

## **“Is Media Performance Democracy’s Critical Issue?”**

A luncheon speech by

[Tom Stites](#), editor/publisher  
[UU World Magazine](#)

To the first Media Giraffe Project summit conference at the  
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Ever since I arrived here at the University of Massachusetts on Wednesday evening for the Media Giraffe summit, I’ve not been able to shake an irony: The first time I ever gave a speech to a journalism audience was almost exactly 25 years ago, right here at UMass, and despite the passage of a quarter century what I’m here to talk about today isn’t all that different from my topic way back then.

I wasn’t yet 40, and was the national trends editor of *The New York Times*. A UMass student who’d been a productive stringer invited me to speak, and she and her classmates gave me the topic: the future of print journalism in an electronic age. So here we are at UMass again, with the electronic age much more advanced and journalism’s quandaries much more vexing, especially when we think about them in the context of our faltering democracy. And still we’re trying to solve the puzzle that is the future of journalism.

Now just because I have a white beard and a long resume doesn’t mean that I’m going to stand up here and regale you with stories about the good old days of newspapers. The most fundamental reason for this is that except for a few places – newspapers owned by civic-minded families in St. Louis, Louisville, Des Moines, Nashville, and Hartford come to mind – the good old days weren’t so good.

*The Philadelphia Inquirer* has been the subject of attention at this conference because the paper’s new owners took control while we’ve been meeting here, so let’s use it as a case in point. *The Inquirer’s* history disproves the myth that family ownership is inherently good. Until 1970 it had been owned for two generations by the Annenberg family. In that year the publisher, Walter Annenberg, sold it to Knight Newspapers – this was before Knight and Ridder joined to become the company that has just been dismantled again. I was the first editor the Knight management hired. At that point, the newspaper that in only a few years would all but corner the market on Pulitzer Prizes was arguably the worst major daily in America. And let me tell you that this is saying a lot, because there were some truly wretched dailies. Some of them were second and third papers in rusting industrial cities; some were doomed afternoon papers full of fluff and police stories with quotes that strained credulity, and for very good reason; some were aging Hearst and Scripps-Howard properties that would make you yearn to read the quality of journalism found today in the least of Dean Singleton’s papers; some were owned by politically corrupt local families.

So what made *The Inquirer* so terrible? The weirdest thing was that it was full of book serializations. Sometimes they even started on Page One. I am told that at one point *The Inquirer* was serializing six books at the same time. So how much space could there be for news? But this is merely weird, and relatively benign.

Try this: Annenberg had a society columnist who was paid a breathtaking salary and reported directly to him. Who she wrote about was often determined by who Annenberg was trying to butter up socially. When he really wanted to trowel it on, he'd have his columnist write something flattering about his social target and order that the column run on Page One.

And then there were Annenberg's political shenanigans – he shamelessly used his news columns to embarrass candidates who dared to run against his favorites. One day in 1966 a Democrat named Milton Shapp held a press conference while running for governor and Annenberg's hand-picked political reporter asked him only one question. The question was, "Mr. Shapp, have you ever been admitted to a mental institution?" "Why no," Shapp responded, and went away scratching his head about this odd question. The next morning he didn't need to scratch his head any more. A five-column front page *Inquirer* headline read, "Shapp Denies Mental Institution Stay." I'm not making this up. I've seen the clipping – a friend used to have a framed copy above his desk. Those were not the good old days. Too bad there were no bloggers back then – what a field day!

These days we wring our hands about ethical transgressions that pale in comparison to Annenberg's and those of many other shameless publishers who once ran newspapers across the land. Whatever becomes of *The Inquirer* in the hands of its newest new owners, it will be a shadow of the newspaper it was in the golden era when Gene Roberts led it to 17 Pulitzers in 18 years starting in the 1970s. But it likely will be a much better paper than *The Inquirer* of the Annenberg era. Or, at least, much less bad.

