Introduction

We live in a very unhistorical age. Most Americans know little about the way news was disseminated in our nation's earliest days. Popular folklore presents us with the image of Paul Revere on horseback, galloping through the night to proclaim that the British were coming. But it's necessary to remember that there was also a vibrant and well-established press during colonial times. *Publick Occurrences, Both Foreign and Domestick*, is thought to be the first newspaper published in America; it was printed by Richard Pierce and edited by Benjamin Harris in Boston, and first appeared on September 25, 1690. Benjamin Franklin was also a newspaperman, who began publishing and writing for the *Pennsylvania Gazette* in 1729. In between, a half-dozen or so other newspapers appeared in Boston, New York and Philadelphia.

Naturally, where there was a thriving press, there was always controversy. *Publick Occurrences* met a quick demise when "an aroused bureaucracy issued a broadside warning against future publications of any kind without 'licence [sic] first obtained from those appointed by the Government to grant the same.'"[1] James Franklin, older brother of Benjamin and publisher of Boston's *New England Courant*, ended up in jail when he found himself opposing the views of Boston's powerful Puritan preachers, the Mathers, about smallpox inoculation. But of course, the most famous case of a journalist fighting for the right to express his opinion in the face of opposition from the colonial rulers was that of John Peter Zenger, who began publishing *The New York Weekly Journal* in New York City in 1733. His trial and subsequent acquittal on charges of "seditious libel" for printing editorials about the corrupt practices of the city's local government is arguably the first instance of freedom of the press emerging as an issue of fundamental importance for the nascent American nation. (It may actually have already been a principle worth fighting for in the minds of at least some colonists, as it has been reported that, upon hearing of the acquittal, "There followed 'three huzzas' and 'shouts of joy' from the crowd of spectators in the courtroom. [The judge] demanded order, even threatening spectators with arrest and imprisonment, but the celebration continued unabated."[2])

We've come quite a long way since then—from the days of pamphleteering and of broadsheets tacked up outside colonial shops and inns, with the public milling about, anxious to read the news of the day—to e-mail alerts about breaking developments and iPods streaming audiovisual content of our choosing right into our hands, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Of course, in-between there were myriad other news sources to turn to, from the Pony Express to the telegraph to radio broadcasts to the nightly network news, where the perceived voice of authority and objectivity—personified by the network anchorman—reported the events of consequence that had occurred across the country and around the world each day. But paralleling the enormous changes taking place in the American scene at all levels, so, too, has our trust in the news media undergone a significant shift—one that is on a markedly downward spiral. A 2005 poll by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, for example, reported that the percentage of Americans saying they can believe most of what they read in their daily newspaper dropped from 84 percent in 1985 to 54 percent in 2004. For televised news, whether broadcast or cable, the results are unfortunately similar. What is the cause of this apparent skepticism? Why has our trust in the news eroded while our cynicism about it seems to grow?

---

[1] HistoryBuff.com, R.J. Brown, editor-in-chief, http://www.historybuff.com/library/reffirstten.html.

[2] University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Law, http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/zenger/zengeraccount.html

One answer I'd suggest is that the explosion of information itself has overwhelmed us. Experts tell us that in the year 2000, the world was annually generating two exabytes of data, or two *quin*tillion bytes of information—which was equivalent to about 250 books for every man, woman and child on earth. That's an enormous amount of data, especially when you consider that since the beginning of history, humanity has created only six times that amount of information—or a total of 12 exabytes. But the way data was snowballing in 2000, researchers at the University of California at Berkeley estimated that the next 12 exabytes would be created in 2.5 years. By that timetable, we've already passed that remarkable milestone.

In the realm of the news, information comes to us from a staggering multiplicity of sources. Today, in the United States, there are about 1,700 daily and 6,800 weekly newspapers; more than 1,600 broadcast television stations; and nearly 8,500 cable systems. There are also some 13,000 radio stations, along with the newest development in radio technology, satellite radio services. Most of these media outlets, in some way or another, provide news as part of their daily fare; some of them are based on a 24-hour-a-day news model, often with other programming (often entertainment oriented) bracketing the newscasts. And that doesn't even begin to count the web-based versions of all these media, along with the independent Internet sites—such as the more than 28 million blogs[3] that have appeared since the late 1990s—also providing news in one form or another. The proliferation of all this news has been accompanied by the attendant phenomenon of news being fragmented into delivery streams aimed at different groups for different reasons. For example, ethnic presses abound: in Chicago, there are approximately 250 ethnic and community publications[4]; in New York City, somewhere around 60 different ethnic groups publish 270 ethnic magazines and newspapers in 42 languages.[5] Think also of MTV news, gender-oriented magazines, religious news services, political web sites, local community "Pennysavers," newsletters from advocacy groups for every cause imaginable—the list is endless. But as a recent report[6] from the Project for Excellence in Journalism concludes, this diversity does not add up to news consumers being provided with any greater depth of knowledge about issues or even a wider view of events taking place at home or abroad. "The new paradox of journalism is more outlets covering fewer stories," the report warns.

