



# The Rise of Mass Communications

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**History of Information i103**  
**Geoff Nunberg**  
**March 4, 2010**



## Today's Puzzlers

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Who said he would prefer newspapers without a government to a government without newspapers?



## Today's Puzzlers

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Who said he would prefer newspapers without a government to a government without newspapers?



## Today's Puzzlers

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What novel mode of distribution was pioneered by the *New York Herald* and the rest of the penny press?



## Itinerary: 3/31

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The emergence of mass communications: supply and demand

The emergence of the mass press

"Objectivity" and propaganda



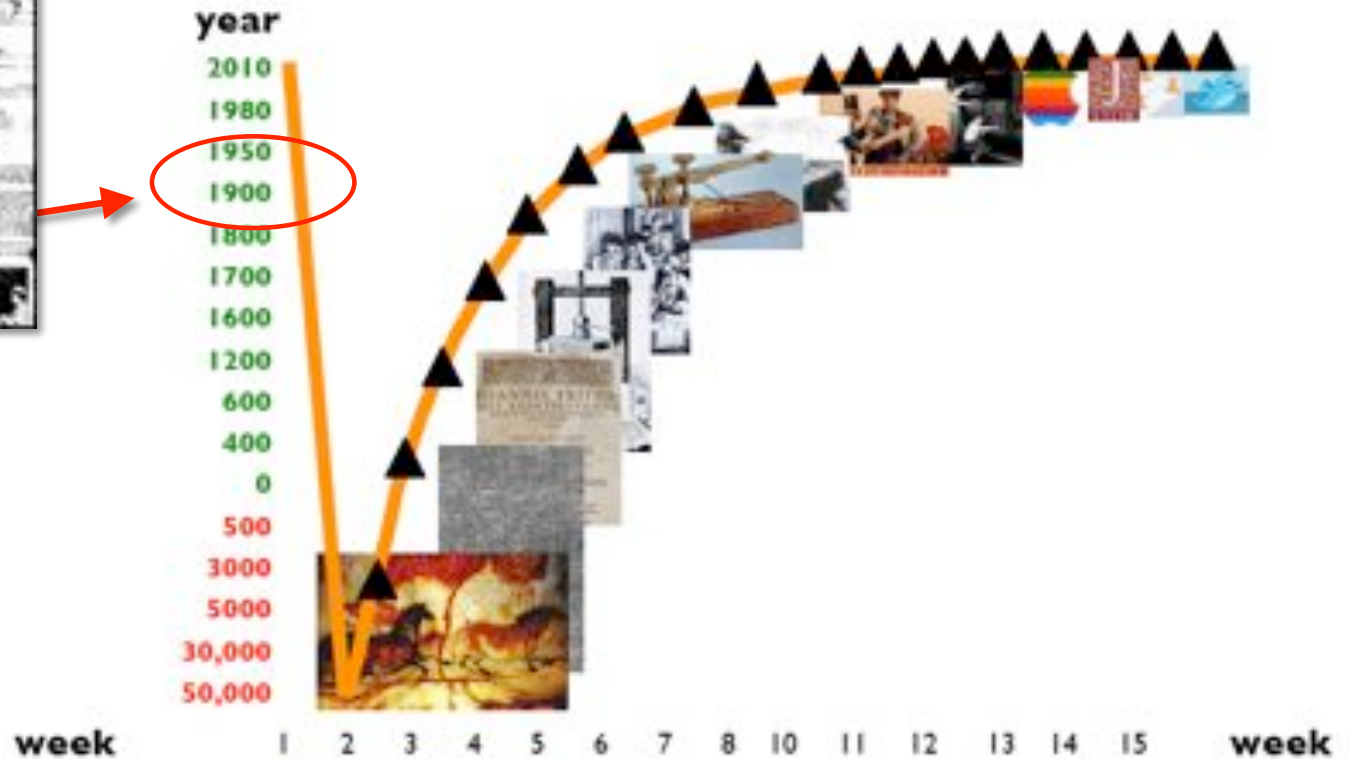
# Today's Puzzlers

What was the significance of *Freedom's Journal*, first published in New York in 1827?





