Champagne corks popped as Eric Freedman and Jim Mitzelfeld hugged each other in the Detroit News newsroom. They had just learned they had won the 1994 Pulitzer Prize for beat reporting for uncovering corruption in the Michigan legislature.

Similar scenes occur at a handful of U.S. newspapers each year as the top awards in journalism are announced. These celebrations often mask the huge effort that goes into winning a Pulitzer. Many of the topics that win might even seem boring to some readers, but the results help make democracy work. The Michigan legislative story, for example, involved more than one hundred stories over a two-year period. As a result, ten people were convicted of felonies, including a state legislator, and Michigan now requires that all legislative agencies meet in public and issue public reports.

*Journalism*—reporting on government, politics, policies, economics, and other news and issues—has become
a cornerstone of American life. The United States was founded on the assumption that a populace could govern if it was well informed. President James Madison wrote that "knowledge will forever govern ignorance, and a people who mean to be their own governors, must arm themselves with the power knowledge gives. A popular government without popular information or the means of acquiring it is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy or perhaps both."¹

From almost the beginning of the history of the United States, newspaper editors and printers sought to inform the people about the happenings of the day. In a January 16, 1787, letter to Colonel Edward Carrington, Thomas Jefferson wrote, "Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter." But his next sentence is less widely quoted: "But I should mean that every [person] should receive those papers and be capable of reading them."²

As late as 1945, Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black reaffirmed the importance of information in American society, noting that the First Amendment guarantee of a free press "rests upon the assumption that the widest possible dissemination of information from diverse and antagonistic sources is essential to the well-being of the public."³

Although the history of journalism is often confused with the history of the newspaper because newspapers were one of the earliest and most common methods of distribution of information about public life, the two are separate and distinct. Newspapers are a delivery system. Today the delivery systems for journalism include radio, television, magazines, books, and sites online. Some people define journalism as an act—a method and art of collecting and presenting information that ultimately is distributed through various channels; others describe it as a ritual—a way of sustaining, enriching, and challenging societal norms; still others see it as the mere dissemination of information.

Journalism has a changing face. As we continue our adventure into the twenty-first century, these issues will need to be addressed:

- How will journalists maintain their credibility in the face of infotainment—a combination of news and entertainment designed to win profits for media companies?
- How does journalism foster the values of a society?
- What has been the impact of the twenty-four-hour news cycle on the thoughtful delivery of news?
- How does the role of the journalist change as she or he adapts to a variety of delivery systems including print, radio, television, cable, and online?
Throughout U.S. history, journalism has helped make the government a government “of” and “by” the people. Political journalism has helped guard against secrecy and governmental power. Thus journalism’s primary purpose has been to inform. But in different periods, it also has been a powerful persuasive tool. And from the earliest times, it has sought to entertain by providing information about unusual happenings and humorous incidents. In recent years, a move by many media industries toward infotainment, a blend of information and entertainment, has caused many journalists to worry about redefining the essence of journalism.

### Challenges to Elite Authority

During the early colonial period, journalists were not a separate occupational group; they were editors, postmasters, and elite businessmen who sought to earn a living by printing information and who wanted to play a role in the founding of a new country. These writers were citizens first and intellectuals or commentators second. This point is important because freedom of expression is not granted to an elite cadre of officials.

### Popular government

Popular government: Government that is controlled by the citizenry rather than an elite cadre of officials.

### Infotainment

Infotainment: A blend of information and entertainment. Critics believe such treatments maquerade as journalism and deceive the public.
journalists—it is granted to citizens of the United States. Thus journalists do not have rights that ordinary citizens do not have.

Scholars debate how courageous journalists were during the colonial period. Some argue that journalists were quite cautious, rarely challenging the status quo. Others point out that despite the fact that governors in the colonies did not like criticism of themselves or the British government, journalists still spoke out. For example, in 1733, John Peter Zenger, printing the *New York Weekly Journal* for a radical attorney named James Alexander, was charged with seditious libel for openly criticizing the royal governor of New York. At that time, the law allowed a jury to determine only whether a printer had actually published specific material, not whether the material was true or was, indeed, seditious. After a highly publicized trial and an eloquent defense by Andrew Hamilton, the jury acquitted Zenger, thereby establishing a political, although not a legal, precedent for the right to criticize government. Hamilton argued that truth should be a defense in any seditious libel trial and that a jury should be able to judge not only whether an accused printer actually printed the material, but also whether it was libelous. He appealed to the
The acquittal of printer John Zenger on charges of seditious libel made media history because it set a precedent for truth (as a defense for libel) in journalism.
colonists’ dislike of arbitrary power, an aversion that would become even stronger as colonists began to consider independence.5

Independence and the Marketplace of Ideas

Journalists played an important role during the late-eighteenth-century struggle for independence. They not only recounted events but also presented competing ideologies for discussion in the marketplace of ideas. During the mid-eighteenth century—especially after the French and Indian War, which required colonists to contribute to what they considered a British cause—colonists began to entertain the idea of increased independence from Britain. Many of the imported books, local newspapers, and pamphlets read by the colonists spread the ideas of the Enlightenment, a philosophical movement during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that generated new ideas about scientific reasoning, democracy, rule by consent of the governed, and free criticism of government. These ideas challenged authoritarian control and championed individual rights and democratic participation.

Chief among intellectuals and editors who challenged British authority was Benjamin Franklin. He established a prominent newspaper in Philadelphia, ran a bookshop, printed a newspaper and various pamphlets, attempted publication of a magazine, and helped found a public library system. He extended his printing network to the southern colonies by financing printers so they could start bookshops and printing establishments in growing cities. He gained fame for both the lightning rod experiments that later earned him a place in elementary school science books and the “Join or Die” snake, a graphic representation of the need for the colonies to stick together in their fight against England or else undergo separate deaths.

When the British Parliament passed the Stamp Act, which assessed a tax on paper, newspaper publishers rebelled. The tax was designed to help pay for the French and Indian War, which started in 1756. The colonists argued that they had no say in whether or how the war should be fought and therefore should not have to pay the tax. In protest some of the newspaper publishers printed woodcuts with skull-and-crossbones emblems; other ceased publishing and refused to pay the tax. By the time of the Revolution, most printers were notoriously patriotic. A lack of tolerance for diversity of political opinion characterized most communities, and printers who remained loyal to the British Crown were quickly exiled. Despite protests against British control of the press, colonists readily exercised their own control of public opinion by suppressing unpopular opinions. The resistance to free expression for everyone during times of stress became a characteristic of American media during the next two centuries, and the media often felt free to demonize and stereotype America’s enemies in times of social strife or war.

Newspaper editors and pamphleteers such as Thomas Paine cheered the colonists onward. During the struggle for independence, when George Washington’s troops were mired in winter snows in Trenton, New Jersey, Paine offered eloquent pleas for steadfastness, such as, “These are the times that try men’s souls.”

The Fight for Political Dominance

Although the states ratified the Constitution with no provision for a free press, within three years (in 1791) a Bill of Rights was added to ensure civil liberties: among others, the right to assemble, to choose a religion, to speak and write freely, and to be tried fairly. Chief among the Bill of Rights was the First Amendment:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the public peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

From 1790 to 1830, during the constitutional debates and the establishment of political parties, most editors and commentators argued vociferously on one side. Eighteenth-century political writers did not value objectivity as an ideal. Journalists, often mem-
bers of the social elite and appointed by a politician, helped establish the function of
the press in a newly created democratic society. They sometimes overstepped the
boundaries of good taste, but they established the right of journalists to comment on
political competition, a right that has fueled the political process ever since. These com-
mmentators sided with either the Federalists, who wanted a strong central government,
or the Anti-Federalists, who argued to preserve the powers of the states.

