

ONE

NEWS AS POLITICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL ACTIVISM

WHAT DO WE mean by a “free press,” “press,” or “freedom of the press”?

What is the purpose of a free press? Is it to report information?

What kind of information? Is it to interpret or analyze information?

What is “the news”? How are decisions made about what is newsworthy and what is not?

What is a “news organization”? One person (a blogger), a group of people (a weekly newspaper), a corporate conglomerate (a television network)?

What is a “journalist”? What qualifies someone as a journalist? Experience, education, position, self-identification?

What is the job of a journalist? Is journalism a profession?

Are there standards?

Are journalists able to be “fair” or “objective”?

What is the purpose of reporting? To reinforce the founding and fundamental principles of the republic? To challenge public officials and authority? To give voice to certain individuals, groups, and causes? To influence politics and policy? To alter the status quo of a society? To promote “the common good” of the community?

What is the common good? Who decides?

What is the difference between freedom of the press and “free speech”? And does the current media revolution, spurred by technological advances such as the internet and social media, change any of this?

Do these questions even matter anymore to news outlets? The questions are rarely asked today let alone rationally discussed. They are infrequently the subject of open or public media circumspection or focused and sustained national debate. It seems “the media” are loath to investigate or explore “the media.” However, when the conduct of the media is questioned as biased, politically partisan, or otherwise irresponsible, they insist that they are of one mission: fidelity to the news and all that stems from it—protecting society from autocratic government, defending freedom of the press, and contributing to societal civility and justice. Moreover, they typically claim to pursue and report the news free from any personal or political agenda.

Is that true of the modern media?

More than seventy years ago, there was a serious self-examination of the media. The Commission on Freedom of the Press (also known as the Hutchins Commission) was organized in 1942 by *Time* and *Life* magazine publisher Henry Luce to explore whether

freedom of the press was in danger and the proper function of the media in a modern democracy. Its report was issued in 1947 and concluded, in part, that freedom of the press was indeed in danger, and for three basic reasons: "First, the importance of the press to the people has greatly increased with the development of the press as an instrument of mass communication. At the same time the development of the press as an instrument of mass communication has greatly decreased the proportion of the people who can express their opinions and ideas through the press. Second, the few who are able to use the machinery of the press as an instrument of mass communication have not provided a service adequate to the needs of the society. Third, those who direct the machinery of the press have engaged from time to time in practices which the society condemns and which, if continued, it will inevitably undertake to regulate or control."¹

The commission warned: "The modern press itself is a new phenomenon. Its typical unit is the great agency of mass communication. These agencies can facilitate thought and discussion. They can stifle it. They can advance the progress of civilization or they can thwart it. They can debase and vulgarize mankind. They can endanger the peace of the world; they can do so accidentally, in a fit of absence of mind. They can play up or down the news and its significance, foster and feed emotions, create complacent fictions and blind spots, misuse the great words, and uphold empty slogans. Their scope and power are increasing every day as new instruments become available to them. These instruments can spread lies faster and farther than our forefathers dreamed when they enshrined the freedom of the press in the First Amendment to our Constitution."²

The commission cautioned that "[w]ith the means of self-

destruction that are now at their disposal, men must live, if they are to live at all, by self-restraint, moderation, and mutual understanding. They get their picture of one another through the press. The press can be inflammatory, sensational, and irresponsible. If it is, it and its freedom will go down in the universal catastrophe. On the other hand, the press can do its duty by the new world that is struggling to be born. It can help create a world community by giving men everywhere knowledge of the world and of one another, by promoting comprehension and appreciation of the goals of a free society that shall embrace all men.”³

Is this how the modern media conduct themselves? Self-restrained, measured, and temperate? Are the media providing knowledge and insight useful to the public and a free society, or are they obsessed with their own personal, political, and progressive predilections and piques? Have the media earned the respect and esteem of their readers, viewers, and listeners as fair and reliable purveyors of information, or are large numbers of the citizenry suspicious and distrustful of their reporting? Are the media on a trajectory of self-destruction, unofficially identifying with one political party (Democratic Party) over the other (Republican Party)?

In point of fact, most newsrooms and journalists have done a very poor job of upholding the tenets of their profession and, ultimately, have done severe damage to press freedom. Many millions of Americans do not respect them or trust them as credible, fair-minded, and unbiased news sources.

For example, on October 12, 2018, Gallup reported: “Republicans have typically placed less trust in the media than independents and especially Democrats, but the gap between Republicans and Democrats has grown. The current 55-percentage-point gap

is among the largest to date, along with last year's 58-point gap. President Donald Trump's attacks on the 'mainstream media' are likely a factor in the increasingly polarized views of the media. Republicans agree with his assertions that the media unfairly cover his administration, while Democrats may see the media as the institution primarily checking the president's power."⁴

Furthermore, "Democrats' trust surged last year and is now at 76%, the highest in Gallup's trend by party, based on available data since 1997. Independents' trust in the media is now at 42%, the highest for that group since 2005. Republicans continue to lag well behind the other party groups—just 21% trust the media—but that is up from 14% in 2016 and last year."⁵ Another way to look at these statistics is that nearly 80 percent of Republicans distrust the media, while nearly 80 percent of Democrats trust the media. This would seem to underscore the close ideological and political association and tracking between Democrats and the press.

Lara Logan, who was a CBS News journalist and war correspondent from 2002 to 2018, spoke frankly in a February 15, 2019, podcast interview about the media's professional demise, preference for the Democratic Party and progressive advocacy, and intolerance of independent and diverse perspectives in reporting. "Visually—anyone who's ever been to Israel and been to the Wailing Wall has seen that the women have this tiny little spot in front of the wall to pray and the rest of the wall is for the men. To me that's a great representation of the American media, is that, you know, in this tiny little corner where the women pray, you've got Breitbart and Fox News and, you know, a few others. And then from that—from there on you have CBS, ABC, NBC, 'Huffington Post,' Politico, whatever, right, all of them. And that's a problem for

me. Because even if it was reversed, if it was, you know, vastly—mostly, you know, right—on the right and a little bit, that would also be a problem for me. What I—my experience has been that the more—the more opinions you have, the more ways that you look at everything in life, everything in life is complicated, everything is gray, right. Nothing is black and white.”⁶