---

[3] "State of the Blogosphere, February 2006 Part 1: On Blogosphere Growth," by Dave Sifry, February 06, 2006. http://technorati.com/weblog/2006/02/81.html

Ironically, hand-in-hand with the ever-increasing number of news suppliers is the growing movement toward media consolidation. The media giants now own not only broadcast networks and local stations, they also own the cable companies that pipe in the signals of their competitors and the studios that produce most of the programming. To get a sense of how consolidated the industry has become, consider this: In 1990, the major broadcast networks—ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox—fully or partially owned just 12.5 percent of the new series they aired. By 2000, it was 56.3 percent. Just two years later, it had surged to 77.5 percent. In addition, 90 percent of the top 50 cable TV stations are owned by the same parent companies that own the broadcast networks; the top 20 Internet news sites are owned by the same media conglomerates that control the broadcast and cable networks.[7] In fact, six huge corporations now control the major U.S. media: Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation (FOX, HarperCollins, the *New York Post*, the *Weekly Standard*, *TV Guide*, DirecTV and 35 TV stations), General Electric (NBC, CNBC, MSNBC, Telemundo, Bravo, Universal Pictures and 28 TV stations), Time Warner (AOL, CNN, Warner Bros., *Time* and its 130-plus magazines), Disney (ABC, Disney Channel, ESPN, 10 TV and 72 radio stations), Viacom (CBS, MTV, Nickelodeon, Paramount Pictures, Simon & Schuster and 183 U.S. radio stations), and Bertelsmann (Random House and its more than 120 imprints worldwide, and Gruner+Jahr and its more than 110 magazines in 10 countries).[8]

These trends have contributed to the perception that most of the news we read, hear and see is subjective, limited in relevance and relativistic in importance. As a society, we seem to have come to the conclusion that no one speaks to us with that unshakable voice of authority anymore. Although there are some pundits whose adherents believe everything they say to be truer than true, others bemoan the fact that there really are no more Edward R. Murrows or Walter Cronkites or the like who represented the pinnacle of journalistic integrity and who never blurred the line between fact and opinion. What has taken their place—in the view of some—is an amalgam of news sources that include shock jocks, info-tainment, talking heads and podcasts, all adding up to diversity without standards, information without wisdom, pictures without explanations, events without context.

---

[4] *Telling Our Stories, Changing Our World: Why Chicago Needs an Association of Independent and Ethnic Presses*, by Jacqueline Lalley with Karen Hawkins, Independent Press Association-Chicago, 2003.

[5] "Ethnic Press Booms in New York City," Associated Press, July 10, 2002.

[6] *The State of the News Media 2006,* Project for Excellence in Journalism.

[7] "My Beef with Big Media," by Ted Turner. *Washington Monthly*, July/August 2004.

[8] "Why Media Ownership Matters," *Seattle Times*, April 3, 2005.

What all this means is that most of the news delivered to us comes without context, or with so little that we often remain baffled by what we've just learned. The ultra-competitive environment that now characterizes the news business, in which the generation of revenue perhaps outweighs all other measures of success, is also having an impact. In such a culture, the news becomes whatever sells newspapers or drives you to a web site or gets you to change the channel on your bigscreen TV. In such a culture, it's acceptable to have multi-page advertising inserts in even the most well-respected magazines that are meant to blend in with the news and editorial content—advertisements for drug company products, for example, in issues of a magazine dealing with health, or travel promotions inserted near articles dealing with ecology and the preservation of natural habitat—and only admit to being ads in tiny, pale type at the edge of the page. And, in such a culture, even sports events (the outcomes of which, to many American fans, as well as their international counterparts, are the most important news of all) are arranged around the need for commercial breaks.

