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Daily newspapers are closing across America. Washington bureaus are shuttering; whole areas of the federal government are now operating with no press coverage. International bureaus are going, going, gone. Journalism, the counterbalance to corporate and political power, the lifeblood of American democracy, is not just threatened. It is in meltdown.

In *The Death and Life of American Journalism*, Robert W. McChesney, an academic, and John Nichols, a journalist, who together founded the nation's leading media reform network, Free Press, investigate the crisis. They propose a bold strategy for saving journalism and saving democracy, one that looks back to how the Founding Fathers ensured free press protection with the First Amendment and provided subsidies to the burgeoning print press of the young nation.

The Death and Life of American Journalism: The Media Revolution that Will Begin the World Again Details

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From Reader Review The Death and Life of American Journalism: The Media Revolution that Will Begin the World Again for online ebook

The American Conservative says

'Neither Jarvis nor anyone else can predict the ways in which the digital revolution is going to "begin the world again" for journalism and the news media, but it's inevitable that big changes will come. Based on a reading of The Death and Life of American Journalism, it's also inevitable—and encouraging—that McChesney and Nichols will hate most of them.'

Read the full review, "Black & White & Red All Over," on our website:
<http://www.theamericanconservative.co...>

C says

Worth reading by all concerned by fading newspapers...Much research, but all designed to bolster authors' conclusions that Journalism must be government-subsidized to survive. This conclusion will doom fair news-coverage AND threaten democracy, rather than strengthen it.

Jodi Dills says

Anyone with any interest in American Journalism needs to read this book.

Tiffany Conner says

There wasn't much in this book which wasn't already public knowledge to anyone who has (gasp!) watched a good news program or read an actual newspaper lately. That's right, I said it.

Even so, I admired the passion and intelligence the authors brought to the issue. They did a fine job of stressing the inextricable link between a healthy democracy and informed, critical journalistic culture. The old models won't do. Newspapers can die (no ad dollars!) and democracy may thrive; it's journalism, good, old-fashioned, gritty, cut-your-teeth-journalism which is at risk. It's finding brave men and women unafraid to ask the hard questions and speak truth to proverbial power which is at stake. It's finding men and women with the courage to be more than simple mouthpieces to the parties in power that matters. It's digging deeper and thinking more. Aggregating links, posting Youtube videos, and Tweeting links is NOT the same as a concerted, discerning investigative journalistic effort. The problem is that we are fast becoming a culture which will never have known the difference between digi-news and digging for the news. I hope I'm dead before the takeover is complete.

Even so, it was a good book, but it wasn't a great book.

Kate says

Obviously, a must-read.

Calvin says

One of the best books I've read addressing the current journalism crisis in the United States. Rather than cite the internet as the reason for the media's downfall, McChesney and Nichols trace the origins of the journalism crisis to the commercial media system. Their historical analysis is extremely fascinating and eye opening.

Paul Heidebrecht says

We should all be worried when we see major newspapers go bankrupt. Not because the owners are losing money but because journalism itself is at risk. And democracy won't survive without independent journalists keeping the public informed about what the government and the powerful in society are up to. We are already in trouble because of the pathetic state into which much of broadcast journalism has already fallen. Just look at your local evening TV news and weep! McChesney's solution: government has to subsidize journalism. Public radio and television is not enough. What a hard sell this will be but I think he's right.

Josh McConnell says

The downward spiral of journalism is a pressing and relevant issue today thanks to the rise of online publications and aggregators. The current model of journalism -- which is owned by big-businesses only caring about turning a profit -- is failing miserably, not only in terms of finances but also in its lack of living up to the accurate definition of journalism. Media outlets are about quick sound bites, entertaining the audiences, being paid off by corporations and not wanting to step on the government's toes. You can not get any further away from the pin than this.

Enter *The Death and Life of American Journalism*, which opens a can of worms that some are too scared to attempt. Blatant honesty is the authors' method of communication, calling out anyone and everyone involved in the demise of journalism. The first chunk of the book actually feels a little depressing, as it is seems like the situation is hopeless. Thankfully, the authors also make suggestions on how to potentially correct the problem. First they look at the claims that a free market and entrepreneurs would rectify things, but that is squashed after significant evaluation. Eventually the authors decide that we need to return to the past, when the government subsidized newspapers but allowed for freedom of speech (meaning they can critique the government).