One thing the old *Inquirer* did better was to sell newspapers. In 1968 its circulation was 473,000; now it is 350,000. But in 1968, *The Inquirer* was the No. 2 paper in town, trailing the family-owned *Bulletin*, an afternoon paper that folded in 1982 after more than a decade of brutal competition with *The Inquirer*. The combined daily circulation of two downtown broadsheets in 1968 was – get this – 1,121,000. That's more than triple what *The Inquirer* sells today. And since *The Inquirer*'s peak two decades ago, it has lost more than a third of its circulation, joining in the circulation decline that causes so much hand-wringing and helps inspire people like us to come together and try to solve the puzzle that is the future of journalism.

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Before I plunge into the meat of what I have to say today, let me pause to acknowledge that very few people in this room have ever heard of me or of the magazine that I've edited for the last decade – and to thank Bill Densmore for sticking his Giraffe neck out and inviting me to speak anyway. And to thank you for having the guts to come listen to someone you don't know much about. Or maybe it's the free lunch. Whatever.

So let me lay out what sociologists might call my social position within journalism. I've come to love the label Bill Densmore hung on me in his early literature about this conference: veteran journalist. It just happens to be quite accurate, and it's a handy replacement for an identity that I've long savored, but one that has been overtaken by technology: ink-stained wretch.

I first went to work in a newsroom in 1962. I've worked for an embarrassingly long list of newspapers, mostly in Chicago and New York. I've held every kind of reporting job from obit writer to columnist to national correspondent, and every kind of editing job from the copy desk rim to managing editor. I've been the editor of two print magazines and the publisher of three; I started an electronic publishing venture more than a decade ago and today am the publisher not only of a print magazine but also its partner magazine on the World Wide Web. Despite my focus so far on the ancient technology of newspapers, I'm not a total troglodyte. I read some

blogs and get RSS feeds. I contributed some thoughts that my friend Dan Gillmor quoted in *We the Media*, his seminal book on citizen journalism.

With a resume as long as mine, it's obvious that I have a weakness for greener grass. My wife's diagnosis is that I'm unstable. My own take is that my weakness for greener grass is partly due to an entrepreneurial streak but mostly it's because I'm never satisfied with the way news is done and I'm always looking for opportunities to make it better.

The last decade has been a fascinating one for me, in that I've stepped away from the news culture and have found that a detached perspective can be fascinating. I may not be in step with many of you who have been immersed in the news culture in the decade I've been on the sidelines, but I suspect that my vantage point may allow me to see some patterns that may be harder to discern from close up.

During my decade of detachment it's been easy for all of us to see that our democracy has eroded to the point that Sandra Day O'Connor gave a speech shortly after retiring from the Supreme Court in which she warned that the United States could become a dictatorship. Let me remind you that this comes from a Reagan appointee, not exactly a Troops Home Now/Impeach Bush advocate. Given the growing power of antidemocratic institutions in our political system that are fueling an imperialistic administration – especially huge corporations, plutocratic wealth, and a strain of Christians with strong theocratic impulses – I tremble when I think about democracy's future in the United States of America. And given journalism's challenges, I'm sure that all of us are trembling.

I'm fixated on democracy because its foundation is the conscience, and conscience, along with the ability to reason, is what distinguishes us from other animals and makes us human. True democracy – not the false definition so popular in Washington that democracy is “a form of government where capital has free reign and elections are held now and then” – true democracy is the collective expression of the citizens' consciences. However wide of the mark this expression may be, it is way preferable to authoritarian forms of government that can force us to act in ways that offend our consciences. To the extent that external authorities can do this, our humanity is diminished – and we are subjects rather than citizens.

I care about journalism down to the marrow of my bones – it's in my DNA – but without democracy meaningful journalism is impossible. And vice versa. That's why I'm here today, answering the call to address the question, “Is media performance democracy's critical issue?”

Well, my answer is *yes*. And from my detached perspective I think that all the attention this conference is paying to print, blogs, citizen journalism, and ownership forms, while much needed, is also obscuring a bigger and more serious problem.