Logan continued that this is not about politics or partisanship to her. It is not about pro-Trump or anti-Trump. It is about news reporting. “It’s got nothing to do with whether I like Trump or I don’t like Trump. Right? Or whether I believe him or identify with him, don’t. Whatever. I don’t even want to have that conversation because I approach that the same way I approach anything. I find that is not a popular way to work in the media today because although the media has always been historically left-leaning, we’ve abandoned our pretense or at least the effort to be objective today. . . . The former executive editor of the *New York Times* has a book coming out, Jill Abramson. And she says, ‘We would do, I don’t know, dozens of stories about Trump every single day and every single one of them was negative.’ Abramson said, ‘We have become the anti-Trump paper of record.’ Well, that’s not our job. That’s a political position. That means we’ve become political activists in a sense. And some could argue, propagandists, right? And there’s some merit to that. We have a few conventions—because they are not really rules—but you need at least two firsthand sources for something, right? Those things help keep your work to a certain standard. Those standards are out the window. I mean, you read one story or another and hear it and it’s all based on one anonymous administration official, former administration official. That’s not journalism. . . .”⁷

When a journalist breaks from the rest of the media pack, which is quite rare, their careers are typically threatened or ruined by the rest of the press. Indeed, after the Logan interview went viral, she was ostracized or worse, personally attacked by individuals in her own profession. In a subsequent interview on Fox's *Hannity*, Logan related that "if there were any independent voices out there, any journalists who are not beating the same drum and giving the same talking points, then we pay the price. What is interesting . . . they cannot take down the substance of what you're saying. They cannot go after the things that matter. So they smear you personally. They go after your integrity. They tear after your reputation as a person and a professional. They will stop at nothing. I am not the only one. And I am just, I am done, right, I am tired of it. And they do not get to write my story anymore. They do not get to speak for me. I want to say loudly and clearly to anybody who is listening, I am not owned. Nobody owns me. I'm not owned by the left or the right."⁸

Indeed, the Commission on Freedom of the Press had specifically emphasized that the media must pay special attention to the difference between fact and opinion. "Of equal importance with reportorial accuracy are the identification of fact as fact and opinion as opinion, and their separation, so far as possible. This is necessary all the way from the reporter's file, up through the copy and makeup desks and editorial offices, to the final, published product. The distinction cannot, of course, be made absolute. There is not fact without a context and no factual report which is uncolored by the opinions of the reporter. But modern conditions require greater effort than ever to make the distinction between fact and opinion. . . ."⁹

Having ignored the blaring warning of the commission, the media have knowingly commingled fact and opinion and have, in fact, regularly taken up the policies and causes of the Democratic Party. Consequently, the public's attitude toward the modern media is divided largely along ideological and party lines.

In January 2018, Knight Foundation–Gallup published its survey of 19,000 U.S. adults. It found that “Americans believe that the media have an important role to play in our democracy—yet they don’t see that role being fulfilled.”¹⁰ “Eighty-four percent of Americans believe the news media have a critical or very important role to play in democracy, particularly in terms of informing the public—yet they don’t see that role being fulfilled and less than half (44 percent) can name an objective news source.”¹¹

As in the Gallup survey, analysts found that “[w]hile the majority of Americans clearly recognized the importance of media in a democracy, there were clear differences between Democrats and Republicans in their views of the media. While 54 percent of Democrats have a very or somewhat favorable opinion of the media, 68 percent of Republicans view the news media in an unfavorable light.”¹²

“Democrats,” Gallup reported, “largely trust the media and Republicans largely distrust it. The divergence based on political affiliation was also seen in perceptions of bias in the news. Forty-five percent of Americans say there is a ‘a great deal’ of political bias in news coverage (up from 25 percent in 1989); 67 percent of Republicans say they see ‘a great deal’ of political bias in the news, versus only 26 percent of Democrats.”¹³

As will become clear, the perceptions revealed in these surveys are realities, and the evidence is overwhelming that journalists as a

group reject, in one form or another, the commission's admonition that reporters should strive to separate fact from opinion; rather, in varying ways and to different degrees, they embrace the idea of news "interpretation" or news "analysis" in the selection, gathering, and reporting of news, influenced by and filtered through the progressive mentality.

While there is much more to the commission's report, its closing summary is especially noteworthy: "The character of the service required of the American press by the American people differs from the service previously demanded, first, in this—that it is essential to the operation of the economy and to the government of the Republic. Second, it is a service of greatly increased responsibilities both as to the quantity and as to the quality of the information required. In terms of quantity, the information about themselves and about their world made available to the American people must be as extensive as the range of their interests and concerns as citizens of the self-governing, industrialized community in the closely integrated modern world. In terms of quality, the information provided must be provided in such a form, and with so scrupulous a regard for the wholeness of the truth and the fairness of its presentation, that the American people may make for themselves, by the exercise of reason and of conscience, the fundamental decisions necessary to the direction of their government and of their lives."¹⁴

A more recent effort to define modern journalism was undertaken by former journalists Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, who claim to have "distilled from our search, some clear principles that journalists agree on—and that citizens have a right to expect. . . . These are the principles that have helped both jour-

nalists and the people in self-governing systems to adjust to the demands of an ever more complex world. They are the elements of journalism. The first among them is that the purpose of journalism is to provide people with information they need to be free and self-governing.”¹⁵ Kovach and Rosenstiel list the elements of journalism as follows:

- Journalism’s first obligation is to the truth.
- Its first loyalty is to citizens.
- Its essence is a discipline of verification.
- Its practitioners must maintain an independence from those they cover.
- It must serve as an independent monitor of power.
- It must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise.
- It must strive to make the significant interesting and relevant.
- It must keep the news comprehensive and in proportion.
- Its practitioners have an obligation to exercise their personal conscience.
- Citizens, too, have rights and responsibilities when it comes to news.¹⁶

These elements of journalism appear noncontroversial when taken at face value. But are they, in truth, the working guidelines for most modern newsmen?

Kovach and Rosenstiel fear that the great challenge—if not threat—to journalism today, as differentiated from past press traditions, results from the nature of the ownership of news outlets. “For the first time in our history, the news increasingly is produced by companies outside journalism, and this new economic organi-

zation is important. We are facing the possibility that independent news will be replaced by rumor and self-interested commercialism posing as news. If that occurs, we will lose the press as an independent institution, free to monitor the other powerful forces and institutions in society.”¹⁷ “In the new century, one of the most profound questions for a democratic society is whether an independent press survives. The answer will depend on whether journalists have the clarity and conviction to articulate what an independent press means and whether, as citizens, the rest of us care.”¹⁸

While the consolidation of news outlets may or may not threaten the independence of news reporting, depending on the relationship between the particular conglomerate and the acquired news company, perhaps of greater moment is the advent of social media and its influence on news reporting. In either case, regardless of platform, format, or structure, the more important issue relates to *content*—that is, what is the nature and purpose of the modern newsroom and journalism.

