to bring both critical pedagogy and critical media literacy into middle and high school classrooms, CMP puts theory into practice with functional, accessible tools and resources. CMP is founded on the principle that the best way to encourage critical media literacy is to provide the actual media examples for critical analysis, and use them as tools to identify, reorient, and challenge harmful representational practices and ideologies. In addition to critical analysis, the site therefore centers critical creation of media. CMP's website, supplemental curricula and programming help youth see and understand across differences, enhancing their perspectives on justice.

CMP originated as an online repository, providing a curated and accessible selection of media examples that educators and youth can use to critically analyze and discuss media representa-

CMP gives youth opportunities to rewrite themselves and generate new perspectives that affirm their lived experiences and promote self-efficacy.

Key Concepts

- Identity is a socially and historically constructed concept. We learn about our own identity and the identity of others through interactions with family, peers, organizations, institutions, media and other connections we make in our everyday life.
- Key facets of identity—like gender, social class, age, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, religion, age and disability—play significant roles in determining how we understand and experience the world, as well as shaping the types of opportunities and challenges we face.
- Social and cultural identity is inextricably linked to issues of power, value systems, and ideology.
- The media uses representations—images, words, and characters or personae—to convey specific ideas and values related to culture and identity in society.



graphicannenberg.usc.edu

tions of social identities. The site focuses on seven broad identity categories: race and ethnicity, gender, LGBTQ+, socio-economic class, religion, ability, and age. Foregrounding the intersectional nature of identity, a single media artifact may be tagged with multiple subcategories of identity. The site's extensive collection of media includes over 700 examples from movies, television and streaming, advertisements, news and documentaries, online viral videos and user-generated content (also tagged by media type). The website archives a wide array of examples that are historically and culturally contextualized through descriptive annotations as well as questions to promote critical engagement. For each of the broad social identity categories, we also offer a text-based overview and lesson plan, as well as a curated playlist with select media examples.

While the site as a whole serves as a media repository open to teachers or youth, we also have developed curricula that align with our mission and provide opportunities for youth that align with emerging formulations of 21st century civic education and literacy. It is with this mindset of civic engagement tied to social justice that our youth think, create and collaborate. *The work of CMP creates multiple avenues to develop agency and voice amongst its youth through intersecting processes of critical digital consumption, critical digital production, and critical digital distribution.*

Hyperlinks for this article at <https://bit.ly/47cSMA0>

Alison Trope, Ph.D., is Director of [The Critical Media Project](#) and Clinical Professor at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School of Communication & Journalism.

DJ Johnson is Associate Director of The Critical Media Project and Associate Professor of Practice in the Division of Media Arts + Practice at the University of Southern California's School of Cinematic Arts.

Propaganda

Building an Immunity

By Michael Gordon

Three years have passed since Americans marched down Pennsylvania Avenue toward the US Capitol to protest what they perceived as a stolen election. After storming the Capitol and sending members of Congress running for the exits, many prominent Republicans, including Mitch McConnell, swiftly condemned the violence and rejected the false claims of a stolen election. Today, those voices have grown quieter or been silenced in the party. In the meantime, the former president has been indicted in four criminal cases involving 91 charges and found liable for defamation, sexual battery, and financial fraud. Yet, a recent FiveThirtyEight national poll showed him as the odds-on favorite to regain the presidency in 2024.

Trump's uncanny resilience with a large part of the American electorate underscores the power and influence of sustained propagandist messaging. Pushing that envelope, last November, the former president started demonizing his political opponents as "vermin" and, in March, started selling bibles lined with the Declaration of Independence, Pledge of Allegiance, the Constitution, and the lyrics to God Bless the USA. These tactics serve a potent and effective propagandist function.

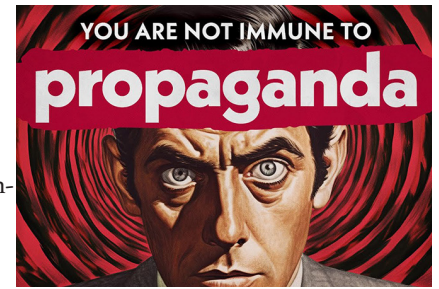
Since 2018, The Propwatch Project, a 501(c)(3) educational nonprofit, whose mission is to raise public awareness about the prevalence of propaganda and disinformation, has been at the forefront of raising public awareness about propaganda and disinformation in mass media and social media. It aims to build immunity to the manipulative tactics at the core of propaganda and disinformation. Employing a strategy called logic-based inoculation, the project develops content designed specifically to strengthen an individual's ability to recognize faulty logic, disinformation, or rhetorical techniques which are indicators of propaganda. The project also conducts and publishes academic research on innovative inoculation approaches using both authentic and AI-generated content. Using this content, visitors to the propwatch.org website can not only practice identifying propaganda techniques, but also learn how and why these techniques work.

At the heart of the project are in-depth analyses of current national and statewide debates, interviews, and speeches to identify the use of propaganda techniques. They generate thousands of authentic examples for website visitors to assimilate and learn from. The project also features discussions and insights from leading scholars, researchers, and authors in the field, discussing critical issues, such as breaking the cycle of toxic polarization, effectively rebutting science denial,

understanding the mechanics of rage farming, and examining how intuition fuels conspiracy theories.