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Let me start with some definitions. I too am taken by the clever Jay Rosen phrase that's the buzz of the conference – “the people formerly known as the audience.” I understand that many of these people are now participants, not just receivers of news but content choosers and content creators, and I understand how valuable this is to the adhesion of our communities and thus to democracy. This positive phenomenon is advancing rapidly in our culture, and I'm cheering lustily as it does.

That said, for purposes of this talk, I'm going to use two old-fashioned terms: “citizen” and “reader.” Yeah, I know, I know, “reader” is a passé concept, a word for a passive recipient of stuff that editors choose. But there is reason to use the word anyway.

In late 1980s the late Neil Postman wrote an enduringly important book called *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. In it he says that Marshall McLuhan only came close to getting it right in his famous adage, that the medium is the message. Postman corrects McLuhan by saying that the medium is the metaphor – a metaphor for the way we think.

Written narrative that people can read, Postman goes on, is a metaphor for thinking logically. And he says that image media bypass reason and go straight to the emotions. The image media are a metaphor for not thinking logically. Images disable thinking, so unless people read and use their reason democracy is disabled as well.

So I don't care whether people read written narrative from newsprint or from a screen, and while participation in the news process is important it's OK with me if people are passive receivers of written narrative that's selected by editors. What matters is that they read news, that their reason is engaged, that they are equipped as well as they can be to be effective citizens.

I'm talking democracy here. Thus *readers*. Thus *citizens*. I'm here to advocate for the citizens – all citizens – and for broad and robust democracy enabled by robust quality journalism.

Also because I'm talking democracy, I've been focusing my remarks on mass market newspapers. That's because they are still the most natural and thus the best medium for conveying serious reporting to large numbers of people – about 55 million Americans a day pick one up. Both radio and television can produce serious reporting and distribute it widely – NPR and PBS and some network magazine shows prove this as a matter of routine – but both broadcast media do other things more naturally and thus better. And the Web's interactivity ensures that it can do some things far better than print can. But while the Web is highly democratic within the slice of the population that uses it intensively, so far this slice is small and elite.

With this as a backdrop, let's finally turn to the huge problem whose contours I see lurking behind the high-profile problems that concern all of us.

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What really makes me twitch is that the amount and distribution of serious reporting that people can read are both dwindling, and they're dwindling in a way that all but cuts off citizens who are less than affluent – the hourly wage earners, the marginally self-employed, the Wal-Mart shoppers, the regular folks of America. This is to say most folks. Shortly I'm going to provide you with some fresh and surprising statistics that show how negative this trend is. But let me start by saying that cutting these citizens off from serious reporting is profoundly antidemocratic in and of itself. It distorts the political process by ensuring that a lot of people don't have the solid information they need to make sound life and citizenship judgments.

Keep in mind that we're talking about a huge population of people quite unlike the information elite who populate this room – people whose average wages have been declining for years after inflation is taken into account, who may be dealing with predatory lenders and have a negative net worth, whose job security tends to be eroding, who may be working more than one job, who include almost all the 45 million Americans without health insurance. Journalism doesn't serve this huge population if it is written and presented only in ways that appeal to people with disposable income to spend on nice furnishings for their suburban houses and who worry about how best to get a second opinion on a medical diagnosis. In fact, to people whose challenge is how best to see just one doctor without ending up in the poorhouse, that kind of reporting is an affront. So is all the lavish coverage of personal finance. And this is the state of our daily newspapers today.

Citizens who have no access to serious journalism about the issues that are relevant to their lives end up awash in the propagandistic opinion media and in the sound bite vapidness of standard broadcast news. Without serious journalism that they can read to equip them with facts and engage their reason, some respond to this sorry state by disenfranchising themselves in hopelessness; others vote the opinions drilled into them by the manipulative cable news diatribes.

*What's the Matter with Kansas?* Thomas Frank famously asked in his book title. I submit that a big part of what's wrong is that lots of Kansans – especially less affluent Kansans who voted their conservative values and thus elected people to Congress who were sure to legislate against their economic interests – these citizens were bereft of serious reporting they could read and thus saw and heard only endless propagandistic opinions from the only media left in their lives.