All in all, the book is very well researched and opens a much needed debate. It is a little thick in its journalism/research vernacular, but should still be an easy read for most people overall. If you care about news, journalism and the freedom of the press in a digital age, then this should be a must read. It may not

necessarily be the right answer, but it certainly seems logical for now.

April Helms says

This is a must-read for journalists and anyone wanting to save the field and restore it to its Fourth Estate watchdog status. The authors take a thorough look as to what is wrong with newspapers (really, all for-profit generalized mass media but the focus is on the newspaper), where things went wrong and, most importantly, how to bring them back. As to what is wrong, several of the problems McChesney and Nichols point to are issues I've brought up for years. A big problem is that the for-profit, commercial model is falling apart and cannot (and should not) be resurrected. The authors have a greater body of history and research than I do, and show that this model, started about 150 years ago, has been problematic from the start, although only now are the wheels starting to come off. McChesney and Nichols lay out why commercially-run media was a problematic situation, and why technology will not salvage it. But the sections I liked best were the solutions. This is the first book I've read on the subject that actually presents real-world and workable solutions, as opposed to pipe dreams. Essentially the solution is to go back to what our Founders had wanted and spoke for (the authors cite many examples): a heavily subsidized news media. The concept of the L3C corporate status- a fairly new status right now only recognized in a few states- seems especially tailor-made for media. It would allow media to remain for-profit under stringent guidelines. The L3C is for a low-profit entity with a social benefit. The company could qualify for subsidies and could even apply for grants while still making a profit, as long as its social message is clear. I hope this avenue is explored and takes root. The consequences of remaining at the status quo would be dire, as the authors also illustrate. There are many citations, graphs and charts to back up what the authors say. Now, the big issue of course is will anyone listen. The cynic in me is doubtful. I hope I am proven wrong. McChesney and Nichols provide the tools and ideas- now they just have to be acted upon.

Camille says

For anyone who has ever sat in front of the TV or read an article and ever asked themselves, "Why do I waste my time with this trash?" when confronted with the empty, partisan quarrels, conspiracy theories, and celebrity gossip that seem to pass for news these days, this is the book for you.

McChesney and Nichols offer some creative ideas for government subsidies that encourage the revival of journalism (especially at the local level) without direct government control over what gets published. While they maintain that "free press" does indeed mean the exclusion of the government from the editorial process, they point to the important role that federal postal subsidies played in fostering the growth of newspapers in America's early days. Excited but healthily skeptical about the possibilities of digital journalism, this is not a bucket of a nostalgia for the decaying remains of 20th century commercial journalism. McChesney and Nichols exhortations and heady prose get a bit repetitive after a while, but this is still a worthwhile read.

Jessa says

Mostly aimed at true believers -- no one who doesn't care about the future of journalism is going to read this. Very interesting chapter about the difference between free speech and free press.

Sabra Jewell says

Absolutely brilliant.

Bill says

This is a very intriguing book that perfectly encapsulates how I personally feel about the state of journalism today. They make a very good argument with a whole slew of suggestions for how to save American journalism. As depressing as their analysis is, their suggestions are just as hopeful. It left me feeling oddly optimistic--though you realize we Americans have a lot of work to do.

CUNYGSJRESEARCH says

Please check the display shelves/cases in the collection.

Matt says

Here are my lectures notes.

State of journalism

Journalism is necessary to educate the electorate on matters of state and democracy.

Newsrooms across the country have been closing down and readership is steadily decreasing. The electorate is less and less informed.

For those who think this problem will make itself felt in the future only: "we are far long on this crisis of unaccountable leadership, secrecy, corruption and hollowed-out democracy, with the news media having played all too complicit a role. This crisis is represented by industrial bailouts that receive scant scrutiny by members of Congress, let alone the voters, and wars launched on the basis of fantasy rather than fact." (p27)

The revenues of newspapers are plummeting as readership is dwindling and internet is taking away the revenue associated with classified ads. "The New York Times' advertising revenues plunged 45 percent from 2006 to 2009. In those three years, the ratio of advertising revenue to circulation income fell from 2 to 1, to 1 to 1." (p29)

Proposed solutions so far

A number of propositions have been made, all unsatisfactory.