Kovach and Rosenstiel raise the issue of “diversity” in the newsroom, which they argue is a vital priority to ensure the integrity of the news product and the credibility of those who produce it. They write, among other things, that “[t]he goal of diversity should be to assemble not only a newsroom that might resemble the community but also one that is as open and honest so that this diversity can function. This is not just racial or gender diversity. It is not just ideological diversity. It is not just social class or economic diversity. It is not just numerical diversity. It is what we call intellectual diversity, and it encompasses and gives meaning to all the other kinds.”¹⁹

Is not the greater danger to an independent press “ideology”

in the newsroom? Whether a monopoly of ideologically based reporting, which plainly exists today, or “intellectual diversity,” should not ideology be reserved for the opinion-editorial pages of newspapers or the commentary segments of broadcasts? Whatever happened to “professional journalism” and the promise or at least suggestion that the press ought to pursue the *objective truth* in the gathering and reporting of news?

But apparently even the notion of objectivity in reporting is subject to dispute and debate. During the turn of the last century, particularly in the early 1920s, as the Progressive Era began to take hold, the “scientific” approach to journalism—that is, a press held to certain professional standards and processes—spread through newsrooms, as it spread through government. Kovach and Rosenstiel give voice to the arguments made in 1919 by Walter Lippmann, a venerated reporter and commentator at the time, and Charles Merz, an associate editor of the *New York World*, in which they condemned the *New York Times*’ coverage of the Russian Revolution. Lippmann and Merz wrote, in part, that “[i]n the large, the news about Russia is a case of seeing not what was, but what men wished to see.” The solution, argued Lippmann and Merz, exists in “the scientific spirit. . . . There is but one kind of unity possible in a world as diverse as ours. It is unity of method, rather than aim; the unity of disciplined experiment.” In this, Lippmann and Merz are projecting the progressive approach to most things onto the profession of journalism and the press generally.²⁰

Kovach and Rosenstiel elaborated: “When the concept of objectivity originally migrated to journalism, it was not meant to imply that journalists were free of bias. Quite the contrary. The term began to appear as part of journalism early in the last cen-

tury, particularly in the 1920s, out of a growing recognition that journalism was full of bias, often unconscious. The call for journalists to adopt objectivity was an appeal for them to develop a consistent method of testing information—a transparent approach to evidence—precisely so that personal and cultural biases would not undermine the accuracy of their work.”²¹

“In the nineteenth century,” write the authors, “journalists talked about something called realism. This was the idea that if reporters simply dug out the facts and ordered them together, the truth would reveal itself rather naturally. Realism emerged at a time when journalism was separating from political parties and becoming more accurate. It roughly coincided with the invention of what journalists called the inverted pyramid, in which a journalist lines the facts up from the most important to the least important, thinking it helps audiences understand things naturally.”²²

But “good intentions” and “honest efforts” are not enough.

Thus the journalist’s objectivity is not an issue, they argue. The focus must be on an objective process and standard by which the journalist must gather, digest, and report the news. “In the original concept . . . the journalist is not objective, but his method can be. The key was in the discipline of the craft, not the aim. . . . Most people think of objectivity in journalism as an aim, not a method. And many citizens scoff at this intention, since they have little idea of the methods journalists might be employing. Yet the notion that the aim of objectivity is insufficient without a unity of method to put it into practice is as valid today as ever. . . .”²³

It is not clear, then, why Kovach and Rosenstiel raise the issue of newsroom diversity as an imperative unless they understand that

an objective method and standard for vetting news is unlikely to occur in a newsroom populated by ideologues and party partisans. The aims then become the goal. Kovach and Rosenstiel as much as admit it. Even so, if the measure of modern journalism is, at least in part, determined by the intellectual diversity of newsrooms, it is apparent if not obvious that news outlets and journalists are overwhelmingly progressive in their thinking and attitudes and share the ideological mindset characteristic of the present-day Democratic Party—the same progressive mindset that has devoured so many of the nation’s cultural and societal institutions during the last century, as I explain at length in *Rediscovering Americanism: And the Tyranny of Progressivism*.

George Mason professor Tim Groseclose, formerly of the University of California, Los Angeles, developed an “objective, social-scientific method” in which he calculates how the progressive political views of journalists and media outlets distort the natural views of Americans. It “prevents us from seeing the world as it actually is. Instead, we see only a distorted version of it. It is as if we see the world through a glass—a glass that magnifies the facts that liberals want us to see and shrinks the facts that conservatives want us to see. The metaphoric glass affects not just what we see, but how we think. That is, media bias really does make us more liberal. Perhaps worst of all, media bias feeds on itself. That is, the bias makes us more liberal, which makes us less able to detect the bias, which allows the media to get away with more bias, which makes us even more liberal, and so on.”²⁴

Groseclose continues: “U.S. newsrooms are extremely one-sided. One consequence of this is what I call the *first-order problem* of an unbalanced newsroom. This is the simple fact that if

you read a newspaper article or watch a television news clip, then almost surely it will have been written or produced by a liberal. But another consequence, which I call the *second-order problem*, may be worse. Two effects of the second-order problem are the *minority-marginalization* principle, in which members of the majority group sometimes treat members of the minority group as if they don't exist. And on the occasions when they do remember that the minority group exists, they sometimes treat the members as if they are mildly evil or subhuman."²⁵

Groseclose argues that another effect is the "*extremism-redefined* principle," in which "the terms 'mainstream' and 'extreme' take on new meaning within the group. When the group is, say, very liberal, mainstream Democratic positions begin to be considered centrist, and positions that would normally be considered extremely left-wing become commonplace."²⁶

The American Press Institute cautions that there is such a bias that "used to be called 'pack journalism.' It has also been called 'group think.' It is the story-line that the press corps *en masse* is telling or repeating. A modern term for it is the *master narrative*. . . . These master narratives can become a kind of trap or rut. The journalist picks facts that illustrate a master narrative, or current stereotype, and ignores other facts."²⁷

Let us examine some significant evidence—reports, surveys, and studies—that does a good job of underscoring Groseclose's observations and assessing the ideological and political nature of the modern media, and which raise serious questions about the diversity, objectivity, and/or impartiality of reporting.

