

# Words, Words, Words

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I keep six honest-serving men  
(They taught me all I knew)  
Their names are What and Why and When  
And How and Where and Who

Rudyard Kipling 1902 Just So Stories

Liebson, what is your definition of a radical?

Mr. Tierney, the root of a monomial surd.

Liebson, have you been paying attention? We were discussing politics.

I had just come from my mathematics class in high school at Forest Hills, New York, and we were in our English Journalism class. I was in the middle front seat just in front of Mr. Tierney, our English Journalism teacher, and I was as usual daydreaming about baseball and girls. Mr. Tierney was portly, middle-aged, with receding sandy hair and a ruddy face and described himself as having the likeness of a cartoon character of Chon Day of the *New Yorker* (he did!).

To back up a bit, the Journalism course consisted of two semesters. The first semester was a stringent approach to journalism in that we had a textbook illustrating all the facts of newspaper writing and editing and in which we composed fictitious news stories and interviewed several guest teachers for feature articles. It was strictly by the book and we were responsible for critiquing material from the *New York Times* or *Herald Tribune* (this was the fifties after all) and our first semester teacher, Mrs. Epling, felt that the *Tribune* was the best edited paper in the city (it was!).

It was quite a change to experience the second semester of our journalism enterprise with Mr. Tierney. He was in charge of our school newspaper, the *Beacon*. As a side note, our cylindrical tower was built instead of a swimming pool that had been planned. When the students were asked where the swimming pool was located we responded “in the tower”.

It was the winter and spring of 1951. Alger Hiss had just been sentenced to nine years in a federal prison. The Kefauver Committee was looking into organized crime. The Korean War was less than a year old and our troops were being pushed back by the Chinese communist forces almost to a beachhead in South Korea. The peace treaty with

Japan was a few months away and would be seen on television throughout the US several months later because of the new coaxial cable. “Be My Love”, “Because of You”, and the” Tennessee Waltz” were among the top 10.”The King and I” and “Guys and Dolls” were the new Broadway musicals. Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis were appearing in a new film “At War with The Army”. “An American in Paris “with Gene Kelly and Leslie Caron would appear later in the year. On television, Ed Murrow’s “See it Now” would begin in the Fall. Oh yes. In a few months, Bobby Thomson would hit the shot heard ‘round the world. Willie Mays and Mickey Mantle were rookies.

Mr. Tierney greeted us the first day with the information that there were no specific assignments, that we were to read the *New Yorker*, and we were to provide him periodically with any essay or reporting that came to mind. His only admonition, “have a running list under the heading of “Words, words, words” and add any new word that you come across. It was years later that I found that the heading was taken from Hamlet. The *New Yorker* that Spring had some articles that were memorable, including the full text of Rachel Carson’s *The Sea Around Us*.

In fact, Mr. Tierney had worked for the *New Yorker* early in his career as a rewrite man, in the early 1930’s. He never specifically provided any anecdotes about his experiences there but when I asked him who he knew there he mentioned EB White, James Thurber, Wolcott Gibbs and of course the Editor, Harold Ross, among others. He was close mouthed about his experiences there no matter how we tried to pry information from him.

Throughout the course, Mr. Tierney focused on three publications, *The New York Times*, specifically the Op-Ed writings of Arthur Krock, and Anne O’Hare McCormick, the *New Yorker*, and *Time* magazine, the latter to illustrate the dissection of fact from fiction. The *New Yorker* is one among several journals and newspapers that provide a rational evaluation of the news. My experience in the journalism class with Mr. Tierney provided me and my classmates with a critical approach to the presentation of news as well as the use of words in parsing of sentences.

Arthur Krock and Anne O’Hare McCormick were the only consistent Op-Ed columnists for the *Times* then. Both contributed three times a week on alternate days. Rather than the current titles over Op-Ed essays that describe the contents, there were two constant titles, one for “In the Nation”, by Arthur Krock and “Abroad”, by Anne McCormick. Mr. Tierney was especially taken with the essays by Arthur Krock, a conservative columnist. In those days, the two Op-Ed

columnists described and tried to analyze the events and actions of participants without attempting to produce a prescription for action that many Op-Ed writers now undertake.

Mr. Krock was Washington bureau chief, correspondent, and columnist, wearing three hats. The information from one of his columns sometimes was of such immediate news value that his editor made it a front page item, and he would then have to compose a substitute column for that day's paper. He had only rare conferences with his staff when he was working in Washington. However, he stressed to them that they should develop expertise in specific areas of interest. The reporter should know as much about the subject as the newsmaker. Another precept was keeping it simple. Don't write a paragraph when a sentence would do. He showed a certain humor in some of his comments. He once translated into the vernacular the sonorous prose of John L. Lewis, comparing it to the style of Samuel Johnson. However, for certain literary effects, he recommended use of the long word for the short one, for, citing Samuel Johnson, an elephant on a tightrope attracts more attention than an acrobat. His typed articles had so many insertions and corrections that a new teletype operator considered his typed words corrections of his longhand.

Krock had exclusive interviews with several Presidents causing his journalistic colleagues discomfort. However, the interview with Franklin Roosevelt, about the proposed Supreme Court packing, gave him a Pulitzer Prize.

Anne O'Hare McCormick had the other three day a week Op-Ed assignment, "Abroad". She was a foreign news correspondent for the *Times*, a field then uncommon for a woman. In 1936, she became the first woman to ever be appointed to the previously eight-man editorial board of the *Times*, providing editorials on the two other days of her work week. In 1937, she won the Pulitzer Prize for correspondence, becoming the first woman to receive a major category Pulitzer Prize in journalism. She provided the first in-depth reports of the rise of Benito Mussolini and the Fascist movement in Italy, providing critiques that were at odds with the many laudatory comments by many newsmen at the time.