The period of rabid political rhetoric has been labeled the Dark Ages of American
journalism by many historians. Anti-Federalist Benjamin Franklin Bache, the grandson
of Benjamin Franklin, accused the revered George Washington of having “debauched”
the nation and argued that “the masque of patriotism may be worn to conceal the
 foulest designs against the liberties of a people.” Bache was so outrageous that even his
friends at times turned against him. But he stuck to his political principles, “in which
he said that government officers were fallible, the Constitution good but not obviously
‘stamped with the seal of perfection,’ and that a free press was ‘one of the first safeguards
of Liberty.’”7 A vituperative editor on the Federalist side, William Cobbett, called
Bache black-hearted, seditious, sleepy-eyed, vile, and perverted.

Despite the First Amendment, a Federalist Congress in 1798 passed the restrictive
Naturalization, Enemy Alien, and Sedition Acts. These laws, commonly called the
Alien and Sedition Acts, made it possible to indict those who “shall write, print,
utter, or publish... false, scandalous and malicious writing or writings against the
Government of the United States, or the President of the United States, or either house
of the Congress... with intent to defame... or to bring them into contempt or dis-
repute.” Those who were convicted could be punished by a fine of not more than
$2,000 and could be imprisoned for two years. Anti-Federalist editors across the land
were indicted and jailed, and only when Thomas Jefferson took office as president
of the United States in 1801 were those editors released. The Alien and Sedition Acts
indeed marked a low point, with their restrictions against the criticism of government
in a time of peace. Because those acts were passed but not renewed, such restrictions
generally have been reserved for times of war.

History of Press Responsibility

When the First Amendment was written, idealists adhered to the Enlightenment philosophy that all individuals are
born equal to learn, improve, and make proper decisions from which to lead productive lives. The government was
thought to exist only as an extension of the people. It was the responsibility of the press to provide information to
individuals, who were considered rational beings who could discern truth from falsehood. The founders of the United States believed that
if a variety of people contributed ideas to the discussion, a free marketplace of ideas
would be created and the truth would emerge. For the marketplace of ideas to suc-
cceed, the market needs to provide free access for those who would contribute.

By the twentieth century, the Industrial Revolution had changed society and the
press. Individuals became more interdependent, and national media developed as ra-
dio and television expanded. During the Great Depression, Franklin Delano Roosevelt
introduced federal programs based on the concept that government has the responsi-
bility to make sure people live in acceptable conditions. In addition, with the imple-
mentation of compulsory education, people gave government the responsibility of
educating the children. To some degree, U.S. society had exchanged individualism for
and reporters and editors were
highly partisan in their efforts to
build a new political system.

Alien and Sedition Acts: Federalist
laws passed in 1798 to restrict
freedom of information. They were
used to quell political dissent.

Hutchins Commission: Commis-
sion established in the 1940s to
review press conduct. The com-
m ission argued that the press
should provide intelligence that
would enable the public to under-
stand the issues of the day.

Dark Ages of journalism: Period
when the republic was formed and
reporters and editors were
highly partisan in their efforts to
build a new political system.

Hutchins Commission: Commis-
sion established in the 1940s to
review press conduct. The com-
m ission argued that the press
should provide intelligence that
would enable the public to under-
stand the issues of the day.
The commission listed five “ideal demands of society for the communication of news and ideas:

1. A truthful, comprehensive, and intelligent account of the day’s events in a context that gives them meaning
2. A forum for the exchange of comment and criticism
3. The projection of a representative picture of the constituent groups in society
4. The presentation and clarification of the goals and values of society
5. Full access to the day’s intelligence

After evaluating the press in light of its ideal demands, the commission found freedom of the press in the United States to be in danger because of the monopolistic nature of the press. Concentration meant, the commission noted, that fewer people had access to communication channels and that those in charge had not provided a service adequate to society’s needs.

Concerned with the potential of new technology to be developed for either good or evil, the commission discussed guidelines for regulation of new technology and international communications systems. The commission chose, however, to assign the press the responsibility of “accountability,” rather than recommending increased government regulation. The commission suggested that retraction or restatement might better serve victims of libel rather than suits for damages, and it recommended repeal of state syndicalism acts and the Alien Registration Act of 1940, saying they were of “dubious constitutionality.” The commission also suggested that the government assume responsibility for disseminating its own news, through either private channels or channels of its own.

The commission suggested that the press should accept the responsibility of being a “common carrier” of information and discussion rather than assuming that ownership meant dissemination of a personal viewpoint. It encouraged owners to experiment with new activities, especially in areas in which profits were not necessarily assured. The commission also encouraged vigorous mutual criticism by members of the press and increased competence of news staffs. It also chided the radio industry for giving away control to soap sponsors and recommended the industry take control of its programs by treating advertisers the way the “best” newspapers treated them.

Focusing on freedom as “bound up intrinsically in the collective good of life in society,” the commission further suggested that the public had a social responsibility to ensure continued freedom of the press, requesting that nonprofit institutions help supply variety and quality to press service. It requested that educational centers be created for advanced research about communications and emphasized the importance of the liberal arts in journalistic training.

Renewing the discussion of the importance of a free and accessible press to a democratic society, the Hutchins Commission finally recommended that an independent agency be established to appraise and report annually on the performance of the press. The commission worried, however, that too much emphasis was being placed on that recommendation. Nevertheless, it seemed to be the only solution commissioners could agree on, after acknowledging that the concept of laissez-faire, not government control, would eliminate the effects of monopoly.

Needless to say, the owners of the agencies of mass communication reacted negatively. Many members of the press were critical because no one from its ranks was included on the commission. Responding to the criticism, the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) in 1950 appointed ten newspapermen and educators to investigate self-improvement possibilities. The editors’ findings reaffirmed the concept of laissez-faire and rejected the commission’s recommendations, claiming that improvement of U.S. newspapers depended on “the character of American newspapermen” and their “acceptance of the great responsibilities imposed by freedom of the press.” The ASNE study suggested that reporters and editors might be more willing to profit by the “intelligent criticism of the newspaper-reading public” than they would by suggestions made by a commission over which they had no control.
Social Responsibility  ✦ During the twentieth century, social responsibility has become the dominant theoretical model for media. As coauthor of *Four Theories of the Press*, Theodore Peterson wrote, “freedom carries concomitant obligations; and the press, which enjoys a privileged position under our government, is obliged to be responsible to society for carrying out certain essential functions of mass communications in contemporary society.” In addition, media should continue to be free from government in order to watch over government.

Although most journalists and media critics accept social responsibility in some form, not all do. Communication scholars John Merrill and Jack Odell have written about the hazards of the social responsibility approach:

We simply (1) cannot understand exactly what is meant by a theory of social responsibility, and (2) cannot help feeling that a growing emphasis on such a theory will lead a nation’s press system away from freedom toward authoritarianism. In the eyes of individual persons in any society various media at times will perform what they see as irresponsible actions; for irresponsibility, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder.