A 2014 study conducted by Indiana University professors Lars Willnat and David H. Weaver, based on online interviews with

1,080 American journalists that were conducted during the fall of 2013, reveals that although 50.2 percent of journalists identified as independent and 14.6 percent as “other,” the number identifying as Democratic was 28.1 percent compared to merely 7.1 percent as Republican.²⁸ “In 1971, the first time the survey was conducted (this was its fifth incarnation), some 25.7 percent of journalists polled said they identified as Republican.”²⁹ Moreover, the fact that approximately 65 percent of these journalists self-identify as either political independents or other does not necessarily mean they are without a partisan or ideological outlook, which may well motivate or influence their reporting. Indeed, during the last several decades alone, poll after poll and survey after survey have demonstrated the media are more liberal than the public at large.³⁰

A November 2018 survey of 462 financial journalists by professors at Arizona State University and Texas A&M University, of which more than 70 percent of those surveyed were affiliated with the *Wall Street Journal*, *Financial Times*, Bloomberg News, Associated Press, *Forbes*, the *New York Times*, Reuters, or the *Washington Post*, revealed that even most financial journalists are political progressives. When asked, “Generally speaking, how would you describe your political views?” the journalists responded: very liberal (17.63 percent); somewhat liberal (40.84 percent); moderate (37.12 percent); somewhat conservative (3.94 percent); and, very conservative (.046 percent). Thus nearly 60 percent of financial journalists surveyed were liberal and less than 5 percent were conservative.³¹

The Center for Public Integrity, a left-of-center organization, reports that “[c]onventional journalistic wisdom holds that re-

porters and editors are referees on politics' playing field—bastions of neutrality who mustn't root for Team Red or Team Blue, either in word or deed. . . . [However, in the 2016 presidential election], people identified in federal campaign finance filings as journalists, reporters, news editors or television news anchors—as well as other donors known to be working in journalism—have combined to give more than \$396,000 to the presidential campaigns of Clinton and Trump. Nearly all of that money—more than 96 percent—. . . benefited Clinton: About 430 people who work in journalism have, through August [2016], combined to give about \$382,000 to the Democratic nominee.”³²

And what of the incestuous relationship between journalists and the last Democratic administration? On September 12, 2013, the *Atlantic*, a progressive media outlet, reported that there were at least twenty-four journalists who transitioned from media jobs to working in the Obama administration.

Here is some of what the *Atlantic's* Elspeth Reeve uncovered:

- *Time* managing editor Rick Stengel moved to the State Department as undersecretary of state for public diplomacy and public affairs;
- Douglas Frantz, who wrote for the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*, was an assistant secretary of state for public affairs;
- *Boston Globe* online politics editor Glen Johnson was a senior adviser at the State Department;
- *Washington Post* writer Stephen Barr moved to the Labor Department as senior managing director of the Office of Public Affairs;

- *Washington Post* congressional reporter Shailagh Murray became Vice President Joe Biden's communications director and later senior adviser to President Obama;
- Rosa Brooks was a columnist for the *Los Angeles Times* before taking a position with the undersecretary of defense for policy;
- The *Washington Post's* Desson Thomson left the paper to serve as a speechwriter for the U.S. ambassador to Britain;
- Roberta Baskin, a onetime CBS News investigative reporter, joined the Department of Health and Human Services as a senior communications adviser;
- The *Washington Post's* Warren Bass, an Outlook section deputy editor, joined then–United Nations ambassador Susan Rice as director of speechwriting and senior policy adviser;
- *Education Week* reporter David Hoff moved to the Education Department;
- CNN senior political producer Sasha Johnson joined the Department of Transportation and later became chief of staff at the Federal Aviation Administration;
- The *Chicago Tribune's* Jill Zuckman moved to the Department of Transportation as communications director;
- Rick Weiss, who had worked for the *Washington Post*, became communications director and senior policy strategist for the White House Office of Science and Technology;
- Former CBS and ABC reporter Linda Douglass joined the Obama campaign and was later communications director for the White House Office of Health Reform;
- *New York Times* reporter Eric Dash moved to the Treasury Department's public affairs office, as did MSNBC producer Anthony Reyes;

- CNN's Aneesh Raman worked for the Obama campaign and later as speechwriter for President Obama;
- CNN's national security reporter Jim Sciutto, formerly with ABC News, served as chief of staff to United States Ambassador to China Gary Locke;
- and *San Francisco Chronicle* environment reporter Kelly Zito joined the Environmental Protection Agency's public affairs office.³³

Notably, *Time* magazine Washington bureau chief Jay Carney became communications director for Vice President Biden and subsequently press secretary to President Obama.

You would be hard-pressed to find a similar extensive relationship between numerous major media organizations and recent Republican administrations. Moreover, what of family ties between the press and the Obama administration? On June 12, 2013, the *Washington Post's* Paul Farhi found the following: "ABC News President Ben Sherwood . . . is the brother of Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall, a top national security adviser to President Obama. His counterpart at CBS, news division president David Rhodes, is the brother of Benjamin Rhodes [deputy national security adviser for strategic communications]. CNN's deputy Washington bureau chief, Virginia Moseley, is married to Tom Nides, [formerly] deputy secretary of state under Hillary Rodham Clinton. Further, White House press secretary Jay Carney's wife is Claire Shipman, a veteran reporter for ABC. And [National Public Radio's] White House correspondent, Ari Shapiro, is married to a lawyer, Michael Gottlieb, who joined the White House counsel's office." Vice President Biden's onetime communications director

“Shailagh Murray . . . is married to Neil King, one of the Wall Street Journal’s top political reporters.”³⁴ Nonetheless, Farhi cites numerous media executives who insist that protections of various sorts are in place to prevent conflicts.

There are other former Democratic staffers who now work in the media and some have long family ties to the Democratic Party. For example:

- MSNBC’s Chris Matthews previously worked for, among others, President Jimmy Carter and Democratic House Speaker Tip O’Neill.
- CNN’s Chris Cuomo is brother to New York’s Democratic governor, Andrew Cuomo.
- CNN’s Jake Tapper worked for Democratic congresswoman Marjorie Margolies-Mezvinsky and Handgun Control Inc.
- ABC’s Cokie Roberts’s father was Hale Boggs, the House Democratic majority leader.
- Of course, ABC’s George Stephanopoulos worked for President Bill Clinton.

There are others, including some Republicans, but this provides a sense of the coziness between the national Washington, D.C., media and the Democratic Party.