Another prominent woman pathfinder in foreign correspondence was Dorothy Thompson, who reported on events in Europe in the 1930's. In 1939 she was recognized by *Time* magazine as the second most influential woman in America next to Eleanor Roosevelt. She is notable as the first American journalist to be expelled from Nazi Germany in 1934 and as one of the few women who were news commentators on radio during the 1930s.

Martha Gellhorn was one of the greatest war correspondents of the 20th century. She reported on virtually every major world conflict that took place during her 60-year career. It is interesting that Thompson and Gellhorn were married at onetime to famous writers, Sinclair Lewis and Ernest Hemingway, respectively, although they achieved their fame before marriage. It was noteworthy that Gellhorn got acquainted with Hemingway while they were both covering the Spanish Civil War.

I myself was impressed with two *Herald Tribune* presentations, (1) that of a woman reporter, Marguerite Higgins, who was providing the best news out of Korea and (2) the sports pages. Marguerite Higgins covered World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War, and in the process advanced the cause of equal access for female war correspondents. She witnessed the liberation of the Dachau concentration camp in April 1945 and received a U.S. Army campaign ribbon for her assistance during the surrender by its S.S. guards. She later covered the Nuremberg war trials and the Soviet Union's blockade of Berlin. In 1950, Higgins was named chief of the *Tribune's* Tokyo bureau. Shortly thereafter, the Korean War broke out and she was one of the first reporters on the spot. Early in the war, Higgins and three of her colleagues were trapped on the north bank of a river near the front line. They managed to cross the river by raft and reached the U.S. military HQ the next day. However, she was quickly ordered out of the country by General Walton Walker, who was concerned for the safety of women at the front and also that the military had no time to worry about making separate accommodations for them. Higgins made a personal appeal to Walker's superior officer, General Douglas MacArthur, who subsequently sent a telegram to the *Herald Tribune* stating that the ban on women correspondents in Korea has been revoked. Higgins won a Pulitzer Prize for Foreign Correspondence for her coverage of the Korean War.

I also avidly read the sports section of the *Tribune*. Besides its comprehensive coverage it had Red Smith as a sports columnist. Enough said. He arrived in New York after 10 years on the *Philadelphia Record* watching the Philadelphia baseball teams in each league, mostly in last place. As he said, "I did 10 years hard in Philly". [1] He and Roger Angell of the *New Yorker* were to me the most incisive and literary sports analysts.

I might add, although I did not have the pleasure of frequenting it, that the *Herald Tribune* building was next to the popular bar called Bleeck's, possibly the most popular watering house among newspapermen at the time. What does this have to do with the *New Yorker*? It so happened that the man who handled correspondence for the magazine was somewhat of a lush, but unfortunately he developed cortical atrophy and his mind degenerated to childhood so that he would resort to buying and bringing toys to the office. Once he brought a little toy automobile into Bleeck's, wound it up, and sent it along the bar. [1A]

Two writers in the *New Yorker* were especially mentioned by Mr. Tierney, AJ Liebling and John Hersey and we were encouraged to read some of their reports, which he made available in the school library. Liebling joined *The New Yorker* in 1935. During World War II, Liebling was active as a war correspondent, filing many stories from Africa, England, and France. He covered the D-Day invasion of France on a landing craft. His account understated, in *New Yorker* characteristic manner, but with great detail, how the deck of the landing craft turned sticky from a mixture of blood and milk when fragments of a German shell hit crewmen and some boxes of rations. He talked with the coxswain who would be the first off the boat when it landed. Later the Lieutenant in charge of the boat told him "The coxswain is gone...He had just stepped off the ramp when he disintegrated. He must have stepped right into a---shell" [2].

Following the war, Liebling returned to regular magazine fare and for many years after he wrote a *New Yorker* monthly feature called "Wayward Press", in which he analyzed the US press. One of his favorite sayings was "People everywhere confuse what they read in newspapers with news." In a May 1960, *New Yorker* his Wayward Press article was entitled "Do You Belong in Journalism?"[3] He commented that "What you have in a one paper town is a privately owned public utility that is constitutionally exempt from public regulation, which would be a violation of freedom of the press", and "The best thing congress can do to keep more newspapers going would be to raise the capital-gains tax to the level of the income tax... Freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one. "

John Hersey, normally a *Life* and *Time* reporter, remarkably portrayed the devastation of Hiroshima on the ground in an entire issue of the *New Yorker* in 1946. The idea for this actually devolved from of an earlier assignment to another *New Yorker* reporter in Germany in early 1945. That reporter was requested to provide a detailed account of the bombing of Cologne, but not from the air, from the ground: He was to describe what the German civilians were doing when the bombs fell, where they fled to safety, who died, who survived, and the comments from the survivors. The report was not published but the idea was

presented to Hersey in early 1946, while he was in Shanghai after the war, to provide a similar report about Hiroshima. He proceeded to Hiroshima to interview his subjects.[4] The story was originally planned for four parts in separate issues but the story was so remarkable was such that the 31,000 word report published completely in one *New Yorker* issue, cutting out all cartoons and other articles, even Notes and Comment, with just a few advertisements. Ironically, Hersey, with his long time affiliation with Time publications, was at one time considered as destined to replace Henry Luce as overall Editor of *Time* publications. After his *New Yorker* report, he was fired by Luce and his picture removed from *Time*'s gallery of honor because he felt that Hersey was treacherous in not contributing the report to *Time*, which certainly would not have printed the whole report in one issue anyway and would have been heavily edited. [5]