Some critics see social responsibility as self-censorship that could deprive the marketplace of ideas of potentially beneficial information. They also fear that standards of responsibility will come from the powerful and not from ordinary citizens.12

Emergence of the Reporter

The shift from editor/printer/intellectual to reporter/editor came with the advent of the penny press in the 1830s. As you will read in the chapter on newspapers, urban editors wanted to expand circulations, hoping that revenues would follow. In doing so, they recognized that strong political affiliations with parties would jeopardize the expansion of their readership. They began to rely more strongly on advertising and sought to report news that would be of interest to all. With this strategy in mind, Benjamin Day of the *New York Sun* hired a reporter—a person who collects information and presents it in a readable fashion to a wide range of readers.

Day hired George W. Wisner, a young reporter, and paid him four dollars a week to rise at four in the morning to cover daily police court sessions. Wisner turned police court charges of spousal assault and petty debt into action and drama for the Sun’s news pages. Crime stories reinforced the social values of the day by showing what happened to those who broke the rules, but they also appealed to an interest in “bad people.” Wisner was an ardent abolitionist, so he used his position to try to sneak antislavery editorials into the Sun along with his police reports.

When Wisner left New York for Michigan, Day hired Richard Adams Locke, an educated man who was interested in scientific discovery. Locke is famous in journalism history for his 1835 series of articles exploiting the discoveries of Sir John Frederick William Herschel, the greatest astronomer of his time, who had established an observatory near Cape Town, South Africa. Locke’s story illustrates that entertainment, along with information, was considered a journalistic goal. Locke reported that Herschel, through the use of a new telescope, had discovered planets in other solar systems and had seen the surface of the moon with vegetation, animals, and winged creatures that resembled men and women. Locke cited the *Edinburgh Journal of Science* as his source and managed to fool not only the general public but the scientific community as well.

The *Sun* defended the hoax, saying that it was useful in diverting the public mind from such worrisome issues as the abolition of slavery. The Moon Hoax, as it came to be called, is often used to illustrate...
the claim that penny editors were less concerned with fact and objectivity than with entertaining their public. Sometimes a little fiction was useful in building circulation. Some critics speculate that Locke was trying to upstage the staid, political papers of New York City, which had rejected the penny press as sensationalistic. These papers could not ignore Locke's story, and most of them printed it. When the hoax was revealed, the papers had little argument with which to defend themselves against the penny press upstarts.

The reporter thus became established as a fixture in American journalism. Fictional accounts of reporters in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries depict them as semieducated “tough guys” who were out to expose corrupt businessmen and government officials. Women, though they began to enter the ranks, are relatively invisible in the fictional accounts. The intellectual role of the newspaper was relegated to the editorial page, and editors who often were heavily involved in politics made editorial decisions. The editors continued to separate themselves financially from political parties, but most editors strongly supported a particular party.

**The Reporter and Social Conscience**

During the mid-1800s, newspaper journalists began to expose the wrongdoings of city officials and to focus on city services and politics. During the late 1800s, reporters established the form of reporting called muckraking, unearthing corporate greed and exposing it to the masses. The food and drug industry had expanded quickly without regulation, and reporters found that many commercial food-handling situations were dangerous to the consumer. Although the articles were often labeled sensational, they were boring by today’s standards. Filled with detail, they dutifully chronicled industry violations of safety and health standards. But they were sensational at the time because to that date no one had written publicly about the issues being discussed. People were shocked to see the material. Much of the material was in the same vein as the social documentary, which found a place in books and, after the turn of the century, to some degree in newsreels. Muckrakers established the *journalism of exposure* as a basic tenet of American journalism.

**Photojournalism.** As the Kodak box camera began to revolutionize public photography after 1900, the development of the 35-millimeter camera and fast film created new opportunities for photojournalism, which was an extension of the type of photography social reformers had used between 1880 and 1915 to document the negative social effects of the Industrial Revolution.
Some journalists tried to expose these problems through heavy use of illustration. Jacob A. Riis and Lewis W. Hine photographed the plight of the poor and homeless to show what can happen to unskilled workers in an unregulated capitalist economic system. In the 1920s, social documentary photography was greatly enhanced with the introduction of the small Leica camera, made by E. Leitz of Germany. With the Leica, a photographer could work unnoticed while recording a scene. Film that could be quickly exposed and new printing techniques contributed to the development of picture magazines in Germany, England, and the United States. By the 1960s, *Life* and *Look* became showcase magazines for the work of photographers. However, television quickly eclipsed the magazines, and current visual images that moved captivated the public.

**JOURNALISM ON RADIO AND TELEVISION**

Print journalism—and print and wire reporters—dominated journalism through the first third of the twentieth century. At first radio was merely a voice for the newspaper; newspaper copy fashioned by print journalists was read across the air. Later, reporters developed specific styles oriented toward listeners and viewers. In July 1922, the *Norfolk* [Nebraska] *Daily News* started the first regularly broadcast noon news program. In 1932 radio reporters covered the Roosevelt–Hoover presidential race and launched radio news. They also started a major industry battle between newspapers and radio, and publishers sought to keep radio from competing with them by limiting radio access to news from the major wire services. Newspapers could not stop radio, however, and by the late 1930s radio news was becoming a standard feature.

**Radio and World War II**

Radio journalists became popular sources of news with their dramatic and complete coverage of World War II. Before radio, war news took hours, days, or even weeks to reach the general public. Radio was instantaneous. Furthermore, print could never match the immediacy of Edward R. Murrow broadcasting from London as German bombs ripped through the city. Murrow developed a radio style, an intimate conversation with his listeners.

During the 1938 coverage of Germany’s invasion of Austria, Murrow set up the first simultaneous broadcast with reporters in Vienna, London, Paris, Berlin, and Rome. By the time Hitler invaded Poland in 1939, CBS and NBC had placed experienced reporters throughout Europe. By 1943 the amount of radio news in the networks’ evening programming had tripled, and a majority of people in the United States rated radio as more accurate than newspapers in war coverage.

**Television Journalism**

Newsreels, shown in movie houses, and television offered the first electronic visual journalism. Although some experimentation with television news occurred as early as 1940, development of news programming was delayed until after World War II; the half-hour television network news shows did not appear until the 1960s.

In 1945, NBC set up an organization for production of news film. In 1948 the network presented *NBC Newsroom*, a program produced by radio journalists and broadcast from the NBC radio newsroom. Critics argued that pictures of a man reading the news did not add much to an understanding of world affairs, but ratings were sufficient to keep the program on the air and attract competitors. The current evening newscast format dates to NBC’s *Camel News Caravan*, a fifteen-minute nightly program starring John Cameron Swayze. CBS inaugurated a similar program, *Douglas Edwards with the News*. *Camel News Caravan* solidified NBC’s news operation for the short term. By May 1951, forty stations carried the program, which mixed newsreel footage with visual reading of the news. NBC Television News established bureaus.
Long before the publicity machine peppered U.S. society with one-name idols such as Madonna and Michael, people earned that sort of recognition through a lifetime of accomplishments. Of these career icons, perhaps the most influential journalist was Edward R. Murrow, who shaped journalism in radio and television. Although it seems that much of broadcast news has fallen into sensationalism and pandering, current standards for good public service journalism can be traced directly to Murrow.

Murrow was born in North Carolina in 1908 and moved to Washington State at age six. During his youth, he worked as a farmhand, a bus driver, and a logger. While attending Washington State College, where he changed his first name from Egbert to Edward, Murrow participated in campus politics; he graduated in 1930.