* Direct bailouts

This is about giving then news corporations direct transfers to help keep the newsrooms alive. But this proposition is dubious as these corporations are the ones that have taken a corporatist turn and sullied today's

journalism. These corporations are also the ones advocating mergers which does not help in providing citizens with various points of view.

* Wave antitrust laws

This is about relaxing the laws on local competition and allowing the news organisations to merge. The argument is that this would allow cutting costs and would keep journalism alive. The argument is weak and mergers have historically not led to better journalism.

* Paywalls

The readers used to pay money to read the paper paper, why should they not pay to read the news online? This is a fair point. However, it is incredibly hard for a paper to charge money for something that other papers give away for free. All newspapers would have to follow suit -- which would imply collusion. It is also hard to compete with state organizations whose mandate is to provide news to the public (e.g. BBC, PBS, Radio-Canada)

* Experiment and show patience

Some optimists believe that we just need to wait it out. That means to foster and deliver journalism will grow from experiments. These optimists point to TPM, the Huffington Post, or even the Drudge Report. However, this feels like an overly-optimistic stance. These examples have worked well but few of them are actually creating news -- a lot of the online blogs are only repackaging news created in old-fashioned newsrooms.

Not to mention the fact that early optimism about the mandate of radio and TV was foiled. Most of today's radio and TV news is a far cry from the ideal news the electorate needs to be fully informed.

Also, the online sphere does not reach everywhere. Broadband access is not nearly universal and is decidedly biased towards the elite. Citing the online world as the solution is far from complete. A plan to provide easier internet access to all would have to be included in such a proposal.

Subsidies

So how can we bankroll journalism? We have:

- volunteer labor
- individual donations
- foundation grants

All of these have their own problems. We are left with a government subsidy as the only real solution to the crisis.

Recommandation

So we need to heavily subsidize journalism -- content creation and investigative journalism. This entails:

1. immediate measure to sustain journalism, each of which transitions to a permanent subsidy if successful
2. a plan to convert the collapsing corporate newspapers into what we term a "post-corporate" digital newspaper, with print versions at the very least until there is ubiquitous broadband
3. converting public and community broadcasting into genuinely world-class civic and democratic media
4. spawning a vibrant, well-funded, competitive and innovative news-media sector on the internet (p159)

What makes journalism

It might be difficult to differentiate good journalism from the bad. For good journalism, at least the following should be true:

- it must provide a rigorous account of people who are in power and people who wish to be in power, in the government, corporate and nonprofit sectors
- it must regard the information needs of all citizens as legitimate
- it must have a plausible method to separate truth from lies, or at least to prevent liars from being unaccountable and leading nations into catastrophes -- particularly wars, economic crises and communal discord
- it must produce a wide range of informed opinions on the most important issues of our times -- not only the transitory concerns of the moments, but also challenges that loom on the horizon. These issues cannot be determined primarily by what people in power are talking about.

(p164)

Policy suggestions

- All publications with less than 25 percent advertising in their pages pay only 5 cents for postage for each of their first 300,000 copies sent to subscribers
- Establish a journalism division for AmeriCorps
- Expand the funding of high-school newspapers and radio stations
- Establish an office to oversee and coordinate the rapid transition of failing corporate newspapers that have dysfunctional ownership structures
- Subsidize journalism through vouchers (Citizenship News Vouchers)

How to pay for the policy suggestions

- tax on broadcast spectrum
- tax on consumer electronics
- spectrum auction tax
- advertising taxes

Conclusion

A strong independent journalism is mandatory for the self-governing society.

The commercial system of journalism that has defined and dominated our discourse for the past 150 years has entered a rapid decline that will not be reversed.

The notion that free markets and new technologies will solve the problem and magically produce commitment to journalism the nation requires is baseless.

The government has played an essential role at key points in American history by creating and subsidizing the news-media system.

The government needs to again play a creative and sustaining role.

There are viable strategies for the government to subsidize a free press without threatening America's ardent and long-standing opposition to official censorship.