Let's unpack this. I'll save the most troubling part for last, and start with what I mean by the term *serious reporting*.

Serious reporting is based in verified fact passed through mature professional judgment. It has integrity. It engages readers – there's that word again, *readers* – with compelling stories and it appeals to their capacity for reason. This is the information that people need so they can make good life decisions and good citizenship decisions. Serious reporting is far from grim and solemn and off-putting. It is accessible and relevant to its readers. And the best serious reporting is a joy to read.

Serious reporting emanates largely from responsible local dailies and national and foreign reporting by big news organizations, print and broadcast. But the reporting all these institutions do is diminishing. With fewer reporters chasing the news, there is less and less variety in the stories citizens see and hear. The media that are booming, especially cable news and blogs, do precious little serious reporting. Or they do it for specialized audiences. And this brings me to the most troubling part of my message today.

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Why is it that less-than-affluent Americans are being zoned out of serious reporting? Elite audiences like this one often jump to the conclusion that “those people” are undereducated and don't read much. But less affluent people do read. Wal-Mart is one of the Big Four booksellers, the others being Borders, Barnes & Noble, and Amazon. Harris poll data show that year after year about 30 per cent of citizens report reading as a favored leisure pursuit. Less-than-affluent people still read, it's just that a great many have stopped reading news.

Now here are my promised surprising statistics. They come from the Pew Center for the People and the Press. Every two years Pew does a survey that asks people whether they'd read a newspaper the day before. When Pew presents its findings, it breaks down the responses by age, and also by educational attainment. But it doesn't break the numbers down by income. Suspecting that the decline in newspaper readership has been disproportionately among the less affluent, I asked them to dig out that data for me.

To my astonishment, for people with annual household income from \$50 to \$75,000, Pew found that people answering that they'd read a newspaper the day before had actually increased by a percentage point between 1998 and 2004, to 58 per cent from 57. And people with household incomes of \$75,000 and up declined by five points, to 55 per cent from 60. But the study did not ask about reading newspapers on line, and the higher one's income the likelier one is to be what another Pew effort, the Internet & American Life Project, calls “high-powered broadband users” – 46 per cent have household incomes of more than \$75,000 annually. And Harris Poll data show that 26 per cent of people who read newspapers on line report reducing their use of

other media, including newspapers. I would be one of these people – I get print papers delivered only on the weekend and read them on line during the week. If you ask me whether I read a newspaper yesterday, five days out of seven I'd answer no.

The data I've gathered don't create a complete picture, and thus force us to extrapolate a bit, but I think it's safe to conclude that that affluent, educated citizens are still reading quality journalism.

This is good news. Now for the bad: For citizens with household incomes of less than \$50,000, readership has plummeted. For people in households earning \$30,000 to \$50,000, readership is down by 13 points, to 35 per cent from 48; for people in \$20,000-to-\$30,000 households, it's down by 9 points, to 34 per cent from 43 per cent, and for people in households with less than \$20,000 income, it's down 11 points, to 27 per cent from 38 per cent. In terms of percentage of decline, the falloff exceeds 20 per cent for all three of these groups – in only six years.

Part of this can be explained by young people entering their earning years with modest salaries and advanced technology habits, and surveys show that today's young people spend less time on news than their counterparts of earlier years. But even taking this into account, what we're talking about here is a class divide – two classes of citizens, one that's well served with quality reporting and one that's left to the vagaries of the manipulators. Given our country's cherished values, this is a disgrace. And it is a terrible threat to democracy, which we all know can't function without a well-informed citizenry.

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So what's causing this? There are many variables. The number of media competing for our attention just keeps expanding. Younger people are far more adept with technology than their elders – although the Harris Poll finds significantly more GenXers reading national newspapers than the overall population. But here's a variable that gets almost no attention: How editors choose what stories to cover and how to frame them.

In this era of discount retailers like Wal-Mart that advertise very little, newspaper advertising tends to come from upscale retailers. Responding to the wishes of these advertisers, publishers no longer want nonaffluent readers. Over the last three decades, newspapers have increasingly reflected that.