During the five years between graduation and the beginning of his twenty-six-year career with the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), Murrow worked with educational organizations and traveled throughout Europe. He started work for CBS in 1935 and was promoted to CBS representative in Europe two years later. It was in Europe that he shaped the values of radio news and trained a group of broadcast journalists who would guide both radio and TV news for a generation.

From Europe, Murrow covered the steady expansion of Hitler’s power. His broadcasts from London during World War II, which started with the statement “This is London,” allowed Americans to experience war as they had never before experienced it. Murrow said that during the war Winston Churchill “mobilized the English language and sent it into battle.” This could be applied accurately to Murrow’s reporting efforts.

Murrow did more than simply report. He trained other journalists such as Howard K. Smith, Charles C. Collingwood, Eric Sevareid, and Richard Hottelet. These colleagues would help define radio news and establish television news a decade later.

Following the war, Murrow became an executive with CBS before returning to journalism on television. In New York, Chicago, Washington, D.C., Cleveland, Los Angeles, Dallas, and San Francisco. It recruited stringers from abroad, hired camera crews and photographers, and signed exchange agreements with affiliate stations for news film. Initially, this meant additional jobs for journalists, but in 1952/1953, as production costs increased and NBC’s news programs encountered financial difficulty, the network dramatically reduced its news division.

Meanwhile, CBS also expanded its news operations. William Paley, along with his second-in-command, Frank Stanton, shaped CBS into a leader in entertainment and news programming. Paley solidified CBS’s financing, then demonstrated an uncanny skill for negotiating with affiliates and with celebrities. He was willing to allocate resources to programming, and it didn’t take Paley long to ensure that CBS would surpass NBC as a leader in news and information programming.

Two of his programs, See It Now and Person to Person, helped shape the public’s expectations of TV journalists. The high point of his TV journalism career came in 1954 when he attacked Senator Joseph R. McCarthy on See It Now for creating a witch-hunt in the name of anticommunism. McCarthy attacked people from the floor of the Senate and caused many to lose their jobs; some even committed suicide. Few people had been willing to do battle with such a powerful senator. But Murrow used his thirty-minute program to criticize McCarthy with McCarthy’s own words and images. He said of McCarthy’s attacks, “We must not confuse dissent with disloyalty,” and added, “We will not be driven by fear into an age of unreason if we remember that we are not descended from fearful men, men who fear to write, to speak, to associate and to defend causes, which were, for the moment, unpopular.”

Murrow continued at CBS until 1961, when President John F. Kennedy appointed him director of the United States Information Agency (USIA). The USIA’s mission was to spread information about the U.S. government and culture around the world. He served as director until 1963 and died in 1965.

During his career, Murrow grew to understand the power and potential of broadcasting. On October 15, 1965, he spoke at the convention of the Radio–Television News Directors Association and said of television: “This instrument can teach, it can illuminate, and yes it can inspire. But it can do so only to the extent that humans are determined to use it to those ends. Otherwise, it is nothing but wires and lights in a box.”

Veteran news reporters remember the Edward R. Murrow days as the Golden Age of Television News, when money flowed through CBS newsrooms and news shaped the reputation of the individual network. Murrow, famous for his radio news broadcasts during World War II, debuted in television in 1951 with the first network public affairs series, *See It Now.* In later years, Murrow made CBS famous for its documentaries, such as *Harvest of Shame,* which depicted the plight of migrant farmworkers.

**Political Reporting on Television** ★★ Just as television restructured U.S. entertainment patterns and the process through which people got their news, so it also reshaped the process of reporting on government officials. Television combined with expanding education, increasing mobility, participatory democratic legislation, and sophisticated research methods during the 1950s and 1960s to weaken political parties in the United States and increase the role of the media in selecting leaders.

Network journalists covered the presidential campaign of 1952, a race between the popular General Dwight D. Eisenhower, a hero of World War II, and Illinois Governor Adlai Stevenson, one of the nation’s foremost intellectuals. During this race, politics began to conform to the requirements of television. Stevenson’s long commentaries bored too many of his listeners; Eisenhower, although anything but a polished television star, at least learned the value of short spots.

Soon after being named Eisenhower’s running mate, Richard Nixon was accused of being the beneficiary of a secret trust fund set up by wealthy businessmen. The public was scandalized. Fearing that Eisenhower would drop him from the Republican ticket, Nixon chose television as the medium for his defense. It was through television that Richard Nixon was able to bypass journalists. Television provided this politician the opportunity to present himself in public without editing by journalists. In what became known as “the Checkers speech,” Nixon detailed his financial condition and vowed that, though his children’s dog Checkers had been donated by an admirer, the family loved the dog and “regardless of what they say, we’re going to keep it.” This personalized use of television built on what Franklin Delano Roosevelt had accomplished with his “Fireside Chats” over radio before and during World War II. Politicians began to go directly to the public, rather than having information first sifted through reporters and editors for newspapers and magazines.

**The Image** ★★ Image has always played a role in U.S. politics. Image helps to define candidates for voters. Television, with its strong visual impact, enhanced the ability of media and politicians to manipulate political images.

John Kennedy used presidential debates and press conferences to shape his image. His ready wit and handsome smile made him a natural for the cameras. In the first televised presidential debate between Kennedy and Richard Nixon in 1960, Kennedy established himself as a man with a vision for leadership and placed Nixon in the position of defending the status quo. The role of image was demonstrated further by the reaction of people who listened to the debate on the radio: The majority of radio listeners believed Nixon won the debate.

The Kennedy–Nixon debates set a precedent for future presidential campaigns. Debates are now an expected part of the campaign process, and their effectiveness or lack of it is controversial and thus interesting to voters. In the 1992 elections, the questioning of candidates in a town hall format, with citizens rather than journalists asking questions, gained more attention than did the formal debates. However, as the 2000 election debates showed, formal encounters continue to be a significant part of presidential campaigning.

In 1968 Richard Nixon hired people who understood the art of television advertising, and paid media became a significant force in political campaigning. Nixon’s people knew how to research public taste and to create advertising. Although disarray in the Democratic Party in 1968 aided Nixon’s victory, some critics charge that without the mastery of the television image devised by his advisors, Nixon might never have become president.

**key concept**

*Television presidential debates* Debates between candidates in front of TV cameras or audiences have become significant factors in presidential elections. Televised debates for primary candidates in key states, as well as in national elections, can earn respectable TV ratings and appear to be an important way for the public to see candidates interact and talk about issues.

**Documents:** Film or video investigations. Based on the term documents—these accounts document the details of a historical or current event. Often used as a term that implies investigative reporting.
Today political candidates work hard to control their images through advertising and by making arranged appearances. Many candidates limit their exposure to journalists, preferring to display a crafted image rather than respond to impromptu questions. Whenever candidates do respond to the press, their spin doctors work to get the candidate’s interpretation of an event or issue into journalists’ stories. The promotion of image rather than issues and substance is also fostered by some of the current production values of television. News values that promote higher ratings through ever shorter sound bites allow candidates to shape a planned, desirable television image, no matter what their actual political history.