Mr. Tierney liked to throw questions about information at us, specifically calling on us by name. One of his favorite approaches was to call on someone to identify persons at the drop of a hat, many of them were obscure. I remember once, since the names were so distinct, that he asked me to identify James A. O'Gorman and Josh Devore. I knew of Josh Devore because I was a rabid baseball historian and remembered that he had been briefly with the New York Giants in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. I had no idea who O'Gorman was and years later when I read a book about the *New Yorker* by James Thurber these names popped up among others as part of a series entitled: "Where are they now"? [6] ]Of course, Mr. Tierney had read this series and once told us that he had kept every *New Yorker* since the late 1920's. Oh yes, O'Gorman was the last US Senator from New York elected by the state legislature.

One of the prominent sections of the *New Yorker* was Profiles, essays focusing on individuals or topics of interest. He encouraged us to write profiles and would occasionally bring in other teachers so that we could interview them as a group and write our individual profiles. Mr. Tierney had several restrictions for our contributions, however: no politics, no religion, and in those late post Victorian days, it was implied no erotica.

He also encouraged us to interview people outside the school. My father had a pharmacy in midtown Manhattan, where writers and actors were frequent customers. I remember that when I was about five, this was around 1941, I was in the drug store with several customers when it appeared that a slim man in a suit and fedora walked in. Everyone turned around and I had no idea why everyone was staring. After he had left I asked father who this man was. "That was no man, that was Greta Garbo." Unawed, I asked "Who is she?"

My father once had me meet Wolcott Gibbs of the *New Yorker*, another frequent customer, in order that he might provide a character reference for me for medical school. I found Gibbs seated in a chair, short, thin, mustached, and diffident, who offered only 3 fingers in a handshake and did not say much. I thought that he was indifferent or did not think much of me although he provided me with a splendid reference. I only learned from reading one of my sources for this essay that Gibbs had fractured two fingers of his right hand during prohibition when he fell down a flight of stairs and thus would use only the other three. [7]

Mr. Tierney was persistently discussing the importance of the distinction between truth and facts. Facts, he said, were in the eye of the beholder but truth was a nebulous concept that we must tiptoe around. He cited items in *Time* magazine and the *New Yorker* frequently as examples of facts, presumed facts or stretches of the imagination. The last considerations were frequently applied to *Time*. The magazine had a system where each word was checked by one of the fact checkers and a dot was placed over each word when it was checked. [8]. If the word wasn't dotted it was the writer's supposed duty to correct it. However, this arduous and expensive approach was often honored in the breach as in the observance. One editor, when a researcher offered Webster's dictionary to prove a point, declared "Webster is the work of human hands". Nonetheless, it may have been difficult to check facts when Whittaker Chambers, as foreign affairs editor, presented a story about the ghosts of the former Tsar and his family applauding Stalin's tactics at Yalta.

The *New Yorker* started a fact-checking department early in its publications, even before *Time*, after a Profile of Edna St. Vincent Millay had numerous factual mistakes so that her mother came into the office to protest. [9] Articles set up in proof were sent to an assigning editor, copy editor and fact checker. Every assertion of fact had to be verified [10]. This might take a week with a lengthy article – clearly the difference between an article in a magazine and newspaper as far as the lengths taken for verifiability. When Dwight Eisenhower was about to become the President of Columbia University, Editor Harold Ross believed that the head of Columbia had to be a High Episcopalian, but Ross needed to know the general's religion. The only source appeared to be the *New York Daily News*, which stated that Ike had grown up in Abilene, Kansas, belonging to a small sect called the River Brethren. Ross would not rely on the *Daily News* and finally Eisenhower himself was called and confirmed this fact.



One of the programs I watched regularly on our new television set when Mr. Tierney was stimulating us to interview interesting persons was Your Hit Parade. I thought it would be a great idea to see if I could interview some of the performers, which at that time included Dorothy Collins, Snooky Lanson and Eileen Wilson. It so happened that a regular customer of my father, who was the star of an NBC television detective series, was available to allow me to visit the set at the NBC studios in midtown. He accompanied me there and I was afforded the opportunity to have brief interviews with these singers. What profound questions did I ask? Not too profound, such as what was your favorite song, what are your hobbies, and what is your favorite food? However, one question I asked was a little out of the ordinary: "What will you do when The Hit Parade closes?" At that time, the program, first on radio, followed by television, had lasted for over 15 years and the response quite reasonably was that the Hit Parade would go on forever. The revolution in popular music styles of the late 50's ended the Hit Parade because they could not fit into the Hit Parade format. I took my notes and developed my profile essay which Mr. Tierney felt was suitable for the school newspaper.

Another venture of ours was transcribing news stories in a mimeographed four page paper that came out monthly and in which three students were assigned in rotation. I had the good fortune to be assigned with a future member of Al-Jazeera and a future prominent first amendment lawyer, so I was in fast company although I did not know it at the time, of course. Our assignment was to take a prominent news event at that time and write an in depth report. We were getting close to the deadline without anything much going on when a train wreck occurred on the Long Island Railroad within several miles from us. Of course, we were not at the scene since the train wreck had not been scheduled. Otherwise we would have been in attendance. However we picked up the pieces so to speak and proceeded to develop several human interest pieces from the scattered information from newspapers and television. Although this was really news from a distance we learned to provide a coherent report and how to use a mimeograph machine.