There are also other influences on reporting, including a “geographic bubble.” *Politico*, a progressive media website, notes that “[t]he national media really does work in a bubble,” which it contends is “something that wasn’t true as recently as 2008. And the bubble is growing more extreme. Concentrated heavily along the coasts, the bubble is both geographic and political. If you’re

a working journalist, odds aren't just that you work in a pro-Clinton county—odds are that you reside in one of the nation's *most* pro-Clinton counties.” Blaming the decline on the newspaper business and the rise of internet-based online reporting for this bubble, correspondents Jack Shafer and Tucker Doherty write that “[t]his isn't just a shift in medium. It's also a shift in socio-politics, and a radical one. Where newspaper jobs are spread nationwide, internet jobs are not: Today, 73 percent of all internet publishing jobs are concentrated in either the Boston–New York–Washington–Richmond corridor or the West Coast crescent that runs from Seattle to San Diego and on to Phoenix. The Chicagoland area, a traditional media center, captures 5 percent of the jobs, with a paltry 22 percent going to the rest of the country. And almost all the real growth of internet publishing is happening outside the heartland, in just a few urban counties, all places that voted for Clinton. So when your conservative friends use ‘media’ as a synonym for ‘coastal’ and ‘liberal,’ they're not far off the mark.”³⁵

Shafer and Doherty conclude that “[n]early 90 percent of all internet publishing employees work in a county where Clinton won, and 75 percent of them work in a county that she won by more than 30 percentage points. When you add in the shrinking number of newspaper jobs, 72 percent of all internet publishing or newspaper employees work in a county that Clinton won. By this measure, of course, Clinton was the national media's candidate. . . . The people who report, edit, produce and publish news can't help being affected—deeply affected—by the environment around them.”³⁶

Given these various studies and analyses, are journalists nonetheless able to put aside their progressive ideological mindset and

political partisanship in a relatively objective or impartial pursuit of news?

Is that even still a goal of modern journalism?

A recent study by the nonpartisan Harvard Kennedy School's Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy suggests not—certainly with regard to the presidency of Donald Trump. On May 18, 2017, the Shorenstein Center issued a comprehensive analysis of news coverage of the first one hundred days of the Trump administration. Among its conclusions:

Trump's attacks on the press have been aimed at what he calls the "mainstream media." Six of the seven U.S. outlets in our study—CBS, CNN, NBC, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post*—are among those he's attacked by name. All six portrayed Trump's first 100 days in highly unfavorable terms. CNN and NBC's coverage were the most unrelenting—negative stories about Trump outpaced positive ones by 13-to-1 on the two networks. Trump's coverage on CBS also exceeded the 90 percent [negative] mark. Trump's coverage exceeded the 80 percent level in *The New York Times* (87 percent negative) and *The Washington Post* (83 percent negative). *The Wall Street Journal* came in below that level (70 percent negative), a difference largely attributable to the *Journal's* more frequent and more favorable economic coverage. Fox was the only outlet where Trump's overall coverage nearly crept into positive territory—52 percent of Fox's reports with a clear tone were negative, while 48 percent were positive. Fox's coverage was 34 percentage points less negative than the average for the other six outlets. . . . Trump's coverage

during his first 100 days was not merely negative in overall terms. It was unfavorable on every dimension. There was not a single major topic where Trump's coverage was more positive than negative.³⁷

These findings, particularly as they relate to Fox, are telling. The prevailing criticism of Fox, especially by its media competition, is that it is in the tank for Trump. While some Fox hosts and programs are more supportive of the president than others—and the distinction at Fox between the news programming and opinion programming is much better delineated than at CNN and MSNBC—the statistics gathered by the Shorenstein Center suggest that the Fox coverage overall is much more evenhanded than at other news outlets, which are overwhelmingly negative.

This may seem surprising given all the stories about Fox in the print and broadcast media portraying Fox as unfair and unbalanced in its coverage. Indeed, Fox and its executives and hosts are frequent targets of other press operations, such as the *New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Politico*, CNN, MSNBC, etc., in which journalists and progressive commentators for these news outlets seem fixated with diminishing Fox's public standing and reputation and, in some instances, even promote commercial boycotts against certain Fox hosts and shows. The reason seems apparent: Fox defies the near ideological and political uniformity of the other media outlets, in which their coverage of Trump is "unfavorable on every dimension."³⁸

The Shorenstein Center provides a thoughtful piece of advice to newsrooms and journalists. "Journalists would . . . do well to spend less time in Washington and more time in places where pol-

icy intersects with people's lives. If they had done so during the presidential campaign, they would not have missed the story that keyed Trump's victory—the fading of the American Dream for millions of ordinary people. Nor do all such narratives have to be a tale of woe. America at the moment is a divided society in some respects, but it's not a broken society and the divisions in Washington are deeper than those beyond the Beltway.”³⁹

By comparison, on April 28, 2009, the Pew Research Center issued its study of media reports on the Obama administration's first one hundred days. Pew reported that “President Barack Obama has enjoyed substantially more positive media coverage than either Bill Clinton or George Bush during their first months in the White House, according to a new study of press coverage. Overall, roughly four out of ten stories, editorials and op-ed columns about Obama have been clearly positive in tone, compared with 22% for Bush and 27% for Clinton in the same mix of seven national media outlets during the same first two months in office, according to a study by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism. The study found positive stories about Obama have outweighed negative by two-to-one (42% vs. 20%) while 38% of stories have been neutral or mixed.”⁴⁰

There are numerous other examples of the media's progressive political and ideological bias, including more studies and surveys, illustrating its widespread existence.⁴¹ Yet the evidence is often dismissed, denied, spun, or made righteous. But it is unequivocal. Indeed, in a growing number of circles, the ideological mission of news organizations and journalists is no longer subterranean. Their advocacy and mission are open and unambiguous.

For example, New York University professor Jay Rosen is a lead-

ing voice in the idea of so-called public or civic journalism—that is, the purpose-driven, community-based social activism journalism movement spreading throughout America’s newsrooms for the last several decades. A harsh critic of then-candidate Donald Trump, Rosen wrote in the *Washington Post*: “Imagine a candidate who wants to *increase* public confusion about where he stands on things so that voters give up on trying to stay informed and instead vote with raw emotion. Under those conditions, does asking ‘Where do you stand, sir?’ serve the goals of journalism, or does it enlist the interviewer in the candidate’s chaotic plan? I know what you’re thinking, journalists: ‘What do you want us to do? Stop covering a major party candidate for president? That would be irresponsible.’ True. But this reaction short-circuits intelligent debate. Beneath every common practice in election coverage there are premises about how candidates will behave. I want you to ask: Do these still apply? Trump isn’t behaving like a normal candidate; he’s acting like an unbound one. In response, journalists have to become less predictable themselves. They have to come up with novel responses. They have to do things they have never done. They may even have to shock us.”⁴²

“They may need to collaborate across news brands in ways they have never known,” Rosen adds. “They may have to call Trump out with a forcefulness unseen before. They may have to risk the breakdown of decorum in interviews and endure excruciating awkwardness. Hardest of all, they will have to explain to the public that Trump is a special case, and the normal rules do not apply.”⁴³

The news reporting about candidate Trump, President Trump, the Trump administration, and Trump supporters certainly gives every indication that Rosen’s public or civic social activism ap-

proach to journalism has a firm grip on modern newsrooms and journalists. But it can also be discerned more broadly in the topics the news media ignore, report, or report repeatedly, as well as the manner in which they are reported and the selection of “experts” or public officials to support certain positions, etc.