Now I'm going to revert to a couple of contrasting stories about the old days. When I was breaking in as a reporter, I ran the police beat for *The Kansas City Times*. The managing editor, a crusty old guy named John Chandley, explained that he wanted me to provide at least a short item about every siren heard each night in all parts of the city, so our readers would know what had happened. And he meant all parts of the city, rich and poor. This kept me hustling, and to this day I remember the lesson: The newspaper I worked for wanted to sell papers to every household in the area. They wanted 100 per cent market penetration, or as close as they could come to 100 per cent. In 1962 and 63, when I was a police reporter, dailies everywhere wanted 100 percent market penetration. *Newsday*, where I worked in the 1970s, approached 85 per cent penetration at its peak, the record for American newspapers. Now it's about 40 per cent. David Laventhol, *Newsday's* editor when I worked there, wanted to make sure his staff valued all the paper's readers. "Never forget that you're writing for the man in the bowling alley," he told us over and over, back in the days before gender-neutral language became the norm.

Now fast-forward to the late 1980s. By this time I was associate managing editor of *The Chicago Tribune*, and all the talk among the news management was about editing the paper for the top two quintiles of the income distribution. That means that 40 percent market penetration is the goal, not 100 percent, and that *The Trib* cares little about 60 percent of the people who might be

its readers. And these people are the men and women in the bowling alley. Why doesn't *The Trib* care? Because these days nonaffluent people shop at Wal-Mart, and advertisers like Lord and Taylor and stores that sell fancy wines don't want to pay for circulation among people who can't afford their wares. It's as simple as that.

Now almost all metro dailies want only the affluent readers. Everybody else is what advertisers call "waste." So publishers simply ignore the interests of the bowling alley set, or write about "them" only as statistics or as the objects of debates among economists and policy analysts. I am absolutely confident that it takes these "waste" readers – more than half of all Americans – very little time perusing the local daily to see that reading further is a waste of their time.

There are no villains here; this change has been gradual and inexorable as old department stores went out of business and discounters became dominant. It was 30 years ago when *The New York Times* set the path that all big dailies have followed by abandoning its historic two-section format to become a four-section daily. It did this by adding a daily business section as well as a variety of special feature sections. Abe Rosenthal, who died this year, is lionized for leading the way with these sections, which attracted waves of new advertising and revenue that protected *The Times's* vast news-gathering budget. Papers all over the country aped *The Times*, and now every metro daily has a daily business section that covers employment reports by assessing their impact on the stock market and feature sections that extol buying fancy new furnishings for your suburban house and health sections that offer advice on how best to get a second opinion on a diagnosis.

In the same period, newspaper staffs have become more and more educated and thus inclined to quote experts who talk in abstractions and jargon and discuss less-than-affluent citizens as statistics. So: Is there any wonder that less affluent Americans have abandoned newspapers and are angry at the press? They've abandoned newspapers – the primary source of serious reporting – because the newspapers have abandoned them.

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Let's see if we can bring this less abstract. Twenty percent of American adults shop at Wal-Mart weekly. How many of you shop at Wal-Mart weekly? Raise your hands. How many of have shopped at Wal-Mart at least once in the last six months? Hands up. Now, how many of you are among the 45 million Americans who don't have medical insurance? Hands up.

The group in this room is largely composed of the people who the upscale advertisers want, and thus who newspapers want as readers. And we're the journalists, the gatekeepers making judgments about how to present the news in ways that's relevant to readers. One of the primary rules of marketing is that if you believe your customers are like you, you're headed to failure. Do we have a clear idea of who our readers are, or who they might be, how they differ from us?

Here's a challenge: Imagine with me that you're a 39-year-old single mother of three daughters. You live in East Boston and ride the Blue Line to work long and unpredictable hours in a retail job near Downtown Crossing. One daughter is grown and married, one is living at home and working part time while attending a community college, and the third is still in high school. Your family has no health insurance. You shop, sparingly and carefully, at Wal-Mart. Now and then, when you can afford it, you go bowling.