Ah! The mimeograph machine. It was in the home of our future Al-Jazeera correspondent, whose father was a lawyer and needed it. We worked on this exercise over several days and on two occasions, future Al- Jazeera's mother served us a snack. I have to admit that she was not the best cook and to this day will not eat spaghetti or scrambled eggs, two courses served. Mr. Tierney provided a critique over the finished product that came out of the mimeograph machine,

as he did with the other monthly submissions. We thought we had done a fair job compiling all the information available. However Tierney commented:” Not too good. How about a comparison with other train wrecks”? The LIRR had a habit of train wrecks and only 9 months before had had a similar major wreck. “How is this going to affect the railroad commuters?” “How many train wrecks have there been throughout the country in the last 10 years?” “Who is responsible for railroad safety in the government”? We had to admit that we were at the time not very astute journalists.

Mr. Tierney occasionally provided us with homilies about the practice of good journalism. Some of them have become outmoded by current practices. Others have become more relevant: In the first paragraph, provide the information who, what, when, where, why and how. In a news story always question the facts with separate persons, even if you are interviewing the President of the United States. At that time, Harry Truman was President and known for his blunt honesty, so Mr. Tierney was making a point.



Dr. Brandwein

One of the most interesting challenges Mr. Tierney provided us was a class interview with one of the prominent teachers in our high school, Dr. Brandwein. He was the chair of the science department and had been responsible for many Westinghouse Science Talent Search winners and honorable mentions in the previous 10 years. I had previously spent a year in his biology class. The first day of the biology class he drew a dot on the blackboard and asked each student in turn what he or she saw. Each one mentioned a dot. Finally, after the entire class had mentioned the dot with minor variations, he admonished us: “Nobody mentioned the rest of the blackboard”. He would also regale us with his experiences in learning fencing as a boy in Austria.

The challenge was to find out about the man himself and several members of the journalism class asked some questions about his experiences, none too probing. However, we elicited an

interesting comment. Dr. Brandwein had to travel occasionally to Washington, DC. for the Westinghouse meetings and indicated how segregated the streetcars were. He went further and commented that if he were a Negro he would spit in the eye of every white. This, in 1950, was a most unusual attitude at the time. Dr. Brandwein eventually went on to write about 25 books about science education and the environment and founded an institute to foster education in science and environmental issues for talented youngsters.

Mr. Tierney did not discuss radio or television news. At the time, I watched two evening news broadcasts, 15 minutes each: John Cameron Swayze at NBC (hopscothching the world for headlines) and Douglas Edwards at CBS. The NBC Camel News Caravan, debuting in early 1949, weekdays, provided a model for future telecasts throughout the world, later increased to 30 minutes and in some cases 60 minutes. This was straight news, actually a reading of news articles primarily from the news services with film clips primarily from the action in the Korean War. The film clips had no background comments but had the same march tune every night.

This was well before the use of the evening news with reporters at the scene.

John Chancellor was such a TV reporter in 1957. [11] At that time he was a junior reporter for NBC news in Chicago. On Labor Day weekend he was assigned by NBC news to go to Little Rock because Arkansas Governor Orvil Faubus was to call out the National Guard to prevent court-ordered integration. In the middle of a white power demonstration, Chancellor was interviewing blacks when a group of whites headed toward him. Terrified, he pointed his microphone toward one of the white man, indicating to him that whatever his group does to him the whole world will hear about it and see it. The men stopped, thinking the microphone was the camera. This was the first all-out confrontation between the law and civil disruption that was played out with television cameras, and the impact of on the spot visual reporting. Chancellor got involved in another confrontation when, during the 1968 Democratic convention, on the floor of the convention, he was arrested by the forces of Mayor Daley for apparently adverse reporting, meaning objectivity.

In contrast to Chancellor's on the spot reporting we have the journalism of retrospective analysis and information. An example of this was the magazine or book reporting of William Bradford Huie, who was an expert on follow-up analysis. For example, Huie wrote a book eliciting the facts about the execution of Private Eddie Slovik, an American soldier, in 1944, by

the Army because of desertion, the only American to be executed for that reason since the Civil War.

Huie decided to investigate the death in 1955 of Emmett Till, a Chicago black, 14 years old, who visited Mississippi. Because he was purported to whistle at a white woman, he was shot to death by two whites, who were cleared by a Mississippi jury after less than an hour [12]. There was little indication about what actually happened until Huie interviewed the two suspects, drinking with them and agreeing to make them a libel settlement in advance since they would be portrayed as murderers. Several years later Huie used a similar method to get the cooperation of the two men who killed the three civil rights workers in Philadelphia, Mississippi.

Mr. Tierney had several subjects that he covered in the nature of journalism. Included were the difficulties of reporters in trying to advance in the field and the role of Negro newspapers. The subject was unusual in that at that time there was little interest in the average newspaper world in that area. Before World War II, African-American newspapers reported heavily on the wave of bitter resentment, disillusionment and desperation sweeping over the masses of American blacks. Readers of these black newspapers were presented with a constant flow of reports about the brutality, mayhem and deprivation caused by race discrimination [13] the major white newspapers largely ignored the issue. In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, several black newspapers stood out, including the *Chicago Defender* from 1905 and the *Pittsburgh Courier* from 1910. Black journals ridiculed white hypocrisy and spoke out bitterly against racial injustice, covering black social and religious organizations in detail. Early in World War II, A. Philip Randolph, then President of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, challenging the lack of black employment in defense industries, threatened a march on Washington, with little coverage in the white press but wide coverage in the black press. During racial confrontations, the *Defender* would list for the front page box scores showing how many blacks had been injured and killed versus how many whites.