Twenty-five years ago, teacher and journalist Alicia C. Shepard explained that Rosen’s approach to journalism and “[t]he goal of public journalism—a.k.a. civic journalism, public service journalism or community-assisted reporting—is to ‘reconnect’ citizens with their newspapers, their communities and the political process, with newspapers playing a role not unlike that of a community organizer. According to the gospel of public journalism, professional passivity is passé; activism is hot. Detachment is out; participation is in. . . .”⁴⁴

At the time, Marvin Kalb, then director of the Shorenstein Center and a former journalist, said, “I think the movement is one of the most significant in American journalism in a long time. This is not a flash in the pan phenomenon. It’s something that seems to be digging deeper roots into American journalism and ought to be examined very carefully.” Kalb went on to warn, “A journalist who becomes an actor, in my view, is overstepping the bounds of his traditional responsibility. When the journalist literally organizes the change and then covers it, I’m uncertain about such traditional qualities as detachment, objectivity, toughness. . . . The whole point of American journalism has always been detachment from authority so that critical analysis is possible.”⁴⁵

Rosen and other like-minded social activists of public and civic journalism reject the traditional standards and notions of a free press for, instead, a radical approach to reporting, where

the media become an essential instrument for the Progressive Movement. They borrow from the philosophy of, among others, sociologist Amitai Etzioni. Etzioni describes his approach as “people committed to creating a new moral, social and public order based on restored communities, without allowing puritanism or oppression.”⁴⁶

But Etzioni’s philosophy, Rosen’s teachings and writings, and the practices of journalists throughout America’s newsrooms (the latter wittingly and unwittingly) essentially embrace and share the role of journalism set forth by John Dewey nearly a century ago. Indeed, one might justifiably refer to Dewey, one of the earliest and most influential progressive intellectuals in the nation, as one of the founding fathers of modern journalism. After all, it is abundantly obvious that the Progressive Movement could not and would not overlook or somehow bypass the most important tool of mass communication for advancing its immense ideological program—a radical break from America’s heritage, culture, and founding, particularly the principle of individual freedom and market capitalism (hence the emphasis on “communitarianism”).

Dewey declared: “When . . . I say that the first object of a re-nascent liberalism is education, I mean that its task is to aid in producing the habits of mind and character, the intellectual and moral patterns, that are somewhere near even with the actual movements of events. It is, I repeat, the split between the latter as they have externally occurred and the ways of desiring, thinking, and of putting emotion and purpose into execution that is the basic cause of present confusion in mind and paralysis in action. The educational task cannot be accomplished merely by working upon men’s minds, without action that effects actual change in in-

stitutions. The idea that dispositions and attitudes can be altered by merely ‘moral’ means conceived of as something that goes on wholly inside of persons is itself one of the old patterns that has to be changed. Thought, desire and purpose exist in a constant give and take of interaction with envioning conditions. But resolute thought is the first step in that change of action that will itself carry further the needed change in patterns of mind and character.”⁴⁷

“In short,” Dewey said, “liberalism must now become radical, meaning by ‘radical’ perception of the necessity of thoroughgoing changes in the set-up of institutions and corresponding activity to bring the changes to pass. For the gulf between what the actual situation makes possible and the actual state itself is so great that it cannot be bridged by piecemeal policies undertaken *ad hoc*.”⁴⁸

Moreover, this “liberalism,” while said to be representative of the community and the people, is the opposite. There is no practical way for the public to influence the substance of the news and reporting it receives. Furthermore, the progressive ideology, while claiming to be people oriented, preaches the wisdom of expert masterminds and administrators, and the application of scientific models and approaches to human behavior through centralized decision making. This was well expressed in 1922 by the highly influential newsman and commentator Walter Lippmann, in his classic book, *Public Opinion*. At the time, Lippmann was a disenchanted socialist, increasingly disillusioned by the public. Consequently, like many progressives, he believed the problem rested with the inability of the citizenry, in a large and complex modern society, to grasp events and rationally discuss or act on them.

Lippman wrote that the world is just too complicated for inattentive or busy individuals, focused on their own lives and pur-

suits, to comprehend events: "The amount of attention available is far too small for any scheme in which it was assumed that all the citizens of the nation would, after devoting themselves to the publications of all the intelligence bureaus, become alert, informed, and eager on the multitude of real questions that never do fit very well into any broad principle. I am not making that assumption. Primarily, the intelligence bureau is an instrument of the man of action, of the representative charged with decision, of the worker at his work, and if it does not help them, it will help nobody in the end. But in so far as it helps them to understand the environment in which they are working, it makes what they do visible. And by that much they become more responsible to the general public."⁴⁹

Lippmann contended that the experts, doing their daily business, are to be relied on to improve society: "The purpose, then, is not to burden every citizen with expert opinions on all questions, but to push that burden away from him towards the responsible administrator. An intelligence system has value, of course, as a source of general information, and as a check on the daily press. But that is secondary. Its real use is as an aid to representative government and administration both in politics and industry. The demand for the assistance of expert reporters in the shape of accountants, statisticians, secretariats, and the like, comes not from the public, but from men doing public business, who can no longer do it by rule of thumb. It is in origin and in ideal an instrument for doing public business better, rather than an instrument for knowing better how badly public business is done."⁵⁰

And Lippman exhorted that it is the process of expert synthesis and analysis that enables the citizen to make sense of things. "Only by insisting that problems shall not come up to him until they

have passed through a procedure, can the busy citizen of a modern state hope to deal with them in a form that is intelligible. For issues, as they are stated by a partisan, almost always consist of an intricate series of facts, as he has observed them, surrounded by a large fatty mass of stereotyped phrases charged with his emotion. According to the fashion of the day, he will emerge from the conference room insisting that what he wants is some soul-filling idea like Justice, Welfare, Americanism, Socialism. On such issues the citizen outside can sometimes be provoked to fear or admiration, but to judgment never. Before he can do anything with the argument, the fat has to be boiled out of it for him.”⁵¹

As many regular consumers of news can attest, this condescending elitism, a fundamental characteristic of progressivism, abounds in the attitude of journalists, and undoubtedly in the environment of newsrooms in all their platforms.