# Where We Are





# The Rise of the Popular Press

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# "The First Information Revolution"

## Growth of common schools:

1800-1825: proportion of children in schools from 37 to 60%

## Increased literacy -- a "nation of readers"

Cf Thos. Paine's *Common Sense*

## Creation of the modern postal service

## Urbanization

## Democratization of commerce and politics

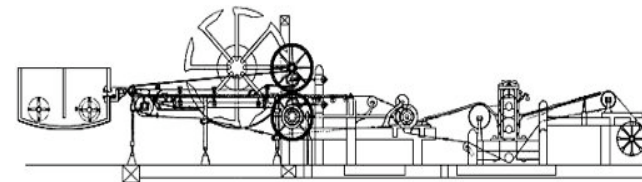
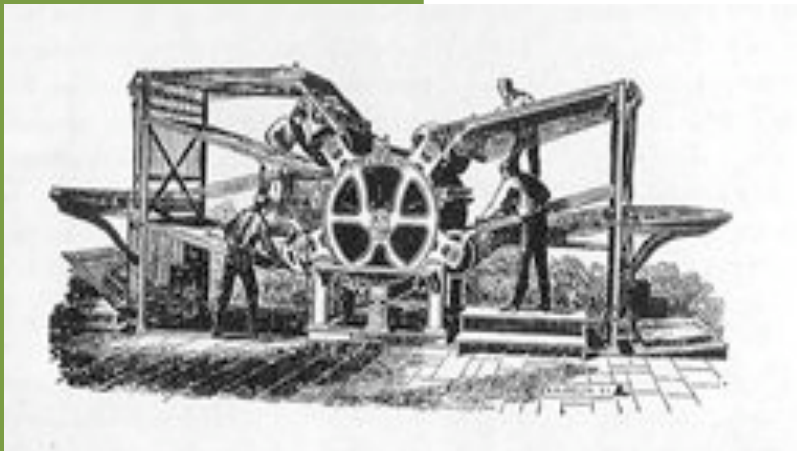


# The first information revolution

## technological advances:

steam press,  
paper-making machines  
stereotypes (Firmin Didot)  
rotary press:

invented by Richard Hoe, 1844; capable of  
20k impressions/hr



Foudrinier Machine, 1811



# The first information revolution

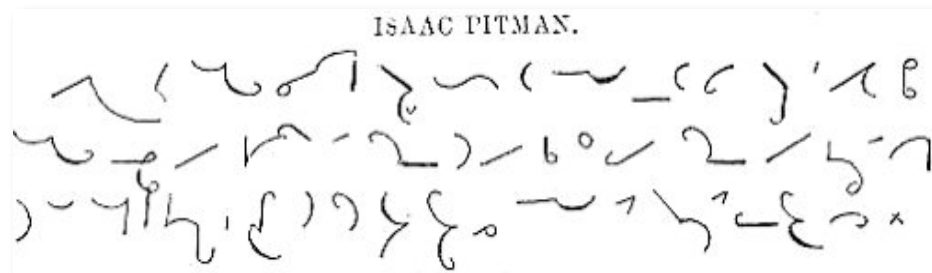


Stephenson's Rocket, 1827

## Further technological Advances:

Railroad, telegraph (from 1840's)

... not to mention shorthand

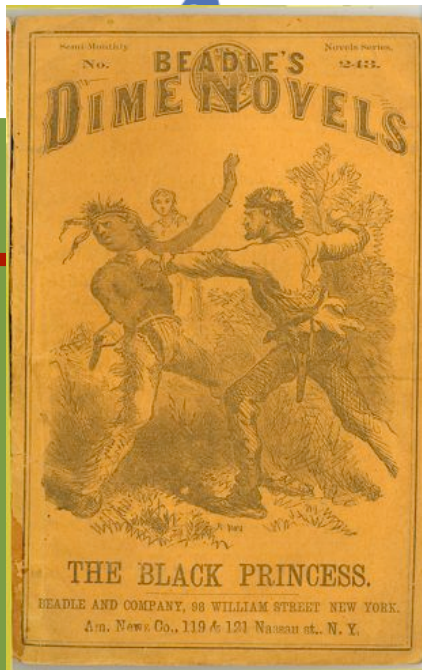


Pitman Shorthand 1837

# "The First Information Revolution"

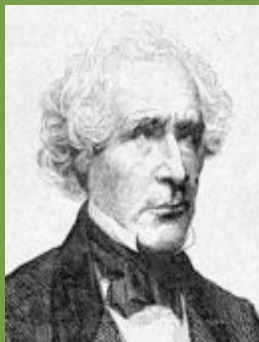
Rise of penny newspapers, circulating libraries, "dime novels," etc.

"the tawdry novels which flare in the bookshelves of our railway stations, and which seem designed... for people with low standards of life." Matthew Arnold, 1880





# Rise of the Penny Newspaper



James Gordon Bennett

## Penny newspapers:

less dependent on patronage, used professional reporters, "developed" stories, pioneered the interview



NY Herald, 1842



Helen Jewett





THE  
**POOR MAN'S GUARDIAN,**  
A Weekly Paper  
FOR THE PEOPLE.



PUBLISHED IN REPLACEMENT OF "LAW," TO THE POWER  
OF "JUSTICE," "AGRICULTURE," "MERCURY."

"A WEEKLY JOURNAL DEVOTED TO THE INTERESTS OF THE PEOPLE."