One effort by a black Chicago sportswriter, Sam Lacy, had seismic repercussions to sport. In the early 1940's, Lacy made an effort to have the owners of major league baseball integrate baseball. The owners did form a major league committee to look into integration with no effect because at least one owner prevented a meeting from taking place. Lacy then met with Branch Rickey, then the General Manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers, about a possible prospect one day, the subject of Jackie Robinson was discussed, and the rest is history. With black columnists such as Clarence Day and Charles Blow in the major press and of course our fellow member Robert Jordan on television, the thoughts and strivings formerly heard only in the early black press are now out in the open.

In college I got to be copy editor of my newspaper. Our editorial concern was the type of reader and how a news story would be judged. A study was once made where journalism students were

asked how a series of news stories might impact favorably or unfavorably upon a hostile reader or sympathetic reader. Scrambled facts were taken from stories that communicated both good news and bad news. [14] The students then assembled the facts into their own versions of the stories. The results were that writers with supportive image persons, reported good news more accurately than bad news and those with presumed hostile readers and reporting bad news, reported bad news more accurately.

What is a newsroom like? There is indeed a hierarchy. The *Times* newsroom was laid out in a systematic manner in which editors of the various desks, national, foreign, or city desks, oversaw rows of reporters desks, with the star reporters at the front of the room, the middle aged veterans who could be trusted with a story, behind them, and the young reporters in the back, whose location toward the front depended how they handled their assignments. The veterans also include a sad collection of men on the decline, foreign correspondents sent home on the decline, or bitter ambitious men who have failed to get editorships. [15]

The major breaking stories went to those in high favor. Lesser assignments, perhaps for someone who was in less favor, were assigned to society, the outskirts of town, a police beat, and possibly the lowest of all, obituaries. The city editor and managing editor dispensed rare congratulatory notes and the publisher bonuses for the best stories. More recently, stories have been handled by groups of reporters who may be located in several cities with help from one or more backup reporters who may be privy to sources.

A newspaper report has been likened to a musical fugue, in which there is an initial statement followed by multiple strands of information related to the purpose of the report – background information, comments by presumably knowledgeable observers and finally how the event relates to the stream of events related to the incident. Unfortunately, many news reports involve interviewing observers whose reliability in reporting their experience is biased by their inability to provide accurate descriptions of the incident, either because of traumatization, lack of perspective involving the incident as a whole, or interest in using the incident to provide a message. Recently, more emphasis and sometimes the major emphasis have been given to a bystander with special concern about how he or she feels about the event. The bystander's response has frequently filled the first paragraph of a news story in place of the who, what, why, when, where, or how.

My wife and I were involved in two such situations. Shortly after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, Wilmette suffered a major thunderstorm and power lines were down. Our doorbell rang and a TV news reporter asked my wife how she felt about the damage. Her response was “Don’t send FEMA”. On another occasion I was at Reagan Airport in Washington when there was some airplane malfunction. I was asked by a TV reporter for my opinion. My response was that I was no expert in that area and suggested that he interview someone expert in aeronautics. I am sure that my response was not aired.

The lives of journalists have been threatened and journalists have been brutally murdered to such an extent that an editorial in the NY Times on October 18 of this year entitled it “Is a Reporter’s Murder a New Normal”? [16] A car bomb had killed an investigative journalist in Malta after she had held some of the most powerful people in the country accountable for political corruption, off shore financial dealings and abuse of power. In the past year, Turkey has imprisoned over 100 journalists without trial. Even broadcast journalists in Finland, a country that has been consistently ranked among the top global press freedom lists, have been pressured by the Prime Minister not to publish reports about his conflicts of interest in business. The freedom of the press has been a contention in this country since John Peter Zenger in the colonial days and the attitudes toward freedom of the press have especially been bones of contention recently.

I do not have to go into detail as to the lengths that the current Administration goes to castigate the press. The conflicts between the President and the media concerning objectivity of journalism was presented in a *Times* Op-Ed by Nicholas Kristof on August 24 in which he indicated that although too often journalists are “superficial, sensationalist, unfair, defensive, or diverted by shiny objects”, and that “we in journalism deserve to have our feet held to the fire”, that journalism is one of the bulwarks of democracy. [17]

Among the many internet responses to this column, I would like to quote some of the following:

- You cannot stand against something without making a public stand. Have the courage to wear the charge of “enemy” when the person making the charge is despicable enough to stand against publically.
- The news is the part of the problem when Op-Ed pieces are offered as “news”. Get rid of bias in reporting and just report the facts.

Although I eventually spent three years on my college newspaper I never became a competent journalist, perhaps because I couldn’t sniff the importance of a newsbreak from a feature. For

example, during one spring break I was assigned to cover a speech by the inventor and engineer Charles F. Kettering, who was receiving an award from my University. Kettering has worked for GM and was responsible for the self-starter and later a high compression engine and the use of high-octane gas, clearing the way for power steering, power brakes and air-conditioning. I wrote a detailed report and interviewed Kettering on his future plans for these advances but missed a comment by a University administrator at the ceremony that would have a profound effect on the University. Was I surprised when my Kettering report was missing from the next issue but the university administrator's comment made the lead story. I always regretted that the major thrust of what I had reported on the future of automobiles had been scrapped.

I appreciate the difficulties journalists must face when attempting not only to get information from sources, withstand attacks from contrarians, but also attempt to find what is "the truth" or "facts" from fiction or lies. This implies that a healthy skepticism is implicit in evaluating information. As for the truth, remember the movie *Rashomon* in which three persons involved in a crime describe the incident in three different ways.