I'm serious about this. I want you to imagine really being this person. Close your eyes, and conjure up your three daughters. These are nice young woman. First picture the married one, next the one living at home, and now, finally, the teenager still in high school. Imagine not having medical insurance, imagine the worry and stress. Imagine skimping at Wal-Mart. Settle into this role.

Now I'm going to put up some clips of stories that *The Boston Globe* published in just one issue this week, Tuesday to be exact. Stay in your role as you look at these slides, and reflect with me on whether *The Globe* is a newspaper that understands you and presents news in a way that's relevant to your life.

I'm going to channel for our mom now, and while I do, stay in your role. Here we go, starting with [the front page](#).

Down in the lower left corner is the only human interest story on the page. Who's this about? [The music director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra](#). I wonder what a music director does. And how much does a ticket to the symphony cost, anyway?

So much for Page A1. Let's take a look at B1. Ah, here's a [story about a tugboat](#). Lots of people who go down to Cape Cod for vacations love this old tugboat, because they get to drive by it real slowly in the terrible traffic, at the Bourne Rotary. Let's see, how often do my daughters and I get a chance to vacation at the Cape?

I guess I might as well move on to the next section. Right here on page C1, I see a story about [a radio station](#): It's WCRB, and it plays classical music. People who like that kind of music were concerned that it might have to go off the air, but now it looks like it won't. People who like that kind of music must be relieved. Myself, I've never had a chance to go to hear the symphony in person – the tickets cost so much – so here's a free way to listen to some classical music. Too bad it's gospel music I like.

Wait a minute! Inside this section, on Page C4, here's a review for gospel night at the Boston Pops. Geez, I wonder how much those tickets cost?

Moving on to E1, the business section, here's a big headline at the top of the page – [houses in Massachusetts are getting cheaper](#). The median price is down by 4 per cent, to only \$331,000. Let's see, at \$11.50 an hour, can I afford that?

And inside the section, here's a [columnist who wants to help me save money](#). I sure could use some help. Now this is a big room, so I can't imagine that you can read the text, so let me read Humberto Cruz's helpful words about 401(k) matching plans for you:

*Even free money can't get millions of Americans to save.*

*Instead, the best way to get them to do it is to force them, unless they specifically say they don't want to.*

*I've come to this conclusion after years of reviewing studies and research papers.*

I'm impressed that you're an expert, Mr. Cruz, but I sure wish you had the expertise to get my employer to offer a 401(k) matching plan.

Mr. Cruz goes on in his column to explain why is it that even free money can't get millions of Americans to save. One reason he cites is the burden of everyday expenses, and I can certainly understand that. But he also quotes an expert named Utkus as saying that another reason people don't save is "plain inertia . . . a 'psychological inability' to do so." Mr. Cruz then quotes Mr. Utkus some more: "I call it the 'savings-averse' population," he says. "They put up a lot of reasons why they can't save." Cruz then adds that the problem "is often one of behavior, not finances." My. I don't have any savings. Is there something wrong with my behavior?

OK, let's turn to this cute little section called [Sidekick](#). This sounds real friendly. "Your Guide to a Better Day," it says. Gee! Right here on the front is something that sure would make my day better. The photo makes my mouth water. A restaurant that has a special on an order of [two lobsters](#) whose combined weight is five pounds. And how much does that cost? I guess I better turn the page.

Ah: Here's another suggestion for making my life better. [Shades of Green](#), the headline says. The story tells about an art exhibit at Dunia, which the paper says is "a self-described 'eco-store' with an art gallery" that's "good for the environment." An artist is showing her paintings and the story says that if I buy one, 20 per cent of my money will be donated to the Earthwatch Institute. I'm sure that's a good cause. I'll have to see if I have enough money left after I eat a couple of lobsters and go to hear the Boston Pops doing gospel music.

Did I neglect to mention that our imaginary mom has a sarcastic streak?