Printed and Published by W. G. CROFT, at the Office of the Poor Man's Guardian, No. 15, St. Paul's Church-Yard, London.

No. 177 Saturday, February 1, 1834. [Price 1d.]

**THE KING SPEAKS.**

*Speech, London, and Police-Commissioner.*  
We would do well to read you a passage from the King's Speech. That speech is indeed, in its substance, a most excellent one, and contains all the good things for 1834 in a perfect manner. It is the greatest we have seen since the year 1794. It is the only one in which the King has spoken in the language of a philosopher, and not of a monarch. It is the only one in which he has spoken in the language of a patriot, and not of a monarch. It is the only one in which he has spoken in the language of a statesman, and not of a monarch. It is the only one in which he has spoken in the language of a reformer, and not of a monarch. It is the only one in which he has spoken in the language of a philosopher, a patriot, a statesman, and a reformer, and not of a monarch.

We beg pardon, there is some resemblance in the words of the King's Speech, to the words of the King's Speech, in the year 1794. It is the only one in which he has spoken in the language of a philosopher, a patriot, a statesman, and a reformer, and not of a monarch. It is the only one in which he has spoken in the language of a philosopher, a patriot, a statesman, and a reformer, and not of a monarch.

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This is the way of all these things. They come out as naturally as the dew, and when they come out, they are as natural as the dew. The Poor Man's Guardian has been established as a rival to the King's Speech, but not a rival to the King's Speech. It is the only one in which he has spoken in the language of a philosopher, a patriot, a statesman, and a reformer, and not of a monarch. It is the only one in which he has spoken in the language of a philosopher, a patriot, a statesman, and a reformer, and not of a monarch.

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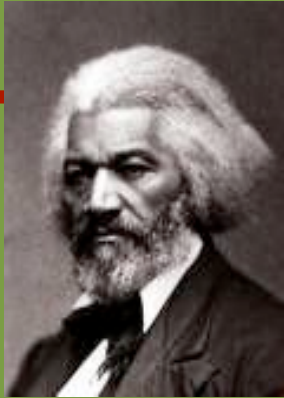


# The early radical press

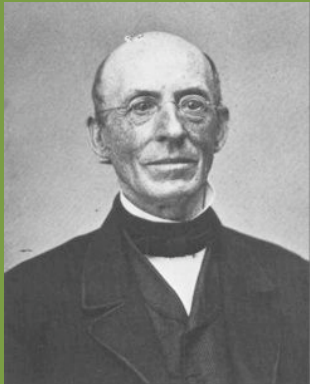
William Cobbett's Political Register in Britain achieves 44,000 weekly circulation in 1816



# The radical press



Frederick Douglass



Wm. Lloyd Garrison

North Star (Douglas), 1847; The Liberator (Garrison), 1831





## The press elsewhere

Parisian daily press goes from 50k copies in 1830 to 1.5m in 1880.

London *Daily Telegraph* launched in 1856. Circulation is 140k in 1860, 300k in 1890

*Who has not heard of Mount Olympus — that high abode of all the powers of type, that favoured seat of the great goddess Pica, that wondrous habitation of gods and devils, from whence, with ceaseless hum of steam and never-ending flow of Castalian ink, issue forth fifty thousand nightly edicts for the governance of a subject nation? Anthony Trollope on "The Jupiter" (London Times) in The Warden*



Le Figaro, 1856







## Localizing the news

“To my readers, an attic fire in the Latin Quarter is more important than a revolution in Madrid.

Hippolyte de Villemessant, founder of Le Figaro



Le Figaro, 1856



Villemessant



# Defining the "News"



## Localizing the news

“To my readers, an attic fire in the Latin Quarter is more important than a revolution in Madrid.

Hippolyte de Villemessant, founder of Le Figaro

"One Englishman is a story. Ten Frenchmen is a story. One hundred Germans is a story. And nothing ever happens in Chile." Posting in a London newsroom.



Le Figaro, 1856



Villemessant



# Defining "the News": Range of Content



Stories about developments in politics, world affairs, business, sports, natural disasters, accidents, crime, arts, science...

AND...

Reviews, weather, columns, announcements,

A "natural hierarchy" of importance?



## Prioritizing "the News"

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But of other features that make stories "newsworthy":

plane crashes > winter furnace breakdowns

crimes of rich criminals > incomes of poor criminals

breakthroughs in science > breakthroughs in auto repair

business news > labor news

(from Herbert Gans, *Deciding What's News*)



## Defining "the News"

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Also:

Famous people > unknown people (even when the famous people's acts are unrelated to the reasons for their fame)

disappearing blondes > disappearing brunettes >  
disappearing women of color



# Rise of the Mass Press



# The Second Newspaper Revolution



Joseph Pulitzer



Randolph Hearst

The *World*, the *Journal-American*; the birth of "yellow journalism"





# The Second Newspaper Revolution



"You supply the pictures and I'll supply the war"  
 attr. W. R. Hearst.