There are now a multiplicity of new sources of public information and analysis, including cable news, talk shows, online news and access to international media, blogs and popular culture genres such as satirical news. The plethora of information from these contentious sources may play havoc with truth and factual information. In earlier times, the subjects and sources of news consisted largely of government officials and other elites, experts, and celebrities. Unknowns, or ordinary people, were the sources few news stories and rarer still the source of news. These new sources of news have led to the changing character of information with the blurring of boundaries among news subjects, sources, producers and consumers. Among the consequences is the partition of television commentary where news and opinion are blended and where guests are used to support the opinion of the commentators.

There are also some wider concerns, as the media continue to change, for example that the brevity of news reports and use of soundbites has reduced fidelity to the truth, and may contribute to a lack of needed context for public understanding. From outside the profession, the rise of news management contributes to the real possibility that news media may be deliberately manipulated. Selective reporting is very commonly alleged against newspapers, and by their nature are forms of bias not easy to establish, or guard against.

The recent evidence that Russian "news" article scams in Facebook was fake news is an example of how easily the presence of words as news can be misconstrued when presented by a technological process. [18] With the commercialization of the World Wide Web, the digital has slowly but steadily

moved to the center of attention of media organizations. In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, technology has gained a central place in discussions about journalism.

Ethical standards in reporting must be considered as well. There is a Society of Professional Journalists' code of ethics that provides among many other standards the following advice:

- (1) Show compassion for those who may be affected adversely by news coverage
- (2) Be sensitive when seeking or using interviews or photographs of those affected by tragedy or grief.
- (3) Recognize that gathering and reporting information may cause harm or discomfort.

The question also arises about the ethics of printing sensitive material. The Pentagon Papers in 1971 dealt with extremely difficult ethical dilemmas faced by journalists. This was a clear example of the ability of the press to publish top secret material. Daniel Ellsberg, a former military analyst revealed top secret documents comprising U.S. military accounts of theater activity during the Viet Nam War, precipitating a constitutional crisis. In June, 1971, *The New York Times* began publishing a series of articles based on the study. After several installments appeared in the *Times*, the U.S. Department of Justice obtained a temporary restraining order against further publication of the classified material, contending that further public dissemination of the material would cause “immediate and irreparable harm” to U.S. national defense interests. The *Times*—joined by the *Washington Post*, which also was in possession of the documents—fought the order through the courts for the fortnight, indicating that the public interest was more compelling. In what is regarded as one of the most significant prior-restraint cases in history, the U.S. Supreme Court allowed the newspapers to resume publishing the material. Incidentally, my future first amendment lawyer friend in high school working with the mimeograph machine participated in the defense.

In addition to codes of ethics, many news organizations maintain an in-house ombudsman whose role is, in part, to keep news organizations honest and accountable to the public. The ombudsman is intended to mediate in conflicts stemming from internal and or external pressures, to maintain accountability to the public for news reported, and to foster self-criticism and to encourage adherence to both codified and uncodified ethics and standards. This position may be the same or similar to the public editor. The *Times* on Sunday has had such an editor, for example, who provides critiques of selected articles in response to readers' comments.

Another aspect of presentation of news is by advocacy journalism. This by definition tends to reject "objectivity", while at the same time maintaining many other common standards and ethics. Literary



devices more akin to fiction are used to bring insight and depth into the subjects about which they write. Such devices as dialogue, metaphor, digression and other such techniques offer the reader insights not usually found in standard news reportage. However, authors in this branch of journalism still maintain ethical criteria such as factual and historical accuracy as found in standard news reporting. This approach is not really new.

Will Irwin, a journalist associated with the muckrakers wrote this in 1911:” One principal canon governs the art of news writing- severe plainness.... The reporter is telling the story of the day. A swift, rushing narrative, whose movement to an end no ornament delays should be his aim. He may catch the reader’s attention by a trick of style or a turn of wit in the opening sentence, he may carry it on from stage to stage by similar devices, but he cannot stop long to moralize or describe. ... The rush to of narrative is more important to him than to the fiction writer. ... Within these seemingly narrow limits is nevertheless room for art- wit, humor, pathos, drama – as long as it abides by the journalist’s chief ethical canon of truth, and is not merely an invention” [19]

In the 1960’s and 1970’s with a revolt against oppressive and artificial consumer culture, a New Journalism evolved , reviving a 19<sup>th</sup> century concept of the journalist as advocate, interpreter, and critic combining the factual authority of journalism with the atmospheric license of fiction. Writers such as Tom Wolfe, Truman Capote and Gay Talese fused journalistic and conversational and literary writing styles to create more accurate depictions and to tell deeper truths about society. Capote as a teenager before World War II worked for several years as a *New Yorker* clerk during the art meetings where the cartoon ideas and finished cartoons were presented. He was known to hide drawings he didn’t like and cluck his tongue when he disagreed with the group [20].He was finally removed from the art meetings by Editor Ross.

When certain distasteful or shocking material is considered important to a story, there are a variety of common methods for mitigating negative audience reaction. Advance warning of explicit or disturbing material may allow listeners or readers to avoid content they would rather not be exposed to. Offensive words may be partially obscured or bleeped. *The New Yorker* is now explicit in the use of offensive words, unlike earlier years under Ross, who used profanity as a matter of course in conversation but was a Victorian for the printed copy in his magazine. *The New York Times* still bleeps them out. Potentially offensive images may be blurred or narrowly cropped. Descriptions may be substituted for pictures; graphic detail might be omitted. Disturbing content might be moved from a cover to an inside page, or on television, from daytime to late evening, when children are less likely to be watching.