Expanded Television News ➤ In 1963, only a few weeks before the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, whose funeral made television history, NBC expanded its evening news coverage from a mere fifteen minutes to a thirty-minute newscast featuring the anchor team of Chet Huntley and David Brinkley. CBS followed suit with a news program anchored by Walter Cronkite. ABC, whose newscasts were at best a fledgling operation, didn’t expand to a half hour until 1967. Since the 1960s, the networks have often explored expanding their evening newscasts to an hour. However, the affiliated stations continue to run their own profitable local newscasts in the lead-in time slot (usually 5:00 to 6:30 or 7:00 P.M. EST) and retain the time slot following the network news for profit-making syndicated shows such as Wheel of Fortune and Jeopardy.

By the end of the 1960s, television had become the country’s dominant medium for the visual display of social controversy. The civil rights movement, the war in Vietnam, environmental damage, and women’s demands for equality were the big stories of the decade. Television covered them all. In 1969 even Vice President Spiro Agnew, who despised and feared the power of television, admitted that the networks have made “hunger” and “black lung disease” national issues overnight. The TV networks have done what no other medium could have done in terms of dramatizing the horrors of war. The networks have tackled our most difficult social problems with a directness and immediacy that is the gift of their medium. They have focused the nation’s attention on its environmental abuses . . . on pollution in the Great Lakes and the threatened ecology of the Everglades.13

Expansion of network news came not in the prestigious and expensive evening hours but in morning news, in which a softer format appealed to audiences with shows such as Good Morning America. The definition of news also expanded to include newsmagazines such as 60 Minutes, which began in 1968 but did not achieve a permanent slot on the weekly schedule until the late 1970s. The expansion also includes late-night news programs such as Ted Koppel’s Nightline, which ABC intro-
duced in 1979 during the height of the crisis arising from Iranian militants’ seizure of hostages in the U.S. embassy in Tehran. In the late 1980s, the number of newsmagazines in prime time grew. By 2000, ABC, NBC, and CBS were producing as many as a dozen newsmagazines a week.

**OBJECTIVITY AND STORYTELLING**

American journalism has emerged from two separate traditions, that of *objectivity* and that of storytelling, or the *narrative tradition*. Modern journalism exhibits a tension between these traditions, with many editors and station managers arguing that objectivity is the golden norm of journalism, while others struggle to retain and understand the narrative tradition and its importance.

We know that impartiality or objectivity was a criterion used as early as the colonial days. Benjamin Franklin speaks of being an “impartial printer.” During the Civil War, J. Thrasher, head of the Press Association in the Confederate states, tells editors to be “objective.” When Adolph Ochs strives to make the *New York Times* a newspaper of record in the mid-1800s, he speaks of “objectivity.”

Traditionally, objectivity has included five components: detachment from the object of the story, nonpartisanship, a reliance on facts, a sense of balance, and use of the inverted pyramid style of writing. However, many journalists believe it is impossible to be totally objective. In fact, journalists have dropped the word *objectivity* from such documents as the Society for Professional Journalists’ code. Whereas Walter Cronkite, the renowned anchor of the CBS evening news from 1962 to 1981, ended his newscast saying, “And that’s the way it is,” Dan Rather ends his with the words, “And that’s part of our world.” The strive for objectivity has been replaced by use of the words *truthfulness*, *accuracy*, and *comprehensiveness*. However, journalists often endorse objectivity as a principal tenet. Leonard Downie, managing editor of the *Washington Post*, reveres the concept to the degree that he claims he does not vote because doing so would force him to take sides and make him less objective.

The tradition of narrative journalism has remained strong. Telling stories was a component of colonial and frontier newspapers. Sometimes they were totally factual;

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**key concept**

**Objectivity** Looking at a story as though through a perfect lens uncolored by a reporter’s thoughts about a subject; trying to view a story from a neutral perspective. Some critics believe pure objectivity is impossible and that fairness and balance are more important.

**key concept**

**Narrative tradition** Journalism as story. Many writers employ fictional techniques in writing nonfiction material.
at other times, they were representations of reality. Narrative journalism, or “literary journalism,” was controversial as early as the 1880s, when it threatened literature, whose predominant form during the period was realism. The controversies centered on some themes that are still heard today: the conflict between “high” and “low” culture and the blending of fiction and fact. Many narrative journalists actually aspired to be novelists.\footnote{15}

During the late 1960s, when a young generation of journalists evaluated the role of journalism in the social change brought about by civil rights and Vietnam activities and debates, they turned to what they labeled “new journalism” as a way of expressing the social context of political arguments. Some of these young reporters abandoned the objective, straightforward approach of “Who? What? When? Where? and Why?” The demands of interpretation and the political and cultural context of the decade demanded new techniques, new language, and incorporation of styles that had distinguished alternative media for many years. Everett Dennis, in the Magic Writing Machine, divided New Journalism into five types: (1) the new nonfiction, also called “reportage” and “parajournalism”; (2) alternative journalism, also called “modern muckraking”; (3) advocacy journalism; (4) underground journalism; and (5) precision journalism. David Halberstam wrote a journalistic account of Vietnam (new nonfiction); the Village Voice advocated political positions on issues such as free love (alternative and advocacy, which sometimes blend); underground newspapers were printed and distributed without acknowledgment of authorship; and precision journalists used new statistical methods to prove points.

Today, narrative journalism appears in books by journalists such as Mark Bowden, whose account of the disastrous U.S. intervention in Somalia is chronicled in Black Hawk Down. Controversy about the method still abounds, especially in relation to books such as Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil, a supposedly nonfiction account of a high-profile murder in Savannah, Georgia. Many critics contend that although the basic structure is nonfiction, the narrative is embellished considerably with fictional constructs.

**TODAY’S MARKET STRUCTURE**

Today’s journalists operate in a highly competitive marketplace. Both the objective and the narrative traditions are used in reporting news for newspapers, radio, television, and the Internet. However, the marketplace has become increasingly competitive, and media companies have “gone public,” or begun to sell stock on the markets, thereby creating a need to pay dividends to those individuals who buy the stocks. This has increased the attention paid to ratings of television and radio news, as well as to the circulation numbers of newspapers and to the numbers of hits on Internet sites. Entertainment has assumed more importance.

Although journalism has always been a business, during the last thirty-five years it has evolved into big business. Whether television, radio, newspapers, or online, the corporations that increasingly own large news outlets require ever-higher profit margins to please the stock analysts and mutual fund managers. The results have varied. In some cases, publicly owned companies such as the New York Times produce award-winning journalism. In other cases, such as Thomson newspapers, the journalism got so bad that companies lost large numbers of readers. Thomson eventually sold its newspaper holdings.\footnote{16} When newspapers seek profit levels that exceed those of most other industries, the result is often a reduction in the number of journalists and a corresponding decline in local, quality coverage.\footnote{17}

Despite these problems, journalism today is supported by thousands of devoted journalists in all media who aim to serve the public and society. The quality of journalism often rests on the initiative of the individuals who put in extra time just to get the story right. However, the tension between profit and quality journalism will continue as long as journalism is a commercial enterprise.
AUDIENCE DEMAND IN NEWSPAPER MARKETS

An often debated question in newsrooms is whether the journalist should give the people what they “need” or whether the journalist should provide the material that audiences “want.” Such an argument assumes that the journalist and editor know what people need to read. The public certainly does not agree and through its purchasing power does make its own decisions about what kinds of information it needs and wants.

The marketplace of ideas assumes that all ideas should be discussed in the open. The more ideas, the better. Only when ideas (even those thought radical) gain access to the public forum can social change occur. Women fought for almost a century before gaining the right to vote through a constitutional amendment adopted in 1920. Their ideas were considered radical by many men—and women.