The proliferation of choices available to most Americans, while nationally celebrated ("freedom of choice" is one of our most cherished ideals) has also made it more difficult than ever to identify quality. "As the number of choices keeps growing, negative aspects of having a multitude of options begin to appear," writes Swarthmore psychologist Barry Schwartz in *The Paradox of Choice*.[9] "As the number of choices grows further, the negatives escalate until we become overloaded. At this point, choice no longer liberates, but debilitates. It might even be said to tyrannize." Indeed, being presented with a multitude of choices without any contextual or objective information about how to compare and evaluate a range of selections, is counterproductive and sidesteps the consequences that may arise from uninformed choices—and these may be enormously impactful. Selecting one doctor over another, one school over another, one course of study, one neighborhood to live in, one job, one insurance plan—these things can change a person's life, for good or ill. Clearly, choice without knowledge is really no choice at all.

---

[9] Ecco, 2004; Harper Perennial, 2005.

Among the different ways that American society has attempted to sort through the vast array of resources available in almost every aspect of daily life is to establish standards that can be relied on to indicate some level of excellence. Often, those standards are identified through the process of licensure: doctors, engineers, electricians, home inspectors, social workers, locksmiths—even funeral directors and barbers—have to obtain a license, but journalists do not. Anyone can be a journalist; you don't need a degree from a journalism school or any other specific or required form of education or training to be a reporter. In fact, with the advent of blogs, an individual doesn't even need to be employed by any type of media outlet to practice whatever form of personal journalism he or she fancies: all that's necessary is a computer and an Internet connection. To some degree, that puts journalists in the same category as creative writers and artists who are driven to express themselves: the difference is that, on the one hand, we understand that those who practice the arts are communicating their opinions and sharing their creativity; on the other hand, we expect journalists to be objectively reporting facts unless they explicitly state, as with an editorial, that they are presenting their individual or organizational views about an issue. As opinions and facts become more and more indistinguishable from each other, confusion about the increasingly blurry line between fact and opinion—even between what is factual news and what is presented as news but comes wrapped in ideology—and uncertainty about the trustworthiness of journalism and its practitioners grows. Widely publicized scandals involving journalists who confessed to plagiarism, or who have been manifestly inaccurate in their reporting, or whose biases seem to be leaking into their stories, probably also add to the public's increasing disillusion with reporters and the news organizations they work for, as do revelations that the government has paid to plant stories in American and Iraqi media, for example, or to encourage commentators to promote particular points of view. In a related turn of events, even the radio pay-for-play "payola" scandals of the 1950s seem to have made a comeback: in 2005, Sony BMG Music Entertainment agreed to pay a $10 million fine to settle charges that their music stars got preferred radio airplay in exchange for trips, goods and cash. "Payola is pervasive," said New York State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer who brought the charges against BMG. "It reaches to the very top of the industry."

In light of all these troubling developments, it is important to remind ourselves of our founding fathers' belief that a healthy democracy requires vibrant—and vigilant—journalism. Such is the spirit that led Thomas Jefferson to declare, in 1787, that, "The basis of our government being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right; and were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate for a moment to prefer the latter."

From my student days—first in Lebanon and later at Stanford University—and on into my professional life as a teacher, historian, and later, as the president of The New York Public Library, Brown University, and now, Carnegie Corporation of New York, it has been clear to me how critical it is that news about national *and* international events be available to all Americans and that it be provided to them in a way that offers background, context, depth and honest, factual information so that every citizen can form his or her own opinions and make decisions about the nation's policies as well as its interactions with its own people and with others around the globe. After all, helping to shape both the present and the future of our nation is the right, and the job, of a citizen in a democracy, and we are all obligated to participate.

But to do our jobs well, we need the help of journalists who are superbly trained, intellectually rigorous, steeped in knowledge about the subjects they report on, steadfast about their ethical standards and courageous in their pursuit of truth. I am convinced that our American journalism schools are the key to enabling individuals to become the kind of journalists who will strive to achieve those standards—indeed, who will require nothing less of themselves. And what we, as a society, have a right to expect of all journalism schools in general, and of those within the great research universities of our country in particular, is that they equip the next generation of journalists with not only the training but also the education that will prepare them to cope with the complex social, cultural and political challenges presented by the rapid changes taking place in our nation and by international developments, as well. Drawing on the multidisciplinary resources of American universities—unquestionably, some of the most enriching, challenging and academically excellent institutions of higher education in the world—offers journalism schools the fortunate and unparalleled opportunity to be both pragmatic in their approach to the basics of journalism training and to take advantage of the wealth of intellectual and scholarly knowledge and wisdom available at the university to develop a curriculum that emphasizes analytical thinking and a passion for learning and engaging with ideas, along with professional technique.