As the nation approaches a pivotal election in November, the consequences of propagandist messaging have become ever more present. The escalating polarization and gradual shift towards radicalization underscore the urgent need to combat propagandist messaging at its core. *The Propwatch Project remains steadfast in its mission to expose these tactics and provide the critical tools and knowledge necessary to recognize and resist them.*

Michael Gordon is the founder and senior editor of The Propwatch Project and a Professor with the College of Computer and Information Technology at St. Petersburg College.



graphic: MR

Propwatch develops content designed to strengthen one's ability to recognize faulty logic, disinformation, or rhetorical techniques which are indicators of propaganda.

Critical Media Literacy in Action

By Shealeigh Voitl, Kate Horgan, and Reagan Haynie

Digital natives, who grew up in the "digital age" or post-1980, are constantly learning how influencers on apps like TikTok and Instagram use their platforms to deceive their followers for profit or power.

Assessing the credibility and authenticity of claims made on these apps is a core feature of modern critical media literacy. Still, fact-checking is just the tip of the iceberg when navigating content online.

Project Censored's Critical Media Literacy in Action (CMLA), a social media series that unpacks common establishment media talking points and social media trends, empowers users to become more discerning judges of information integrity.

The series was created by three digital natives, who were each noticing troubling patterns across their respective feeds. In CMLA's first episode, Project Censored's Kate Horgan, one of the series' creators, discusses how the New York Times often obscured and, at times, wholly removed Israel's responsibility in its brutal attack on Gaza and its citizens by using what Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) refers to as "linguistic gymnastics." In another episode, *MintPress News'* Alan MacLeod discusses certain corporate news outlets' use of passive voice in their reporting on Gaza, which, among other things, absolves Israel of accountability and sanitizes its violence.

The CMLA series encourages users to better understand tactics by the establishment press, such as linguistic gymnastics, and how they are employed to misinform an audience. Ultimately, CMLA's creators want users to be able to fully embrace technology by learning how social media algorithms work, investigating, for example, content moderation practices unique to each platform and what kind of content most often gets blocked and why.

By harnessing this knowledge, social media users can develop a general toolkit applicable across various platforms to recognize and challenge misinformation (and misdirection) effectively. Find the Critical Media Literacy in Action series on Project Censored's TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube channels.

Shealeigh Voitl is Project Censored's Digital and Print Editor. Her writing has been featured in Truthout, The Progressive, and Ms. Magazine. Kate Horgan is Project Censored's Website Design and Media Assistant, and a coauthor of The Media and Me. Reagan Haynie is Project Censored's Social Media Manager. Her work has been featured in the Project's State of The Free Press.

Hyperlinks for these articles at <https://bit.ly/47cSMAO>

Community Radio Our Best Hope for Community- Based Media and Democracy. Can We Keep It Vibrant and Strong?

By Marty Durlin

Community radio grew out of Pacifica Radio's KPFA, founded in 1949 by pacifist Lew Hill. Hill's lofty mission of eclectic, intelligent, listener-sponsored programming — with music, the arts, philosophy and politics center stage — became the template for community radio stations that proliferated during the 1960s, 70s and 80s. Spearheading that movement was Lorenzo Milam, author of *Sex and Broadcasting*, a handbook for how to start and run a community station. Milam inspired a flock of new stations in the western United States with whimsical call letters such as KRAB, KBOO and KAOS.

The nonprofit Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) was created in 1967, as a funder of both radio and TV. Congress appropriates these funds in a two-year advance cycle intended to keep Washington politics out of the mix. Alas, politics intervenes often — mostly in the form of Republican lawmakers trying to “de-fund” CPB, in punishment for news choices made by public broadcasters.

Despite being targeted from the very beginning by such critics as Richard Nixon, CPB's federal funding has survived for more than half a century. There were heady days in the 1970s when the landmark children's TV program *Sesame Street* became the poster child for congressional support and all of public broadcasting benefited.

But community radio stations — considered the stepchild of public radio because unpaid local producers rather than professionals create the programming — have continued to struggle. Stations in wealthier urban communities often qualify for CPB support. But the smaller rural stations are unable to access CPB funding. Even though these stations — perhaps even more than their wealthier counterparts — are vital news outlets and serve as incubators, conveners, connectors, havens for independent musicians, and lifelines during emergencies, they fail to meet the financial threshold deemed necessary for CPB funding.

These smaller stations are “where the rubber meets the road.” Their missions — mirroring KPFA's with aspirations of harmony, collaboration and civil discourse — are confronted daily with reality. The dream of tolerance and cooperation is challenged by passionate disagreement over the definition of “good programming.” Fairness and equity go nose to nose with scarcity of resources.

Community radio stations are vital news outlets and serve as incubators, conveners, connectors, havens for independent musicians, and lifelines during emergencies.



graphic: Radio Boise

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) noncommercial restrictions and the stations' internal values don't necessarily line up. Traditional hierarchy derails consensus. Sometimes the stations are brought to a standstill by internal squabbling.

Nevertheless, many have survived decades of underfunding and conflict, all the while depending on volunteer hosts who are entrusted with the stations' precious FCC licenses. So far, enough people value these hyper-local outlets to support this miracle. But as competition for audience attention increases, as delivery systems change and car radios are no longer installed in new vehicles, the audience is dwindling. Can community radio be nimble and creative enough to move into the future?

Certainly the first requisite is sustainability and funding. A change of policy at CPB, giving smaller stations preference in the division of federal funds, would be a good first step. On a station level, we must convince philanthropists that we deserve large gifts, not just \$50 donations. We must foster more community partnerships and wider outreach — not only helping ourselves, but also other crucial nonprofits in our communities. Younger hosts, as well as people of color and other marginalized communities, must be recruited to create programming that speaks to the evolving opportunities and crises of our rapidly changing world.

