Journalism and Democracy

J201 Introduction to Mass Communication

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Grand principles of American Journalism

1. Independence
2. Transparency
3. Citizen engagement
4. Holding power accountable
5. Objectivity
6. Fairness
7. Balance
8. Accuracy/Verification
9. Telling the truth
Communication and Democracy

① Communication is essential to democracy in the U.S. and all democratic nations.

② "The press" has had a special place in U.S. society since the founding.

③ If the press does not function, democracy can't work.

④ The press isn't functioning as it did.
Democracy: demos (people) + archy (rule)
How are people able to engage with serious political issues?

Most are not experts; many are not educated.

They work and don’t have time to study issues.

They may not care or see depth of issues.

They may be extremely self-interested.
Problems of Founders

• Same problem of founders 225 years ago.

• Principal arguments of anti-democrats: does democracy ask too much of citizens?
## From subject to citizen

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>Citizens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Little input into decision-making</td>
<td>(Some) input into decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>’Best’ quality is loyalty</td>
<td>Independent thinking and judgment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferential to authorities</td>
<td>Need for information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little need for information</td>
<td>Need to form public opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No need for opinion formation</td>
<td></td>
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Responsibilities and tasks of citizens

Ability to be a citizen requires competency in what is happening in community.

So that he or she can act when necessary.

Requires that citizen be informed.

“It is precisely on characters of...limited information on weak capacities...that the eloquence and address of the few are known to act with all their force.” James Madison, Federalist No. 58
Hybrid Model of Citizenship

Founders created a system that accommodated a hybrid, conflicted vision of citizenship.

On the one hand, more democratic than anything in Europe.

On the other, power of the people was still circumscribed.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Democratic</th>
<th>Restrictions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elections (of representatives)</td>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Press</td>
<td>Race</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom of Assembly</td>
<td>Age</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other liberties (religion, association)</td>
<td>Property ownership</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Electoral College</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Senate</td>
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Two solutions to challenge

1) Education: teach the fundamental rules of the game and philosophy of democracy; teach something about the issues, problems, and players of the day.

2) The press: essential to informing citizens about the world around them so that they can act as citizens.
What must the press do?

• Inform citizens.

• Sort truth from falsehood; protection from deception.

• Enable the aggregation and filtering of interests.

• Inform representation.
Informing citizens

1. Policies being proposed.

2. Power: the players involved.


Thomas Jefferson, letter to John Tyler, 1804: “No experiment can be more interesting than that we are now trying, and which we trust will end in establishing the fact, that man may be governed by reason and truth. Our first object should therefore be, to leave open to him all the avenues to truth. The most effectual hitherto found, is the freedom of the press.”

http://www.constitution.org/tj/jeff11.txt
Aggregating interests

• Many diverse, unknown interests.

• Which are most important? Which are distractions? Which should leaders focus on?

• The public sphere

• How is a public sphere possible in a mass society?
Informing representation

In a representative democracy, the bulk of policy making is done by elected officials. How are they supposed to know what their constituents want/need?

Constituent contacts
Polls
The press
• What kind of information system can achieve these ideals?

• Our news system is built–imperfectly–on these ideals.

• Our news system is changing rapidly toward one that does not support these ideals very well.
Concluding remarks

• We may not be creating informed citizens.

• The kind of journalism that has supported informed citizenship is less common.

• It is challenged from above by the decline of the old advertiser supported business model for journalism.

• It is challenged from below by the explosion of new sources of information, its speed of circulation, declining attention, and declining interest in public affairs.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


See you Friday