After all, it is the American university, with its long tradition of nurturing research, encouraging experimentation and supporting study and learning that push out to the frontiers of knowledge, where so many of the issues that affect society are often most deeply and thoroughly analyzed and debated, and where they find their first foothold onto the national agenda. The university, America's great marketplace of ideas, is also the source of breakthroughs such as those in medical research and treatment, which are more likely to emerge from medical schools than from doctors' offices. In the same way, the nation should be able to rely upon professional schools of journalism for significant advances in the means and methods of gathering and reporting the news to the American public.

It was, in large part, prompted by such considerations that Carnegie Corporation of New York created the *Carnegie Journalism Initiative*, a curriculum-enrichment effort that calls for a reinvigoration of the journalism curriculum to offer students at our nation's public and private universities a deep and multi-layered exploration of complex subjects like history, politics, classics and philosophy to undergird their journalistic skills. The effort is one element of the *Carnegie-Knight Initiative on the Future of Journalism Education*, which was launched in 2005 and focuses on developing a vision of what a journalism school can be at an exemplary institution of higher education. The Carnegie-Knight Initiative also includes News 21 Incubators, annual national investigative reporting projects overseen by campus professors and distributed nationally through both traditional and innovative media and The Carnegie-Knight Task Force, which aims to carry out research and create a platform for educators to speak on policy and journalism education issues. All these efforts grew out of a partnership involving the Corporation, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and the deans of four of the nation's leading journalism schools—the Graduate School of Journalism, University of California at Berkeley; the Graduate School of Journalism, Columbia University; the Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University; and the Annenberg School of Communication, University of Southern California—as well as the director of the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

In order to continue working toward our goals, on November 16, 2005, in New York City, the Corporation brought together some of the nation's most influential news industry leaders and top journalism educators to engage in a discussion of how to prepare "the best and the brightest" to become tomorrow's journalists and how to reinvent and reinvigorate the news environment. In the view of one of America's most eminent journalists, former executive editor of *The New York Times*, Max Frankel, who attended the gathering, it is critical for leaders of both the profession of journalism and journalism education to participate in this kind of frank, wide-ranging dialogue because, as he notes, "Not only journalism schools but the self-styled 'responsible' print and web media have an obligation...to attack the irresponsible practice of our craft, to reject the lumping together of all 'media' and to redefine their understanding of important and meaningful news coverage."

This gathering, one in a series of meetings, was part of an ongoing national conversation among the deans, students, journalists and others involved in our initiative and aimed at creating awareness about the challenges facing the profession of journalism and about the changes that must take place in journalism schools and their curricula if tomorrow's journalists are truly going to make a meaningful contribution to our knowledge and understanding about the forces that shape our lives. Reinventing journalism education as a richer and more rigorous pursuit is not a pipe dream—it is an unquestionable necessity, and a process that has already begun at the initial group of nine universities we are currently working with, where both the president of the university and the deans are committed to playing a leadership role. But that's only a beginning.

Journalism has come to a crossroads, a time in history when it cannot continue as it was. There are too many new ways now that news is delivered and so much information being communicated that there is an aching need for educated, knowledgeable, ethical and objective journalists—both those who have been trained at journalism schools as well as individuals who have come to profession from other routes—to help us sort through it all. There are facts we need to be aware of, ideas we should explore, but they get lost like single blades of grass on an endless plain. We have a long tradition of looking to our universities to produce the generations of thinkers who have helped to guide our nation through social and cultural upheavals, political crises and even the dark days of war and terrorism. It is my hope that our journalism schools will rediscover the professional, intellectual and educational resources of the universities they are part of and that the universities, in turn, will act on their obligation to reach out to their journalism schools and help to deepen and enrich the education they offer. When the students of such schools become the journalists of the future, our nation and our democracy will be the true beneficiaries. ■

VARTAN GREGORIAN
President, Carnegie Corporation of New York