But some things never change. In the end, community radio stations rely on trust and good will, and that quality permeates the information they convey and nurtures the desire to make the world a better place.

Hyperlinks for this article at <https://bit.ly/47cSMAO>

Marty Durlin co-founded the Grassroots Radio Conference, served as chair of the National Federation of Community Broadcasters, the Pacifica National Board, and the Rocky Mountain Community Radio Coalition. She served as General Manager of KGNU in Boulder CO for more than 20 years, and for community radio stations in Utah and Northern California.

Nonprofit Media Can It Replace Traditional Journalism Outlets as Reliable News Sources?

This piece was written for CQ Researcher and published on March 8, 2024.

By Sharene Azimi

New nonprofit and community-based news organizations can do more than simply fill in for journalism outlets that have closed. They can, and are, building a news media ecosystem that is more collaborative, representative and accessible.

The 450-plus nonprofit newsrooms in the Institute for Nonprofit News (INN) network share approximately 20,000 stories per month with more than 7,000 media outlets. INN members — including some NPR and PBS affiliates — also pool resources to cover important stories, such as exploring a national issue from different geographic locations or investigating different aspects of critical regional issues, putting collaboration above competition.

Nonprofit and community-based newsrooms are serving places that were overlooked by traditional media — including rural areas, communities of color and neighborhoods with majority immigrant populations. These newsrooms' journalists represent the communities they serve and thus are able to uncover stories that a reporter dropping in from a metropolitan daily might never find.

What about access? The vast majority of nonprofit news organizations provide all or much of their content for free, by diversifying revenue streams to include individual donations, foundation grants, and business sponsorships in addition to ads. Unchained from the subscriber model, these outlets are increasingly providing content that meets people where they are, whether that is via an email newsletter, a podcast, a text-based messaging service or a Spanish-language group chat on WhatsApp. In



graphic: INN

other words, they are providing essential news and information to people who need it, regardless of whether they can afford a subscription.

Taken together, these shifts show how innovative news leaders are not just tweaking what was done in the past, but are building something even better.

Let us remember that news deserts are not the only reason people lack reliable sources of information. The big, uncomfortable reason many people are uninformed — or, worse, misinformed — is because they are turning away from the news. Consumer behavior has changed, and the news media industry must change with it. Do people want another story about a shooting or car crash? Or do they want to know “why” there has been an uptick in shootings or what is being done to address a local intersection prone to collisions? Communities need journalism that goes beyond identifying partisan divisions on an issue to reveal who is working to resolve the issue.

The question is not what replaces traditional journalism outlets, but how does the journalism field evolve so that it truly reflects and benefits the public it serves.

Hyperlinks for this article at <https://bit.ly/47cSMA0>

Sharene Azimi is the Communications Director for the Institute for Nonprofit News (INN). She edits the weekly INNnovation newsletter and oversees all of INN's communications.

Nonprofit and community-based news organizations are building a news media ecosystem that is more collaborative, representative and accessible.

News Outlet Profiles From INN's Network

You can check out profiles on all of INN's members under Network on their web page (<https://inn.org/>). Here are two examples of local, community-based nonprofit news organizations.

AfroLA is solutions-focused, data-driven and community-centered journalism for Los Angeles, told through the lens of the Black community, and with emphasis on how news may disparately impact L.A.'s most vulnerable groups and communities of color.

“We are tired of tropes and assumptions about Black people in the media. “We are tired of local news that doesn't scratch the surface of the communities they cover. We want news with nuance and context and narratives from people you might not normally hear from or about.” Check out their website <https://afrolanews.org/>

Block Club Chicago was created by the editors and reporters of DNAinfo Chicago after that award-winning website was shutdown by its billionaire owner. This collaborative, nimble, journalist-run, reader-backed news site reflects and responds to the city's neighborhoods.

Their newsroom delivers reliable, nonpartisan and essential coverage of Chicago's diverse neighborhoods. They went from a scrappy startup to one of Chicago's most respected, read and cited news organizations. Their full-time reporters, embedded in the communities they cover, report with context, respect and deep knowledge, instead of parachuting in. This leads to more accurate portrayals of neighborhoods — and earns the trust of their readers. See <https://blockclubchicago.org/>

Mission-Oriented Journalism

By Jim Tarbell, Andy Roth, Nancy Price, David Delk

In their own way, with heart and soul these mission-driven journalists are providing their truth as accurately, fairly, honestly and courageously as they can.

All news outlets have a mission including: informing the public, making money; promoting democracy; advocating for a political, philosophical or financial perspective; and on and on. Often the mission is hidden, while journalists all have unacknowledged biases.

News outlets will frequently say they are being objective. But how can they be objective if they have unacknowledged biases? The flamboyant journalist Hunter S. Thompson used to say, "There is no such thing as objective journalism. So why try?"

The Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics does not mention objectivity. Instead, they have a long list of advisory protocols. Basically they say that journalists should:

- Seek truth and report it by being accurate, fair, honest and courageous;
- Minimize harm by treating sources, subjects, colleagues and members of the public as human beings deserving respect;
- Act Independently with the highest and primary obligation of serving the public;

Power & Money at Fox News

Roger Ailes' and Rupert Murdoch's missions for Fox News are laid out in Gabriel Sherman's book, *The Loudest Voice in the Room*. Ever since the entertainment TV prodigy, Roger Ailes, in his late 20s, turned Dick Nixon's 1968 Presidential campaign around, he knew that television could manipulate the public. He also realized that TV could replace the political Party. In 1996 when Murdoch hired him to run his startup Fox News channel, Ailes embraced a mission of turning Fox News into a political operation to take over the Republican Party.