About the time I gave my 1981 speech here at UMass, a friend of mine named Larry Durocher published a parody called *Not The New York Times*. It sold hundreds of thousands of copies because it was so relentlessly funny. Instead of a Living Section, it had a Having Section, whose lead headline was, How to Insulate Your House with Pate. The *Globe* and *The Chicago Tribune* and *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and other regional dailies haven't gone quite that far, but the trend is heading that way.

There are 130 million Americans over 18 outside whose incomes are down the scale from the publishers' favored top two quintiles. Their lives have many particularities, and our fictional mom is only one of them. This is to say that I did not invent her as a stereotype. I invented her because my mother was a single parent who worked retail and I know how we struggled financially. Nonetheless, my mother subscribed to *The Kansas City Star* and read it every day. But that was back in the old days, the way-long-ago days when I was a kid, when newspapers still wanted everybody to read them. *The Star* was a two-section paper then. It didn't have fancy feature sections. And it wanted everybody in every neighborhood in the city to know about every siren.

My purpose here has not been to pick on the *Globe*. Given changes in retailing and thus advertising, the changes in newspapers have been inevitable.

I don't think my mother, or our fictional mom from East Boston, would mind a newspaper with these stories in it if the paper also had stories that addressed their interests. But the *Globe* I just picked apart has no stories offering people with no health coverage strategies for getting care without going bankrupt. Or pieces about how the state gigs low-income people with the lottery. Or analyses of the job market for weekly wage earners. Or a myriad of other things that are crucial to the lives of people the newspapers no longer care about.

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Abe Rosenthal wasn't the only major editor who died this year. My dear friend Bill Woo, William F. Woo, also left us. Bill was the first person to be named anything other than Joseph Pulitzer to be the editor of *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, and after he was run off by a change of management, he taught journalism at Stanford. I went to Bill's memorial service a few weeks ago, and it got me back in touch with the Pulitzer legacy – not just the prizes, but the philosophy that gave rise to them. When the original Joseph Pulitzer retired in 99 years ago, he wrote The Post-Dispatch Platform, which the paper has published daily ever since. Let me read it to you:

I know that my retirement will make no difference in its cardinal principles, that it will always fight for progress and reform, never tolerate injustice or corruption, always fight

demagogues of all parties, never belong to any party, always oppose privileged classes and public plunderers, never lack sympathy with the poor, always remain devoted to the public welfare, never be satisfied with merely printing news, always be drastically independent, never be afraid to attack wrong, whether by predatory plutocracy or predatory poverty.

When the original Pulitzer's grandson was publisher and Bill Woo was his editor, they'd go to lunch once a week to go over the previous week's papers and review how well they'd done in living out the planks of the Platform. They wanted to make sure that the paper never lacked sympathy with the poor and was never afraid to attack wrong, whether by predatory plutocracy or predatory poverty.

Now, instead of having sympathy for the poor our newspapers discard them. But so do many of us in this room. Many of us think about citizen journalism and blogs as the saviors of democracy, and while they certainly have impact and show lots of promise, so far they reach a much smaller and much more rarefied audience than daily newspapers. We talk of readers as the audience, as the users, and as the people formerly known as the audience, believing that they are participants in the news process now. It's much more accurate to say that some are participants now, and to acknowledge that the majority do not participate, and no small number never will. Many of us are committing the marketing sin of thinking the customers are like us. Some are like us, but most citizens are less educated than us, and make less money than us, and have far more uncertainty in their lives.

So my plea to all of us, myself included, is that we keep America's discarded readers in mind as we work to strengthen journalism and shore up our withering democracy. We need to remember that they're citizens, too, and to take care to make sure they have easy access to quality journalism that squarely addresses the issues that affect their lives. Unless we do, there's a good chance that our democracy is doomed. Or, at the very best, our democracy will be disfigured by a class divide that's the 21<sup>st</sup> century equivalent of our nation's earliest days, when voting was restricted to white male property owners.

So let's adopt Pulitzer's Platform as a creed for journalism, and heed the call of democracy to get quality news to everybody – *everybody*. Media performance really is democracy's critical issue. Much responsibility rests on us. If we can't do better – lots better – I fear for our nation's future.

Thank you very much.

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