Providing a new interpretation of the news emerged in the 1920s and 1930s with the development of news magazines. *Time* began publishing in 1923, *Newsweek* (originally *Today*, and *U.S. News and World*

*Report* (originally *United States News*) in 1933. Rejecting any pretense of neutrality or objectivity, *Time* provided readers with commentary on, and interpretation of, current policies and ideas. The style including formulation of new words by combining two words into one such as cinemactor and globaloney. *Time*, and later *Newsweek* and *US News and World Report* were geared to upper class, white, male readers. In critiquing the state of journalism, Henry Luce recommended that newspapers drop its separation of news and editorial in favor of front page news that joined “intelligent criticism, evaluation and representation of the men who hold offices of public trust” [21].

There are increasing distractions from facts or truth by purveyors of obfuscation. During the early 1950’s, Senator Joseph McCarthy set an example of such distractions through innuendo, hysteria, and ad hominem attacks in a witch-hunt against individuals suspected of being sympathetic to the communist movement, eagerly reported by the press. It was only when he began to attack the military in a Senate hearing that his critics had enough ammunition to combat his attacks. In effect, he set out to do the unthinkable and it turned out to be thinkable with the support of fellow congressmen, politicizing the naivety and anxiety of many Americans but in the process, aided by the press, destroying the lives and careers of thousands of Americans.

How can news be distorted? A good example is the effect of editing in *Time* magazine under Luce as depicted by W.A. Swanberg in his biography of Luce: adjectival twists, laudations and denigrations, mood words, nuances, unattributed comments, suppression of facts, emphasis of some items in places of prominences such as headlines, leads, or picture captions, photographs showing a smile or scowl, appearance of clothing, etc. [22]

As an example, one might compare the *Time* treatment of Senator Estes Kefauver, then running for President, vs. Vice-President Richard Nixon during the pre-convention campaign of 1956. Kefauver was found to perspire so heavily that he had to carry an extra shirt with him, his handshake was” limp but not clammy”, he had a poor-mouthed sudden drawl,” he glided along like an imperturbable praying mantis, he had a tedious habit of shaking one’s hand after another, looking at its owner with glazed, unseeing eyes, hardly hearing himself mouth some meaningless banality”. [23]

However, Nixon, emerging in the Philippines, “generated friendship. He shook hands held out from the cordoned crowd, relied with effect on his California Spanish, three times halted his Cadillac to shake hands. Secret service men blanched, but Filipinos loved it”. [24] One analyst commented that “the Nixon handshake is brave. It does things in far off places that make Secret

Servicemen turn white under the keen eyes of trained Time reporters who have made a special study of the skin tones of fearful American in the tropics”. [24]

*Time* magazine in the old days used what newspapermen called the Delphic Oracle or Disembodied Voice, presumably witnesses who were unidentified but fortuitously right on top of the event, but made the point that was needed by the magazine. For example, When Jan Masaryk fell to his death in Prague when the Communists took over in Czechoslovakia in 1948, an unnamed Czech woman conveniently witnessed the event from a nearby balustrade and told the unnamed *Time* reporter that “The damned, damned Communists killed him. They are worse than the Nazis”. [25] Memorable language was always used by these unidentified witnesses, in contrast to what is heard from witnesses at an incident in current TV news reports.

Even in the *Times*, it is sometimes hard to determine the kernel of objectivity in a news report. For example, the leading news report in the October 4, 2017 edition was an article about a Supreme Court hearing about gerrymandering. Since it was a hearing, no decision would as yet be made but the first paragraph did not go into a summary of the content but discussed how Justice Kennedy has “never found a satisfactory way to determine when voting maps are so warped by politics that they cross the constitution line”.

This is one of many examples of obfuscation now in lead paragraphs of news articles that do not provide a summary of the content of the article, more and more apparent recently replacing the who, what, when, where, why and how that had been standard previously.

It is perhaps easier to perceive the distortions in daily newspapers than in newsmagazines. According to Ben Bagdikian, journalist, news media critic and commentator, in 1959 “The newsmagazines have arisen in the present form only in this generation, a generation unprepared for the special forms of influence which the newsmagazines use. In many respects the influence is comparable to modern advertising techniques of depth probing and psychological motivation. By using many of these methods in the presentation of news interpretation, the newsmagazines are influencing a generation of middle-class voters who are extremely sensitive to bias in newspaper stories but almost totally unaware of the new techniques in newsmagazines.” [26].

Value judgments can take a toll on objectivity in presenting news- the preset ideas that act as a substrate for determining the presentation of news at a cost of objectivity. A master of value judgment in his control of what appeared in *Time* and *Life*, Luce spoke before his employees in 1952 after Eisenhower won his first Presidential election and Luce had gone all out to support

him. Luce declared “The alleged journalistic objectivity...a claim that a writer presents facts without applying any value judgment [is] the objectivity that we are against. It is that I had to renounce and denounce. ... this does not mean that value judgments are bad...Quite the contrary. It means that 75% of the business of recognizing, selecting, and organizing facts is having a correct value judgment”. [27] He believed that the only objective in news without value judgment was the stock market quotations.

Since journalism is presumably based upon eliciting the truth, what about the place of advertisements? Harold Ross, although not involved with the business end of the *New Yorker*, was concerned about the truth in advertising in his magazine. He insisted on determining whether ads were tasteless or misleading. He was allowed by the business division to retouch ads. These might include ads for deodorants, laxatives, mortuaries and such. He might threaten to resign if he was not upheld but he was too valuable. Once he ran a casual spoofing a cigarette ad, unfortunately placed right next to an ad for that brand of cigarettes. [28] It was only in the mid-sixties that William Shawn, Ross’s successor, vetoed ads for cigarettes.