In the process, he fulfilled Murdoch's money-making mission. Within a decade, Fox News was the most profitable division of News Corp and within another decade was making a billion dollars a year.

Ailes did this by turning mundane and often fictional news stories into national sagas of sex, violence, money and power that captivated American audiences. These included Monica Lewinsky, Whitewater, the Iraq War, Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, Obama's birth certificate and the Tea Party.

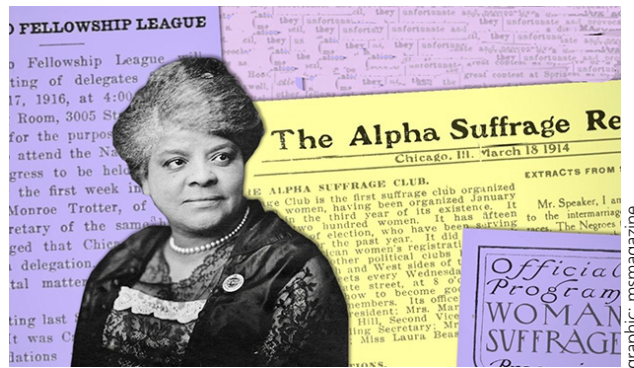
Ailes went to war against his opponents. Favored Republican candidates received wall-to-wall news coverage, while Ailes told his Fox News minions that their rivals "Hate America. They hate Capitalism...Beat the shit out of them...Fuck these guys, kick them as hard as you can."

- Be accountable and transparent by taking responsibility for one's work and explaining one's decisions to the public.

Obviously not all journalist live up to these standards (See the sidebar on Fox News). But most journalists try, even though they no doubt harbor many unacknowledged biases themselves.

One way to get around this problem is for newsrooms to publicize their biases and missions. This is a major advantage of the burgeoning world of Mission-Oriented Journalism. They all put their missions right out in front.

The Alliance for Democracy (AfD) that publishes *Justice Rising* declares, "The mission of the Alliance for



Ida B. Wells, journalist, Civil Rights hero and Pulitzer Prize winner

graphic: msmagazine

Democracy is to free all people from corporate domination of politics, economics, the environment, culture and information; to establish true democracy; and to create a just society with a sustainable, equitable economy."

Some will say that AfD is only providing one side of the story and that depending on such venues to provide our information skews our perspectives. On the other hand, most of the media in this country are owned by for-profit corporations and have a huge interest in never letting the public entertain the question of what harms corporations are doing to our democracy, environment, culture and economy.

Or more famously, consider Ida B. Wells' writings in the *Memphis and Headlight*. She certainly had a mission and it changed the world for the better.

Others will say that such journalism keeps people in their interest silos and increases our divisiveness and failure to collaborate in building a better world. But there is strength in diversity, and the more Mission-Oriented Journalism moves away from the comforting aphorism of Walter Cronkite, who ended his nightly newscast with "and that's the way it is," or the New York Times' "all the news fit to print" the better for all of us. How could anyone ever believe that they were getting all the news in a few short minutes, or in one news source.

The reality is that no one can get a complete view of what is happening in the world from one news outlet. Mission-Oriented Journalism is a solution to that problem. It is creating a broad-based media landscape providing the information we all need from a panoply of news sources that declare their mission and bias up-front. It is the actualization of the concept "we provide, you decide."

One of the fascinating aspects of Mission-Oriented Journalism is that many of the journalists involved in these outlets never went to journalism school. They never learned the Code of Ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists. But in their own way, with heart and soul, these mission-driven journalists are providing their truth as accurately, fairly, honestly and courageously as they can.

JR Recommended Mission-Oriented Newrooms



BIG: By Matt Stoller, www.thebignewsletter.com/
America is in a monopoly crisis. Unregulated monopolies raise prices, lower wages, and move money from rural areas to a few gilded cities.

Dominant firms focus on corrupting our politics to protect their market power.

Laws and regulators designed to break up monopolies have lain dormant. BIG tells the story of monopolization: Why it happened; and what we can do about it. BIG brings you inside the thinking of the enforcers fighting against monopolies; shows you the levers they can bring to bear; describes the politics of market power, and how antitrust defense lawyers wheedle their way out of slippery problems by corrupting the law. Most of all, BIG shows you how you, too, can spot monopolies, and do something about them.



MINT PRESS NEWS: www.mintpressnews.com/
Founded in 2012 by Mnar Adley, MintPress News (MPN) covers national and international politics, economics, and environmental issues. Through the lenses of social justice and human rights, it highlights how special interest groups, big business, and lobbying efforts drive US foreign affairs and impact the world. In addition to his investigative reporting, senior staff writer Alan MacLeod promotes critical media literacy by exposing the deceptive use of language in the headlines of corporate news reports. Journalism, as defined by the first amendment, plays the role of watchdog over the government. This is what inspires MPN's style of reporting. MintPress is tenaciously committed to total editorial freedom and journalistic integrity.



POPULAR RESISTANCE: popularresistance.org/
Popular Resistance provides daily movement news and resources. It is committed to bringing movements for peace, ending empire, militarism, and war, and allied social justice movements together into an independent, nonviolent and diverse movement of movements to shift power of concentrated wealth to the people and put human needs before corporate greed.

Popular Resistance is a resource and information clearinghouse and provides a daily stream of resistance news from a wide variety of sources, including independent and citizens' media, in the United States and from around the world. You can sign up for the Daily Digest, subscribe to their free weekly newsletter, and learn more about signing up for various campaigns.