Professor Charles Kesler of Claremont McKenna College and the Claremont Institute summed up the media’s transformation this way: “Early in the 20th century journalism began to think of itself as a profession. In the 19th century most newspapers had been outgrowths of political parties. Now the rising spirit was non-partisan, independent, and expert, guided by the example of the new social sciences, whether philosophical-historical or more scientific approach. Both recipes came from the same university kitchen, so it was common to find enlisted in the same political causes both the earnest, idealistic, progressive social reformers and the cool, scientific social inquirers of facts and nothing but the facts. . . .”⁵²

Kesler added: “The new journalism, too, grew up thinking of itself as liberal and ‘objective’ at the same time. It was objective

insofar as it separated facts from values: reporting the facts, and relegating the values to the editorial pages. But to be objective or scientific in that way was itself a liberal value. Liberals of almost all stripes were confident that those separate facts would eventually line up together as ‘history,’ meta-fact confirming their own version of progress and hence their own values. . . . The front page and the editorial page were ultimately in synch. . . .”⁵³

Lacking confidence in the intelligence and wisdom of his fellow citizens, Rosen insists on indoctrination and manipulation by media elites: “If the public is assumed to be ‘out there,’ more or less intact, then the job of the press is easy to state: to inform people about what goes on in their name and their midst. But suppose the public leads a more broken existence. At times it may be alert and engaged, but just as often it struggles against other pressures—including itself—that can win out in the end. Inattention to public matters is perhaps the simplest of these, atomization of society one of the more intricate. Money speaks louder than the public, problems overwhelm it, fatigue sets in, attention falters, cynicism swells. A public that leads this more fragile kind of existence suggests a different task for the press: not just to inform a public that may or may not emerge, but to improve the chances that it will emerge. John Dewey, an early hero of mine, had suggested something like this in his 1927 book, *The Public and Its Problems*.”⁵⁴

Rosen seems to be referencing Dewey’s view of news as providing “meaning”—the “social consequences” of the information. Dewey wrote that “[n]ews’ signifies something which has just happened, and which is new just because it deviates from the old and regular. But its *meaning* depends upon relations to what it imports, to what its social consequences are.”⁵⁵ Therefore, report-

ing events without a social context, and their relationship to the past as part of a continuum, isolates them from their connections. “Even if social sciences as a specialized apparatus of inquiry were more advanced than they are,” Dewey continued, “they would be comparatively impotent in the office of directing opinion on matters of concern to the public as long as they are remote from application in the daily and unremitting assembly and interpretation of ‘news.’ On the other hand, the tools of social inquiry will be clumsy as long as they are forged in place and under conditions remote from contemporary events.”⁵⁶

Again we are reminded that real news is information infused with progressive social theory.

Seton Hall assistant professor and former journalist Matthew Pressman makes a more nuanced case for abandoning fact-based journalism for social activism. He contends that “[t]o some observers, the overriding characteristic of American journalism is liberal bias. But that is inaccurate, because it suggests either a deliberate effect to slant the news or a complete obliviousness to the political implications of news coverage. What truly defines contemporary American journalism is a set of values that determine news judgments. Some are political values: mistrust of the wealthy and powerful, sympathy for the dispossessed, belief in the government’s responsibility to address social ills. Others are journalistic values: the beliefs that journalists must analyze the news, must serve their readers, must try to be evenhanded. These values are not designed to serve any ideological agenda, but they help create a news product more satisfying to the center-left than to those who are right of center.”⁵⁷ Pressman argues that as a result of certain horrific events in the 1960s and 1970s, no longer could journalists

simply report news as objective news without interpretation influenced by progressive values.

In other words, journalists should not seek and report facts as news, but launder their news gathering priorities and the facts themselves through a progressive ideology to give them meaning and purpose. Of course, the meaning or purpose happens to promote the progressive policy and political agenda. Inasmuch as this approach mostly excludes the moral and political values of a large population of Americans, it cannot be accomplished in an “evenhanded” way, as Pressman urges. It can merely be said to be evenhanded when, in truth, such an assertion is preposterous and impossible as a matter of fact. This helps explain the modern-day near monopoly of ideologically slanted news reporting. Too often it is biased. Too often it is policy driven. And it is, therefore, “more satisfying to the center-left.”

Pressman explains what had been, in his view, the lamentable state of the press a century ago. “Ever since major American newspapers began adopting the ideal of objectivity in the 1910s and 1920s, they had allowed only a select few journalists to interpret the news: editorial writers, opinion columnists, and those writing for special sections in the Sunday edition. . . . Workaday reporters, however, had to stick to the four W’s and one H: who, what, when, where, and how. The ‘why’ question was beyond their purview. With interpretive reporting, that began to change.”⁵⁸

Consequently, the pursuit and conveyance of objective truth as news is not the journalist’s real purpose or goal anymore, but instead “interpretive reporting” through progressive lenses. “The move toward interpretation,” explains Pressman, “began in the 1950s and continues today, and it has had far-reaching implica-

tions. It caused journalists to redefine objectivity, contributed to the public's mistrust of the news media, and shifted the balance of power in news organizations from editors to reporters. But at the outset, it was—like most profound changes in big, established institutions—simply an attempt to keep pace with the competition [that is, radio, then television, and now the internet].”⁵⁹

Hence, when the news consumer reads, hears, or sees progressive bias or even political partisanship in the press that appears to closely align with the pronouncements and policies of the Democratic Party and Democratic officials, given its progressive ideological schema, he is not imagining things.