The marketplace of ideas involves social discourse, and social discourse can lead to policy formation. For example, the state of Oregon adopted strict recycling standards for its population by the early 1970s, ten to twenty years before most other states did the same. Oregon’s marketplace of ideas considered the recycling issue important, and the discussion in that marketplace led to policy changes that other states eventually adopted.

The audience demands information that it can discuss; thus journalism provides the discussion points that help to create the marketplace of ideas. Through the marketplace, the public—individually and in groups—makes political, social, and economic decisions.

Who Uses Journalism?

Because information available through new technology requires that someone purchase a technological device, the possibility exists for a society divided into information-poor and information-rich segments. In such a society, information is the golden key to success, and the information is available only to those with money. Research has consistently shown that those with already high levels of information gain even more information as they begin to use new technologies, and even if information-poor consumers become more knowledgeable, they continually fall behind in the socioinformation struggle. Therefore, the knowledge gap, the distance between those who use information technologies at the highest levels and those usually with lower socioeconomic status who do not, increases rather than decreases.18

The creation of a knowledge gap is of concern for many reasons. A 1972 study showed that information distribution inequities in a society could be directly related to inequities in the distribution of other elements of social life such as education, affluence, and exposure to communication channels. The United States has long succeeded as a democracy at least in part because of its high literacy rates and its emphasis on maintaining a solid middle class; democracies are known to survive longest in countries with a strong middle class. If class begins to be defined not only by education and social status but also by access to and possession of information, the creation of a knowledge gap may signify the weakening of the middle class.

SUPPLYING THE AUDIENCE’S DEMAND

The supply for the marketplace of ideas comes from all sources of information, including individuals, newspapers, movies, television, recordings, and radio. Consumers,
Agenda-setting research  Media research that seeks to understand the relationship between readers’ determination of important issues and politicians’ and press’s treatment of them. The research focuses not on how media cover an issue but on how they set an agenda through the choice of the issues they cover.

Key Concept

Impact applies when a large number of people are affected by an event or issue or when a small number of individuals are intensely affected. A car accident that kills three people has a greater impact than one that causes a small cut on one person’s forehead.

Proximity deals with the geographic location of an event. The more local the event, the more news value it has. A story that shuts off electricity for eight hours in Lansing, Michigan, will be reported in the Lansing State Journal but not in the Detroit Free Press because the Journal is proximate to Lansing readers.

Prominence concerns how notable or famous a person is. Politicians, sports figures, and entertainment stars are prominent figures. An illicit affair by a shoe store clerk would not be news, but President Clinton’s affair was because of prominence.

Timeliness deals with recency of an event or issue. A bank robbery that happened yesterday has more news value than one twenty years ago. The focus is on breaking stories.

Conflict relates to disagreement among people. The conflict can be physical, as in crime and war, but it need not be. Much political news involves conflict in the marketplace of ideas.

Disaster includes both natural calamities such as earthquakes and human-caused catastrophes such as an oil spill in the ocean.

Human interest relates to personal details that intrigue readers. The story of an eighty-year-old woman who drives a school bus and is called “Grandma” by elementary students has human interest.

News values may change as society changes. The penny press, for example, emphasized crime news, which contained conflict and impact. A more recent type of news
is called “coping information.” Life in the United States has grown more complicated. More readers want information that will help them live more efficiently. Articles about how to stay healthy through better eating and exercise help people cope with daily stress.

A story can have more than one news value. The more of these values in a story, the more likely it is that people will read it. In addition, some values are more important than others. Because newspapers tend to emphasize local news, proximity is important for most staff-prepared stories.

Journalists don’t sit with a checklist of news values when picking events to be covered. Rather, they internalize these values and judge whether stories will be of interest to their readers. As the audience changes, however, the match between the journalists’ and the audience’s news values can change. Coping information emerged because readers wanted it.

Many readers criticize newspapers for emphasizing too much bad news, another term for conflict and disaster. Journalists counter that some bad news is important and must be understood if people are to be effective citizens. Many readers grew tired of reading about the Clinton and Lewinsky controversy. The debate centered not only on the amount of coverage but also on the nature of the coverage. Readers and journalists can agree on a story having news value but disagree on how that story should be presented to readers.

Specialized Supply in the Marketplace

Information can be supplied in many forms through many different media. Listed in the following sections are some of the ways that information has been gathered and delivered in recent decades.

**Computer-Assisted Reporting** ✦ A major trend in journalism is the use of computers for reporting. Computers have altered the way newspapers produce and print news, and they have allowed newspapers to distribute news electronically. People can access news from computers, through newspaper, broadcast, and specific online web sites. The computer, however, has also affected the way news is gathered and written. **Computer-assisted reporting (CAR)** is an umbrella term for several uses of computers in reporting. CAR activities range from finding addresses and phone numbers online, to accessing government databases, to using programs that manipulate data to create new interpretations of old data.

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**Key Concept**

**Computer-assisted reporting (CAR)** The use of computer technology to gather and analyze information for news articles includes the use of the Internet, spreadsheets, and databases.
Initially, only investigative reporters at large newspaper organizations practiced CAR because it involved more computer and database skills than most journalists possessed. As journalists gained better computer skills and governments put databases online, CAR use increased. It remains a complex and expensive tool, but it increasingly plays a significant role in helping reporters understand everything from economic reports to census numbers.

The Public Journalism Controversy ✦ The development of public journalism as a theoretical and practical approach to reporting has created a great deal of controversy. Newspapers and local broadcast news reports have always served local readers. But during the mid-twentieth century, many reporters strived not to enter community journalism, because they viewed working for big papers such as the New York Times, Chicago Tribune, and Washington Post, or for network news, as the road to professional advancement and career success. On a smaller scale, journalists left the small towns for papers in the state capitals. Urban journalists could adopt the professional values of being detached, objective, tough, and critical. They stood apart from the communities they served.

As their audience and their competition changed, newspaper organizations found themselves with diminishing circulations and a lack of connection with their communities. Seeking to reestablish their identities, some newspaper editors, as well as academicians, began to explore a philosophy of public journalism. Many local newspapers partnered with broadcast stations in public journalism efforts. Many of these efforts also included online components of newsgathering and dissemination. The American Journalism Review lists five components of public journalism:

- asking readers to help decide what the paper covers and how it covers it; becoming a more active player and less an observer; lobbying for change on the news pages; finding sources whose voices are often unheard; and, above all, dramatically strengthening the bonds between newspaper and community. At its heart is the assumption that a newspaper should act as a catalyst for change.\(^{19}\)

Words such as involvement invoke specters of political corruption from the past, and editors feared that trying to influence the outcome of public action would affect newspapers’ credibility. In addition, some editors saw the new approach as a loss of control of their own product. Marvin Kalb, director of the Washington Office of the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard University, while acknowledging that the public journalism movement “is not a flash in the pan phenomenon,” urged caution: “A journalist who becomes an actor, in my view, is overstepping the bounds of . . . traditional responsibility.”\(^{20}\)
The Pew Center for Civic Journalism has funded many journalism projects involving newspapers, television, and radio stations. The Portland Press Herald and the Maine Sunday Telegram in Portland, Maine, used the money to allow teenagers to work with the news staff to publish news and features online. The Savannah Morning News in Georgia studied and wrote about the effects of an aging population on taxes, lifestyles, and services in the region. However, Pew start-up funding is ending, and the question is whether public journalism survives through other infusions of funding or because news organizations adopt it as an essential element of news coverage.