STREET ROOTS: <https://www.streetroots.org/>
Street Roots is a Portland, Oregon weekly, social-justice newspaper sold by people experiencing homelessness and poverty to earn an income. Their award-winning newspaper is filled with quality local journalism focused on social and environmental justice issues. Their content includes in-depth reporting by professional journalists, along with op-eds from community members and social justice oriented organizations. They also regularly feature poetry and other writings by vendors, produced independently and through their creative writing workshops. Their tagline, "For those who can't afford free speech" drives home how money too often purchases power, weakening democracy.

SLUDGE: <https://readsludge.com/>

Sludge is an independent, nonprofit news outlet that produces investigative journalism on lobbying and money in politics. They report on: the ways: special interests launder their agendas; the power maps of corporate networks that extend deep into government; concentrated economic powers shaping public policy, and more. They produce news on the power of money in the 2024 elections; corporate money and corruption of public policies on climate, defense, health, stocks, tech, as well as political efforts to quell the corruption of big money in each of those sectors and democratic initiatives to give power back to the people. Sludge articles are researched and written by Donny Shaw and David Moore, founders of OpenCongress.org.



PAYDAY REPORT: <https://paydayreport.com/>

Established in 1996 by Mike Elk, The Payday Report covers labor and union news across the United States from its base in Pittsburgh. Since March 2020, the Payday Report's Interactive Strike Tracker has documented more than 3,000 strikes in cities and communities across the United States. While the corporate media provide superficial "horse race" coverage of the 2024 election, the Payday Report is producing special coverage of union issues and activities in crucial swing states. Payday has impacted the conversation on gun control, and their coverage of the strike wave has been praised by *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *PBS* and *Esquire*.



BLACK ALLIANCE FOR PEACE (BAP): <https://blackallianceforpeace.com/>



A People(s)-Centered Human Rights Project Against War, Repression and Imperialism, BAP recaptures and redevelops the historic anti-war, anti-imperialist, and pro-peace positions of the radical Black movement.

Their news section includes their BAP Newsletter; Videos, Statements and In the News sections; Movement News from Around the World; and Afghanistan News.

AFRICOM Watch focuses on the US Department of Defense's Africa Command and efforts to shut it down. They also cover US domestic militarization of the police and the military's 1033 program. They are also activating popular movements in support of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States' Zone of Peace."

NW LABOR PRESS: <https://nwlaborpress.org/>

NW Labor Press (NWLP) strives to put all the news together to get the big picture. NW Labor Press analyzes trends and makes sense of the world from a pro-labor, pro-worker perspective.



NWLP covers candidate endorsements and union political activity. Half the battle is electing union members, friends, and allies. The other half is getting pro-worker public policy enacted, while holding politicians accountable when they fail us.

NWLP reports on: union officer elections; the proceedings of union conventions; the right to organize and bargain collectively, the right to a decent standard of living, and the right to be treated fairly and with dignity.

New Media Landscape for a Stronger Democracy — Groups

PROJECT CENSORED

Project Censored's mission is to promote critical media literacy, independent journalism, and democracy. They educate students and the public about the importance of a truly free press for democratic self-government. Censorship undermines democracy. They expose and oppose news censorship and promote independent investigative journalism, media literacy, and critical thinking. Although mainly concerned with providing critical media literacy for teachers at all levels, there are also many good materials on their website for anyone interested in becoming critically media literate, like their Decoding Democracy series. See www.projectcensored.org

Free Press closely monitors the decisions shaping the media landscape and sounds the alarm when people's rights to connect and communicate are in danger. They focus on saving Net Neutrality, achieving affordable internet access for all, uplifting the voices of people of color in the media, challenging old and new media gatekeepers to serve the public interest, ending unwarranted surveillance, defending press freedom and reimagining local journalism. Through activism and advocacy on all these issues and more, they work to challenge powerful corporations, influence policy makers, raise public awareness and mobilize millions. They invite people to envision what a transformed media could look like and how technology could improve their lives — and then they fight alongside them to make it happen. See <https://www.freepress.net/>



Media and Democracy Project is a grassroots civic membership organization fighting for a more informative and pro-democracy media operating in the public interest. They believe a well-informed citizenry is the foundation of a democratic society. Deregulation and technological upheavals have left the crucial work of informing Americans in the grip of corporations with profit directives and political agendas. They often fail to provide the accurate information Americans need to understand the world. Fox News, and the Murdoch family lied to us about the 2020 election. Join thousands of people who are demanding the Federal Communications Commission hold an immediate hearing into Fox's broadcast license renewal. See www.mediaanddemocracyproject.org

The Center for Media and Democracy (CMD) is a nationally recognized watchdog that leads in-depth, award-winning investigations into the corruption that undermines our democracy, environment, and economic prosperity. Founded by John Stauber, one of the first investigative journalists to highlight the manipulative techniques of public relations and propaganda in the media, CMD operates PR Watch and believes in the public's right to know how government operates and how corporations influence our democracy — and the true motivations for their actions. See <https://www.prwatch.org/>



Prometheus Radio Project builds participatory radio as a tool for social justice organizing and a voice for community expression. To that end, they demystify media policy and technology, advocate for a more just media system, and help grassroots organizations build communications infrastructure to strengthen their communities and movements.