Ross’s quest for the truth produced crossed swords with Luce and Walter Winchell. In the early 1930’s, *Fortune* magazine, part of Luce’s empire, had produced an analysis of the *New Yorker* including estimates of the salaries of the major players. It so happened that Ralph Ingersoll, formerly a *New Yorker* managing editor and therefore somewhat conversant of what was going on was now on the staff of *Fortune*. The report considered full of inaccuracies and was therefore embarrassing to those of the *New Yorker* staff. It was decided that there would be a parody of *Time* magazine in the *New Yorker* using *Timestyle*, written by Wolcott Gibbs. Although the parody was mostly thrust at *Timestyle*, where “backward ran sentences until reeled the mind”, Luce was mostly concerned about many supposed inaccuracies in the profile, especially about *Time*’s salaries and profits when it was submitted to him during a conference with Ross before the profile was published. Ross replied “Perhaps it is but that, after all, is part of the parody of *Time*. [29] Incidentally, *Timestyle* had nothing to do with Luce’s input but was developed by Britton Hadden, the co-founder of *Time* who had died in early 1929 and had been quite influenced by Homeric epithets and ancient Greek syntax.

Ross was also concerned with inaccuracies in the tabloid gossip columns. The *New Yorker* went after Walter Winchell of the tabloid *Daily Mirror* in a six part profile in 1940. Numerous inaccuracies found and the general tenor of the profile on Winchell so upset him that he had Ross

and the profile writer ejected from the Stork Club, Winchell's de facto office where he wrote his breathless prose. Winchell never forgave him and once reported to *Daily Mirror* readers that Ross didn't wear undershorts, whereby Ross mailed him the undershorts he was wearing when Ross was apprised of the comment. [30]

In all fairness to Henry R. Luce, in 1943, during WW II, he established and financed a Commission of Inquiry on Freedom of the Press, a group chaired and selected by Robert M. Hutchins, then President of the University of Chicago. Three years later the commission wrote a preliminary report "A Free and Responsible Press", that commented: "The first requirement is that the media should be accurate. They should not lie". Other considerations were providing significant ideas contrary to their own, identifying the sources of its facts, opinions, and arguments so that the reader can judge them. [31]

Henry Luce and his magazines closely and strongly supported Willkie in 1940. However, again, in all fairness to him, there was an allowance an occasional even-handed approach to news analysis. For example, in *Life* magazine at the time just before the election that year, two articles side by side were entitled "The Case Against Willkie" and "The Case Against Roosevelt". [32] Luce himself had a signed editorial declaring the non-voter as "traitor to the Republic" and would not shake hands with or sit down for a meal with him. EB White, commenting on this in the *New Yorker*, complained that this put him in a bind because if he heeded both articles he could not vote for either one and since it was now impossible to vote he was now a traitor and would need a small table for himself if he was at a party with Luce.

Although the *New Yorker* Notes and Comments section has become a virtually continuous editorial about the Trump administration and Congress, before World War II Ross was adamant about keeping politics out of his magazine, although sometimes profiling political personalities. At the time, it had no political agenda like *Time* magazine. *The New Yorker* largely ignored the depression, the Spanish Civil War, the New Deal and racial upheaval in those days. Until the war, in its editorial stand, according to one writer, the magazine was on record as "being against the use of poisonous spray on fruit, and against the trend in automobile design that narrows the driver's field of vision by lowering the front seat" [33] However, EB White, the prolific writer and anchor of the *New Yorker*, did manage to slip in a commentary on the national despair in his Notes and Comments section during the height of the depression:

“We walked over to Union Square the other day to dry out our soul in the sun, and sat awhile with the dismal on the benches....Uneasily we glanced around at our countrymen. The only precious blessing most of them were in possession of was the cup of coffee they had recently got from the relief shanty nearby. In such graven words, it seemed to us, the disconsolate must taste the ultimate bile”. [34]

I will conclude with the results of a Gallup poll earlier this month reported by David Leonhardt and Stuart Thompson in the *New York Times* November 8th on the percentage of persons having a great deal of confidence in newspapers between last year’s presidential election and the present. Overall, such confidence increased from 20% to 29% overall (Democrats 28% to 45%, but Republicans *decreased* from 15 to 11%). For TV news, such confidence increased from 21% to 24% (Democrats 25% to 35%, Republicans *decreased* 14% to 12%). The important message in my estimation is that there is a considerable gap in how persons of different political persuasions have confidence in news reporting, but in overall assessments, confidence in news reporting remains quite low.

One objective of the *New York Times*, issued by Adolph Ochs, who became publisher in 1896, was to print the news without fear or favor. We are presently in a time when objectivity is being replaced increasingly by misinformation. Ultimately, this may impinge on how we view our country. We are reminded of Benjamin Franklin’s response to a question about what kind of a government would be constructed. “A republic if you can keep it”. To paraphrase Franklin, vigilant news media are essential in maintaining “A democracy if you can keep it”.

As for myself, I must allude to the words of the late author and playwright, SN Behrman, writing in 1970, in his late 70’s the height of the Vietnam War: [35]

“The country has taken on a frightening aspect. It seems to have become plutocracy, cruel, capable of atrocities, which has darkened its image all over the world. I say to myself: Why should I care? In a short time I will know nothing about anything. But I care. I care deeply”. Good night and good luck.

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