The debate over public journalism centers on three main questions: (1) What is public journalism? (2) Does public journalism increase circulation and viewing and improve attitudes toward the media? (3) What should be the role of readers in determining journalistic content? The first question seems easy to answer, but critics maintain that public journalism represents the worst of media marketing—giving readers what they say they want just to sell newspapers or gain viewers. Supporters say journalists cannot recognize all the issues that audiences need to know about without communicating with those readers.

**INTERNATIONAL JOURNALISM**

Media organizations are becoming increasingly global. Multinational companies own media outlets in multiple countries. Ownership ultimately has an impact on journalism. In World War II and in Vietnam, for the most part U.S. citizens covered the war and reported on it in U.S. media for U.S. consumers. Other countries relied on various systems for gaining information. Some of that information was U.S. based, such as international news broadcasts by Voice of America, the government-owned information service.

Today, however, CNN employs news reporters from around the world. They may or may not be U.S. citizens. This means that the view of reporters in regard to international incidents may vary considerably more than reporter views varied during earlier international conflicts. CNN executives also are searching for audiences...
Around the world. An example of this was apparent during the spring and summer of June 2002, when many Israeli groups charged CNN with biased coverage of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. Media watch groups charged that CNN humanized Palestinians and merely noted the number of dead in Israel. Ted Turner’s comments to the *London Guardian* didn’t help: “The Israelis, they’ve got the most powerful military machines in the world. The Palestinians have nothing,” Mr. Turner told the London-based *Guardian*. “So who are the terrorists? I would make a case that both sides are engaged in terrorism.”

Here is the *Washington Times*’s account of the apology that followed:

“AOL Time Warner understands and takes seriously the feelings of those offended by Mr. Turner’s statements on Israel,” AOL Time Warner spokesman Ed Adler said in a statement. “Mr. Turner has no operational or editorial involvement at CNN. Mr. Turner’s comments are his own and do not reflect the views of our company in any way.”

Another executive rued the loss of convivial relations between CNN and other broadcast companies in the troubled region. Global ownership of media companies does affect content, as can be seen from this example. This raises new questions about the role of a reporter as a citizen, as an employee, and as an objective journalist.

**TRENDS**

Throughout history, journalistic trends have come and gone. Sometimes they involve technology and delivery of news, and other times they involve the impact of business and journalistic practices on what people receive as news. Currently, four major trends are shaping journalism: issues of credibility, journalism and political participation, the future of journalism online, and the impact of profits on journalism.

**Credibility**

Journalists have come on hard times—their credibility with the public has taken a nosedive. In an attempt to address these issues, several associations and “think groups” have studied the credibility issue. A study conducted by *Time* magazine in 1998 found that newspaper credibility had sunk to a level at which only 21 percent of Americans believed all or most of the content in the local newspaper, representing a decline from 28 percent in 1985.

The American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) began a $1 million project to improve credibility. They discovered that the public finds too many factual and
spelling/grammar errors in newspapers, too little respect for and knowledge about their communities, too much influence of reporters’ biases on what is covered and how it is reported, too much sensationalism to increase sales, and too much concern with profit.

In 1997 a group of twenty-five distinguished journalists came together at Harvard University to discuss the profession. They created the Committee of Concerned Journalists. The committee conducted public forums, did interviews and surveys, and studied the content of news reporting. Bill Kovach, former curator of the Nieman Foundation, and Tom Rosenstiel, director of the Project for Excellence in Journalism, used information gathered through the committee and from other sources to write a book titled *The Elements of Journalism*. In this book, they seek to reestablish the important principles of journalism. During the summer of 2001, the *Nieman Reports* was dedicated to articles addressing these elements. Kovach and Rosenstiel identified the following principles:

1. Journalism’s first obligation is to tell the truth.
2. Journalism’s first loyalty is to citizens.
3. The essence of journalism is a discipline of verification.
4. Journalists must maintain an independence from those they cover.
5. Journalists must serve as an independent monitor of power.
6. Journalism must provide a forum for public criticism and comment.
7. Journalists must make the significant interesting and relevant.
8. Journalists should keep the news in proportion and make it comprehensive.
9. Journalists have an obligation to personal conscience.

These principles are not exactly new. They closely parallel codes of ethics by such organizations as The Society for Professional Journalists. However, they point to a significant trend—and to an important issue. The trend is actually twofold: (1) Journalism has declined in credibility and the public doesn’t believe journalists; and (2) critics and journalists are striving to address the issue because they believe credibility to be important not only to their profession but also to the society in which they live. The issue is whether journalistic principles can survive in the modern-day cacophony of entertainment noise and profit-seeking values.

**Interaction: Journalism and Political Participation**

Being able to participate in the selection of political leaders is one of the characteristics of a democracy. However, in the United States declining percentages of eligible voters participate in the process. In 1964, 69.3 percent of people of voting age actually cast a ballot. That number has declined until in 2000 it fell just short of 55 percent. In 2000, because of large immigration numbers, the Census Bureau reported the statistics slightly differently. It reported the percentage of voters of eligible age and eligible citizenship who voted. Using that population, the percentage of eligible voters actually casting a ballot rose to 60 percent, up 2 percent from 1996. Only 64 percent of those eligible to vote registered to do so.22

You might ask, “Isn’t that a political issue? Is that an issue for journalism?” It is an issue for journalism because journalists deliver most political messages to U.S. voters. And when an election is so close that journalists cannot adequately report it—indeed, the vote counters cannot accurately count the votes—the role of journalists in the political process becomes even more apparent. The election of 2000 caused many reporters, editors, and managers to rethink how they cover elections.

In addition, journalists and political critics have become increasingly concerned about the reliance on popular culture media for political news and about the trend toward increased political advertising and decreased political coverage. In 1992, President Clinton appeared on the *Arsenio Hall Show* and on *Donahue*, in addition to responding to journalists on traditional political shows such as *Meet the Press* and the *MacNeil-Lehrer NewsHour*. He played his saxophone in an effort to establish a link with the American public. He participated in a new style of debate in Richmond, Virginia, responding to questions from the audience rather than to questions from journalists. By 1996 this type of media behavior did not seem unusual. In the 1998
midterm elections, the major television networks carried 73 percent fewer stories about the elections than they did in the 1994 midterm elections. Political advertising on broadcast television alone amounted to over $400 million dollars in 1996; in 2000 it reached $606 million. However, television stations billed $531 million in political advertising, the highest election billing year ever.

Michael Kelly, in a *New York Times Magazine* article, argued that “the conversation of politics now is carried on in the vernacular of advertising. The big sell, the television sell, appears to be the only way to sell. Increasingly, and especially in Washington, how well one does on television has come to determine how well one does in life.” Kelly describes Washington, D.C., as a national capital where increasingly the “distinction between reality and fantasy has been lost. . . . Movie stars show up with their press agents and their bodyguards to ‘testify’ before Congress. Politicians and reporters make cameo appearances as movie stars, playing themselves in fictional scenes about politics and reporting.”