They envision a world in which the media is not a means to limit democratic participation, but a way for communities and movements to express themselves and struggle for justice. They imagine a nationwide community radio infrastructure made up of hundreds of independent, locally-orientated stations, part of a global movement to put media in the hands of the people. They can help you plan, build and fund your own low-powered radio station. Check them out at <https://www.prometheusradio.org/>

Institute for Public Accuracy increases the reach and capacity of progressive and grassroots organizations — at no cost to them — to address public policy by getting them and their ideas into the mainstream media. IPA gains media access for those whose voices are commonly excluded or drowned out by government or corporate-backed institutions. As a national consortium of independent public-policy researchers, analysts and activists, IPA widens media exposure for progressive perspectives on many issues including the environment, human rights, foreign policy, and economic justice.



REBUILD LOCAL NEWS is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that advances public policies to counter the collapse of local news, revitalize community journalism, and strengthen democracy. Their goal is to help create model, sustainable, Radio, TV, Online and Print news organizations to do local news and better cover marginalized communities. They also incentivize consumers and businesses to support those local newsrooms. Finally, they work to amend public policies to emphasize local ownership, and support journalists who pursue careers in local public service journalism. See <https://www.rebuildlocalnews.org/>

Books — New Media Landscape for A Stronger Democracy

By Jim Tarbell and Andy Lee Roth

The media plays a huge role in how functional our democracy is at electing politicians who implement the best public policies for the common good. That has become difficult as our media landscape moves through a huge structural transition, and some media producers bombard media consumers with propaganda and misinformation. This requires everyone to be critically media literate so they can wade through all the hype and find their own truth. These books will help you on that journey.

Brant Houston's *Changing Models for Journalism: Reinventing the Newsroom* is a good overview best described in the title to his introduction, "The fall of traditional media, the rise of nonprofit newsrooms, and the fight to save local news." He does a great job describing the emergence of the nonprofit newsroom, how nonprofit newsrooms came about and what financial models were developed to make nonprofit newsrooms sustainable. His first chapter asks "What happened to traditional media?"

And he wraps the book up with a chapter on "Advocacy, Activists and Solutions," where he describes cutting edge collaborations between traditional media and the Yanomami in Brazil fighting illegal mining operations on their territory.

Back in this country, *News Deserts and Ghost Newspapers: Will Local News Survive?* by Penny Abernathy and the UNC Hussman School of

Journalism and the Media is the most recent volume of their State of the Media reports. It supplies the numbers, demographics and financial data on the collapse of traditional media between 2004 and 2019. They focus on the areas of the country that lost dailies and weeklies over that time period and left a virtual news desert in their wake. They note that counties in the South suffered a loss of local news publications three times worse than other parts of the country, leaving people there to depend on network TV for their news.

Margot Susca's 2024 book *Hedged: How Private Investment Funds Helped Destroy American Newspapers and Undermine Democracy* illuminates the role of Wall Street vultures in the demise of local media. She points out that giant private equity and hedge funds used highly leveraged buy outs, burdensome advisory fees, and cost-cutting policies that drained newsrooms of reporters to con-

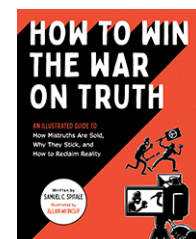
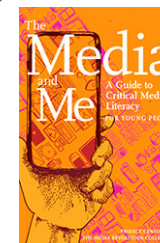
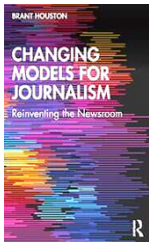
solidate dailies and weeklies under one management framework. They then combined or closed the under-performing publications and left the rest as ghost publications with almost no staff.

Into this weakened media landscape, the bombastic and irreverent Trump campaign sought to destroy any trust Americans still had for their news system. Nolan Higdon and Mickey Huff pick up the story in their book *United States of Distraction: Media Manipulation in Post-Truth America (And What You Can Do About It)*. They start out with a prescient historical analysis that reaches back to Lewis Powell's memo to the US Chamber of Commerce pushing corporate America to take over our media, educational, political and legal systems to ensure that corporate monopoly capitalism should reign forever. Then they describe how Trumpism worked to destroy the truth while we were not watching. Their solution to this problem is to train people to be critically media literate, so they can detect propaganda and false news that the Trump campaign spreads across the country.

Project Censored's *The Media and Me: A Guide to Critical Media Literacy* begins this campaign by educating youth and young adults to be critically media literate. But it also has important information for all of us on how the media can mess with our mind and self-image. They remind us to take a step back from a news story and consider the biases of who wrote it and what corporate or non-corporate entity had editorial control over the article.

Following this up, *The Propagandists' Playbook: How Conservative Elites Manipulate, Search and Threaten Democracy*, by Francesca Bolla Tripodi explores how people use media to find trustworthy information. Sociologist Tripodi interviewed conservative media users and immersed herself in right-wing media. Treating conservatism as a way of seeing the world and a set of media practices, she explains how conservative media are "so effective at exploiting" their audiences' world views and media practices.

Finally, Samuel Spitalé's *How to Win the War on Truth: An Illustrated Guide to How Mistruths Are Sold, Why They Stick, and How to Reclaim Reality*, illustrated by Allan Whincup, shows how our brains process information, and reviews the history of propaganda. *How To Win the War on Truth* uses vivid illustrations and clear, jargon-free text to promote media literacy. Noting that "no one pays to publicize programs that serve the public," media critic Samuel Spitalé exposes the logic and motivations of corporate PR and government propaganda. Each chapter is filled with clear examples and catchy infographics.



