

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.