The effectiveness of the marketplace of ideas in different societies varies with the type of government and with the extent of commercialism in each country. In authoritarian countries, the government often limits access to the public forum. In a country where ordinary citizens participate in governance, extensive participation in the marketplace of ideas is crucial for effective government. In the United States, media critics recently have become concerned about the quality of political participation because of the commercialization of the political process through TV advertisements and the sensationalism of quasi-entertainment political talk shows.

Some argue that television has corrupted the marketplace of ideas into a showplace for images rather than a public forum for issues and that it has destroyed any possibility for rational political discourse. Others argue that popularization of politics through television and other avenues has brought—and will continue to bring—more individuals into the political process.
Journalism and the Internet

Old-line media companies are meeting new media companies on the Web. Many newspapers have a presence on the Web. However, too often their presence amounts to searchable classified advertising and news content that experts call “shovelware.” That is, the newspapers simply post their paper content on a web site with a few graphics and pictures.

New media companies, however, value the interactivity of the Web and seek to provide content unique to the new medium. Chip Brown, in an article aptly titled “Fear.Com,” writes in American Journalism Review that the “Web may usurp” the role of newspapers as agenda-setters and news filters. The Web puts a cornucopia of primary sources within everyone’s reach, and makes the stuff of which news is made available to anyone, raw and unprocessed, minus the contributions of reporters and editors, minus their judicious evaluation and careful fact-checking, but also minus their “family newspaper” euphemisms, their pack-mentality blind spots and their sometimes patronizing determinations about what is in the “public interest.”

Brown says the problem with newspapers on the Web is that there is other information available that is more informative, interesting, and playful.

Many media companies are creating news sites rather than shoveling newspaper content onto the Web. Web news has some advantages over paper: Contents can be searchable, they can be updated frequently, and they can link to sites outside their own. Web news is interactive, with instant e-mail feedback, online chatrooms, or live interviews. For instance, washingtonpost.com offers several hours of live chat and other programs featuring Post reporters. Restaurant critic Phyllis Richman’s show attracts many questions. Even the late Katharine Graham, publisher of the Post, signed on for interactive sessions with the public.

Some analysts note that the release of special prosecutor Kenneth Starr’s report on the Clinton–Lewinsky issue marked a “defining moment” for the Web. Many newspapers elected to print short excerpts with a notation that their web sites carried the full text. PilotOnline, the web site for the Virginia-Pilot, beat its print edition by twelve hours. The Web is a natural enhancement for newspapers and broadcast units involved in civic journalism. Traditional civic journalism usually involves a media organization acting as a catalyst to get a community to talk about issues, suggest solutions for problems, and be involved in specific news projects. New Hampshire Public Radio used the Internet as a mechanism for people to discuss a series of reports about an airport access road construction project. Jan Schaffer, executive director of the Pew Center for Civic Journalism in Washington, says that although there can be a “civic space in a town hall meeting . . . there also can be a civic space on the Internet where people can share ideas and have a discussion.”

A. L. May, associate professor in the School of Media and Public Affairs at George Washington University, found that journalists use campaign finance web databases freely. Other uses are more “haphazard.” Some reporters are interviewing sources online, but more often they use the Internet to find sources and set up interviews. Journalists complain about e-mail overdose.

Traditional media organizations are quick to criticize Internet journalism and to blame the ills of the profession—valuing speed over accuracy, sensationalism, and arrogance—on web journalists operating without traditional editing and control. And in truth, web journalists say that the constant deadlines spur them to quick decision making that may lead to inaccuracy. However, vast differences in web sites may well be recognized by the public. Just as readers distinguish between the Washington Post and the National Enquirer, so they can distinguish between Matt Drudge’s undocumented reports and Slate, a credible online magazine.

Business and Journalism

Providing meaningful journalism is expensive. Reporters, editors, designers, artists, and photographers must be paid. As a result, the vast majority of U.S. newspapers are
commercial enterprises. They sell advertising and in some cases charge for the news. Of the revenue generated from advertising and selling news, most goes to support the news organization, but some goes to the owners as profit. It is the distribution of revenues between these two areas that determines how good journalism will be in a community.

During the last forty years, two business trends have shaped news organizations. First, media companies that own newspapers, newsmagazines, and television news operations have started to sell their stock to the public. Stock shares are ownership shares. As the public has increased its ownership of news organizations, the demand has grown for these news organizations to make higher-than-normal profits. Many newspaper companies try to give 20 percent or more of their revenues to stockholders as profit. Television networks aim for even higher profit rates.

Second, as these profit expectations have grown, the number of companies competing for the advertising revenue also has grown. Economic theory explains that as competition increases, average profits for individual companies will decrease. At a time when news organizations face more competition, they need more profit. Therefore, to keep high profits while advertising revenues are level or declining, news organizations will have to cut the number of journalists they employ. The outcome will be a long-term decline in the quality of journalism, which in turn will probably reduce the number of viewers, listeners, and readers.

News organizations will face a trade-off between high short-term profits and high long-term profits. To keep one, they must sacrifice the other as competition for advertising revenue grows. Of course, which choice is made will depend on who owns the news organization and the goals of the owners. The decision by owners will vary from company to company, but the outcome of the decisions will affect the quality of journalism within communities throughout the United States.

**summary**

- The United States government is based on an assumption that information will be disseminated freely and that the people will be well informed.
- The primary purpose of journalism is to inform, but it also often entertains and sometimes seeks to persuade.
- The business of reporting developed as editors sought to achieve mass audiences.
- The philosophy of the Enlightenment was used by American colonists to defend civil liberties.
- Televised politics has changed the nature of political campaigning.

- Reporters have sought through the years to expose the corrupt dealings of business and of government. This activity is called muckraking.
- Journalism has two traditions: one is the objective analysis of the facts at hand and the other is a narrative tradition, or storytelling.
- Journalists have lost credibility during an era of infotainment.
- The move of news companies to sell stock publicly has affected the level of profits sought by such companies.
questions for review

1. What is the importance of the John Peter Zenger case?
2. What is the Bill of Rights?
3. What does the First Amendment protect?
4. What factors contributed to the development of the reporter?
5. Why is image important to politicians?

issues to think about

1. Try to imagine a society without the free dissemination of information. How would your life be different from the way it is today?
2. Should journalism be used to persuade and to entertain as well as to inform?
3. Explore the relationship of Enlightenment philosophy to the development of independent journalism in the United States.
4. What are the fundamental differences between print and broadcast reporting?
5. Name several news values and critique them.
6. Critique the concept of public journalism.
7. Discuss the occupation of journalist. What is attractive about it? What is not so attractive?

suggested readings


navigating the web

www.cjr.org
The Columbia Journalism Review, published in conjunction with the Columbia School of Journalism, is a critique of modern media, but it offers excellent information for journalists about the business and about how to make ethical decisions. A similar publication, the American Journalism Review, can be accessed at www.wjr.org.

www.poynter.org/
The Poynter Organization’s site claims it has “[e]verything you need to be a better journalist.” The Poynter Institute is a school dedicated to “teaching and inspiring journalists and media leaders. It promotes excellence and integrity in the practice of craft and in the practical leadership of successful businesses. It stands for a journalism that informs citizens and enlightens public discourse. It carries forward Nelson Poynter’s belief in the value of independent journalism.” Nelson Poynter is a former editor of the St. Petersburg Times.

www.foxnews.com/
www.cnn.com/
For up-to-the-minute national and international news, Fox News Channel or CNN are excellent sites. Major newspaper sites also provide good national and international news.