Our Media Landscape Needs Structural Transformation

By Victor Pickard

Truly democratic and engaged journalism requires that people own and control their own media. It also requires that journalism serves not just profit imperatives, but also addresses people's needs, tells their stories, and goes where the silences are. While providing critical information is always a key mission for good journalism, local media is about much more than informing citizens, keeping a watchful eye on the powerful, and ringing alarm bells about social problems. As important as these essential services are, good journalism — especially participatory journalism — is also about building community and solidarity among diverse publics.

In the US — a multiracial, class-riven democracy, with a history of deep structural inequities — this requires a kind of adversarial journalism that identifies systemic problems, treats its readers as engaged participants of society, and proposes solutions as to how we should confront problems.

For this process to succeed, we need a media system that does not just provide news about or even for these communities; it must also empower news production by the people themselves.

Boundaries between journalists and the communities they serve should be removed for us to democratize our media. Taking a page from the Indymedia movement of the late 90s/early 2000s, it's not enough to simply hate the media: we must *become* the media!

But this also necessitates treating the media as a public good and a public service. It must not be a commodity market whose sole aim is to enrich a small group of investors, owners, and advertisers — typically wealthy White men.

To make this happen, journalists and publishers need to imagine long-term objectives and struggles while responding to immediate challenges. This new media framework seeks to utterly transform — restructure, democratize — our entire media system



photo: Quintype.com

over time, rather than shoring up the existing media system and always leaving the fundamental capitalist political economy in place.

This approach acknowledges that we cannot simply smash the current system overnight. But it also acknowledges that the current status quo is unsustainable, and we therefore must aim for structural reforms that may currently seem unimaginable. It behooves us to embrace a not-so-distant political horizon that envisions an entirely different media system, one that is publicly owned, democratically controlled, and serves us all, not simply the privileged, wealthy few.

None of this means that we should give up on pressuring mainstream news media to do a better job. After all, the stakes are too high. Nor does it mean that we no longer need institutions for professional norms to ensure good journalism. But it does mean that we remain clear-eyed about the constraints to any strategy that expects capitalist media to become more democratic.

Instead, we should aim to transform media over the long term by radically shifting the underlying political economy and the incentives and logics that bend it towards bad media practices, from clickbait to stenographic reporting.

I propose the creation of “[Public Media Centers](#)” in every community that are federally guaranteed but locally governed. Another plan, the “[Local Journalism Initiative](#),” would enable people to vote on public funds being allocated to their preferred local nonprofit news organizations. Such ambitious projects would require a [Marshall Plan-style](#) program to recreate our entire media system from the ground up along participatory democratic lines.

Regardless of our precise plan for radical change, as media critics and media activists, our focus shouldn't be simply to shame professional journalists in the commercial sector to do a better job. The aim should be to transform the current system. And the only way to achieve such a goal is to take journalism out of the market.

Hyperlinks for this article at <https://bit.ly/47cSMA0t>

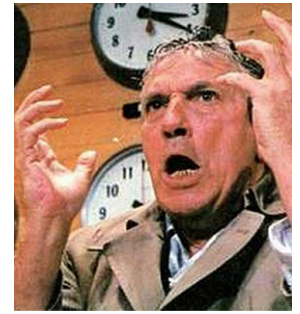
Victor Pickard is a Professor of Media Policy and Political Economy at the University of Pennsylvania. He is the author of many books including *America's Battle for Media Democracy*. He is the Chair of the Free Press Board.

It behooves us to embrace a not-so-distant political horizon that envisions an entirely different media system, one that's publicly owned, democratically controlled, and serves us all.



News Flash: "We're Mad as Hell and Aren't Going to Take It Anymore"

Here are three lightly abridged excerpts from the 1976 movie *Network* written by Paddy Chayefsky. In the first excerpt, TV news anchor Howard Beale calls for Americans to get mad and take action to stop the corporate takeover of America. In the second excerpt, he is chastised by his corporate CEO, which leads to the third excerpt of Howard Beale's capitulation that we are all doomed to become corporate automatons.



Howard Beale

HOWARD BEALE'S CALL TO ACTION

"We know things are bad. Everything is going crazy. We sit in our house saying, 'Please leave us alone.'

"Well, I'm not gonna leave you alone. You've got to get mad. You've got to say, 'I'm a human being, god damn it. My life has value.' I want you to go to the window, open it and yell: 'I'm as mad as hell and I'm not gonna take this anymore!'. . .

"And listen carefully because this is your god damn life I'm talking about today. In this country, when one company wants to take over another company they buy up a controlling share of the stock.

"That's how Communications Corporation of America (CCA) took over this network. But now, the Western World Funding Corporation is buying up CCA. Well, just who in the hell is the Western World Funding Corporation? It is a consortium of banks and insurance companies buying CCA as agents for somebody else. Who is this somebody else? They won't tell you. And there's not a single law in the books to stop them. There's only one thing that can stop them — You! I want you to send a telegram to the White House. by midnight tonight, I want a million telegrams saying 'I'm as mad as hell and I'm not gonna take this anymore! I don't want the banks selling my country. I want the CCA deal stopped now.'"