A decade before Pressman's writing, former *Washington Post* reporter Thomas Edsall was even more blunt and took the argument even further. Edsall proclaimed that “journalism should own its liberalism—then manage it, challenge it, and account for it.” “The mainstream press is liberal. Once, before 1965, reporters were a mix of the working stiff's leavened by ne'er-do-well college grads unfit for corporate headquarters or divinity school. Since the civil rights and women's movements, the culture wars and Watergate, the press corps at such institutions as *The Washington Post*, ABC-NBC-CBS News, the *NYT*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Boston Globe*, etc. is composed in large part of ‘new’ or ‘creative’ class members of the liberal elite—well-educated men and women who tend to favor abortion rights, women's rights, civil rights, and gay rights. In the main, they find such figures as Bill O'Reilly, Glenn Beck, Sean Hannity, Pat Robertson, or Jerry Falwell beneath contempt.”⁶⁰

Of course, Edsall is correct about the contempt the modern press has for conservatives generally. But it is more than that. It

bleeds into open hostility for conservative media institutions, such as conservative talk radio and the Fox News Channel, the latter of which does not even claim to be a conservative news outlet but, rather, a nonconforming media network that uses the moniker “fair and balanced.” Moreover, the media’s progressive mindset and interpretive approach results in the press calling into question virtually every cultural, traditional, and institutional norm, as one might expect. After all, it now functions as an outgrowth of the broader progressive ideological and political project. It also leads to a more myopic view of society and the evident increasing disdain and intolerance newsrooms and journalists openly display for fellow citizens who may not share their ideological attitudes, especially these days supporters of President Trump. Again, this helps explain the synergy between the press and the Democratic Party. Therefore, it logically follows that the Democratic Party mostly benefits from the media’s interpretation of the news.

As Gallup reported on April 5, 2017, “[s]ixty-two percent of U.S. adults say the media has a favorite [political party], up from about 50% in past years. Just 27% now say the media favors neither major party. . . . Currently, 77% of Republicans say the media favors one party over the other; in 2003, 59% of Republicans said the same. By comparison, 44% of Democrats now say the media plays favorites, unchanged from the 44% who said so in 2003. . . . Gallup asked those who perceive political bias in the news media to say which party the news media favors. Almost two-thirds (64%) of those who believe the media favors a political party say it is the Democratic Party. Only about a third as many (22%) believe the media favors Republicans. This is not new. Americans who perceive media bias have always said the direction of that bias leaned

in favor of the Democrats, although the percentage holding that view has varied.”⁶¹

For Edsall, the problem is that “there are very few good conservative reporters. There are many intellectually impressive conservative advocates and opinion leaders, but the ideology does not seem to make for good journalists.”⁶²

Of course, as the studies demonstrate, there are very few conservative reporters in the first place, given the lack of diverse beliefs and attitudes in newsrooms. And the community of journalists is increasingly cloistered by ideology and geography. But Edsall then makes the self-serving assertion that “[i]n contrast, any examination of the nation’s top reporters over the past half-century would show that, in the main, liberals do make good journalists in the tradition of objective news coverage. The liberal tilt of the mainstream media is, in this view, a strength, but one that in recent years, amid liberal-bias controversies, has been mismanaged.”⁶³

Hence liberals far outnumber others in news organizations, liberals are better reporters anyway, and the issue with liberal bias in the media is actually a problem of branding and marketing.

Edsall, like Pressman later, must resort to a both self-fulfilling and incoherent formulation of journalism’s purpose to justify liberal media bias and simultaneously reject bias as a criticism. “While the personnel tend to share an ideological worldview,” writes Edsall, “most have a personal and professional commitment to the objective presentation of information.” Edsall’s complaint is that “[t]he refusal of mainstream media executives to acknowledge the ideological leanings of their staffs has produced a dangerous form of media guilt in which the press leans over so far backward

to avoid the charge of left bias that it ends up either neutered or leaning to the right.”⁶⁴

Furthermore, it seems the media’s progressive ideological outlook has in some ways morphed into a moral crusade, as in other societal areas so inflicted with progressive sensibilities during the course of the last century. Kovach and Rosenstiel assert that most journalists “sense that journalism is a moral act and know that all of their background and values direct what they will do and not do in producing it. . . . For many journalists, this moral dimension is particularly strong because of what attracted them to the profession in the first place. When they initially became interested in the news, often as adolescents or teenagers, many were drawn to the craft by its most basic elements—calling attention to inequities in the system, connecting people, creating community. . . . These journalists feel strongly about the moral dimension of their profession because without it they have so little to help them navigate the gray spaces of ethical decisions.”⁶⁵

A moral imperative to one’s life, let alone career, is certainly noble. It is not exclusive to journalism. It is something to which individuals from all walks of life, in all professions and areas of work, should possess or strive. But if and when morality is defined by or interpreted through a progressive ideology and related policy and political objectives, the outcome is a profession whose members form a class or aristocracy of strident, pretentious, arrogant, and self-righteously superior individuals, rarely capable of circumspection or improvement. This has most recently and particularly revealed itself in the media’s coverage of President Trump. Charles Kesler explains: “President Trump exploits that vulnerability with his criticism of ‘fake news.’ He accuses them not merely of making

it up, that is, of getting the facts wrong or concocting ‘facts’ to fit their bias, but also of inventing the very standards by which to conceal and justify their abuses: the fake authority of ‘objectivity,’ nonpartisanship, and progress. They are as partisan as journalists were two centuries ago, but can’t, or won’t, admit it, which means they can’t begin to ask how to moderate themselves. In truth, they may be as much self-deluded as deluding.”⁶⁶ Thus, for many in the press, the president is challenging their moral paramouncy.

And herein lies a major part of the problem: what is the prime objective of “journalism”? Is modern journalism supposed to be a project inculcated with a progressive mindset and value system yet somehow free of bias, as Professor Pressman argues; or, is modern journalism supposed to be a reporter’s pursuit of social activism and a social overhaul, therefore and necessarily an anti-Western reformation, as Professor Rosen demands; or, is it an exclusive club of wise men and women through whom the world is to be explained to the plebes; or, is it supposed to be the gathering and reporting of objective truth and facts, where interpretation and analysis are left to the readers, viewers, and listeners; or, is it an institution that should strengthen the civil society by promoting the nation’s founding principles?

The evidence indicates that when it comes to matters of politics and culture, among other things, journalism has become an overwhelmingly progressive enterprise, and the disingenuousness with which it is mostly denied, defended, or even celebrated often leads to a pack mentality, groupthink, repetition, and even propaganda presented as news. However, it must be said, as demonstrated ear-

lier, that the attitude of an increasing number of influential media voices is less concerned with the veneer of objectivity and more open about the progressive ideological outlook that motivates their reporting. This is a project that has been under way for about a century.

Therefore the questions raised at the opening of this chapter are more or less answered by the values and mindset of the media's collective progressive ethos and attachment to social activism. Moreover, as foot soldiers for the Progressive Movement, newsrooms and journalists have also traveled far from the substantive principles and beliefs that animated the early printers, pamphleteers, and newspaper publishers who gave birth to press freedom and American independence.