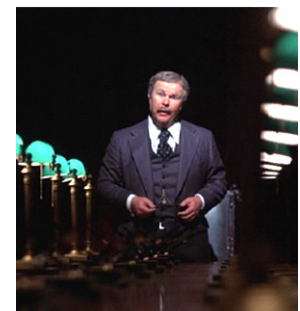
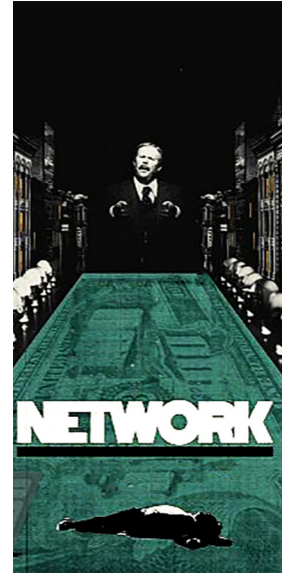
CORPORATE CEO'S RESPONSE

"You Have meddled With The Primal Forces of Nature, Mr. Beale and I Won't Have It! There are no nations, there are no peoples. There is only one holistic system of systems. One vast and immense, interwoven, interacting, multi-variate, multinational dominion of dollars, which determines the totality of life on this planet. That is the natural order of things today. There is no democracy. There is only IBM and ITT and AT&T, and Dupont, Dow, Union Carbide, and Exxon. Those are the nations of the world today. The world is a collage of corporations, inexorably determined by the immutable bylaws of business."

HOWARD BEALE'S CAPITULATION

"Six million telegrams were received at the White House. The takeover of CCA has been stopped. The people won. It was a radiant eruption of democracy. But that is not likely to happen again. Because democracy is a dying giant, a sick, decaying, political concept writhing in its final pain.

"What is finished is the idea that this great country is dedicated to the freedom and flourishing of every individual in it. It's every single one of you out there that's finished. Because this is no longer a nation of independent individuals. It's a nation of some 200-odd million transistorized, deodorized bodies, totally unnecessary as human beings and as replaceable as piston rods. Whether it's good or bad, that's what is so. The whole world is becoming humanoid, creatures that look human but aren't. The whole world's people are becoming mass-produced, programmed, numbered, insensate things."



CEO of Communications Corporation of America

Paddy Chayefsky's movie Network won four Oscars: including Best Actor, Best Actress, Best Supporting Actress, and Best Original Screenplay.

Network is available for streaming. Howard Beale's call to action is at <https://www.ign.com/videos/network-im-mad-as-hell>. The corporate CEO's response can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OVd98F6JLVc>



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Why You Should Care

Wall Street Vultures Destroy Our Media

Gone are the days of locally owned newspapers. They have all been sucked up by hedge funds and private equity firms with no experience or desire to deliver local news. They have closed all their offices and moved administration to distant locales. No longer can you drop by and chat with the editors. They no longer have reporters to cover local government, leaving communities uninformed and local governments unobserved and ripe for corruption.

Big Tech's Dystopian Future

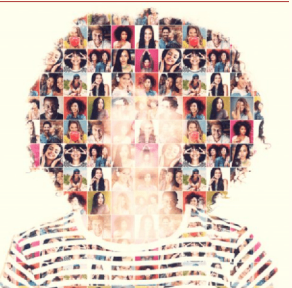
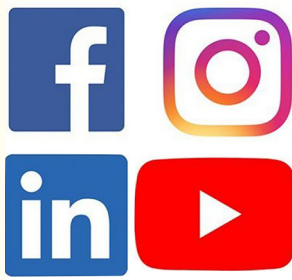
Big Tech is coming after our lives. They make millions poaching news articles from local newsrooms, while luring away advertising dollars that support those newsrooms. Tech's social media has drains our community life and then harvests their users' content for their own corporate profit and well being. Next they have plan to take over our culture with fake intelligence that can not feel, create, love, cry or care about what it is doing. It is not human, we are.

Propaganda Threatens Democracy

Since childhood we have been told to avoid the bad guy that is offering us unhealthy candy. Propaganda is the unhealthy candy of the media world. It preys on our innate sense to believe that we live in a world of good intentions and there are not con men out there luring us into dark corners. Unfortunately, bad guys abound trying to enlist our financial, political or personal support for their nefarious ends. They will ruin our lives and our world if we do not remain vigilant over their disinformation, propaganda and profit maximization motives.

Media Biases Distort Who We Are

We are besieged by the biased storytellers of our times. This is particularly true in our media-heavy, celebrity-celebrating, influencer-infiltrated lives dominated by movies, music, TV, and other outside pressures. In this alienating milieu, we are susceptible to the styles, tastes, political views, historical understandings, and gender orientations of others. We can lose ourselves, our lives, friends and families in the enticing media world. Without an awareness of who we are and can be, we can not make the better world we envision together.



What You Can Do

Become the Media

We have to take our role as democratic citizens seriously by staying aware of developments that are damaging to our communities. Then we should research the history and consequences of those developments, which may be extracting community resources, poisoning the environment, damaging natural systems or corrupting public decision making. Then broadcast your news to create the political will to enact just policies. We have to become the local media.

Go Offline & Build Community

Community is the solution to the alienation caused by the technological dystopia of the cyber world. Join a community service organization to work with others to put out fires, feed the homeless or monitor local political developments. Go to community breakfasts, or nonprofit fundraisers. If these do not exist, get your neighbors together and make them happen.

Flex Your Media Literacy Muscles

Media literacy empowers people, promoting civic engagement and collective action for social justice. Flex your media literacy muscles by cutting "junk food" news from your media diet, following the money, asking who's treated as newsworthy, and supporting truly independent news outlets. Media power is political power, as the late, great Ben Bagdikian always reminded people.

Establish Your Identity in the World

To make positive change in the world, you have to understand the true cultural and historical context you were born into and inhabit now. You must identify the biases and propaganda that the media feeds you while integrating your lived experiences and values into an honest global perspective. Use groups like the Critical Media Project or Project Censored's Critical Media Literacy in Action to help find who you are and how you want the world to be.