Richard Harding Davis



Does Our Flag Protect Women?  
 Indignities Practiced by Spanish Officials  
 on Board American Vessels. Refined  
 Young Women Stripped and Searched by  
 Brutal Spaniards While Under Our Flag

NY Journal, 2/12/1897



## The Birth of "Muckraking"



The connection to political Progressivism.

In Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" you may recall the description of the Man with the Muck-rake, the man who could look no way but downward, with the muck-rake in his hand...

Now, it is very necessary that we should not flinch from seeing what is vile and debasing. ... But the man who never does anything else, who never thinks or speaks or writes, save of his feats with the muck-rake, speedily becomes, not a help to society... but one of the most potent forces for evil. Theodore Roosevelt, 1906



# The Birth of "Muckraking"



Nellie Bly  
(Elizabeth Cochran)



Ida Tarbell



Lincoln Steffens





# The Birth of "Muckraking"



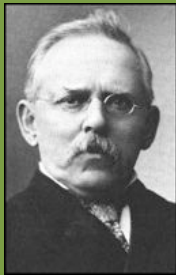
Upton Sinclair





# "Social Photography"

Photography and the awakening of social conscience



Jacob Riis:  
*How the Other Half Lives*



Lithograph prepared  
from Riis photo



# "Social Photography"



Lewis Hine  
Carolina Cotton Mill, 1909



"Some boys and girls were so small they had to climb up on to the spinning frame to mend broken threads and to put back the empty bobbins." Bibb Mill No. 1. Macon, Ga.



***"There were two things I wanted to do. I wanted to show the things that had to be corrected; I wanted to show the things that had to be appreciated" Lewis Hine***



# Social Photography



Walker Evans



"Let Us Now Praise Famous Men"

Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange, Farm Security Administration, mid-1930s



Evans



Lange, photos of Dust Bowl and Japanese relocation in WWII





# The emergence of "objectivity"

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“Reality’ is one of  
the few words that  
mean nothing  
without quotes.”  
V. Nabokov





## The "higher journalism"



1896: Adolph Ochs takes over the NY Times

Stresses "decency," reform, "respectability,"  
"information" journalism

Circulation goes from 9000 to 350,000 in 1920





# 19th c. forces leading to rise of "objectivity"

Weakening of partisanship.

1860 -- Gov't Printing Office established

Reform movement, civil services, beginnings of progressivism

Enlarged markets for mass-circulation press/  
increasing dependence on advertising

Professionalization of journalism -- creation of  
journalism courses & schools



## Growth of wire services

Its [The AP's] members [i.e. subscribers] are scattered from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from Canada to the Gulf, and represent every possible shade of political belief, religious faith, and economic sympathy. It is obvious that the Associated Press can have no partisan nor factional bias, no religious affiliation, no capitalistic nor pro-labor trend. Its function is simply to furnish its members with a truthful, clean, comprehensive, non-partisan...report of the news in the world as expeditiously as is compatible with accuracy...

Frank B. Noyes, president of the Associated Press, 1913



# Objectivity as a Conscious Norm



# The Components of Objectivity

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## Detachment:

Objective reporting is supposed to be cool, rather than emotional, in tone.

privileges "information" over "story"

My business is merely to communicate facts. My instructions do not allow me to make any comments on the facts I communicate. ... My despatches are merely dry matters of facts and detail. AP Washington bureau chief, 1866



# What makes for "objectivity"?

---



## "Facticity"

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# The Components of Objectivity

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## "Balance"

Objective reporting takes pains to represent fairly each leading side in a political controversy.

According to the objectivity norm, the journalist's job consists of reporting something called 'news' without commenting on it, slanting it, or shaping its formulation in any way."





Edwin Stanton

# Features of Objectivity

## The inverted pyramid

This evening at about 9:30 p.m. at Ford's Theatre, the President, while sitting in his private box with Mrs. Lincoln, Mrs. Harris and Major Rathburn, was shot by an assassin, who suddenly entered the box and approached behind the President.

The assassin then leaped upon the stage, brandishing a large dagger or knife, and made his escape in the rear of the theatre.

The pistol ball entered the back of the President's head and penetrated nearly through the head. The wound is mortal.

The President has been insensible ever since it was inflicted, and is now dying.

About the same hour an assassin, whether the same or not, entered Mr. Seward's apartment and under pretense of having a prescription was shown to the Secretary's sick chamber...

NY Herald, 4/15/1865



# Features of Objectivity



Edwin Stanton

The Lead: Who, what, where, when,  
why & how?

The most important info goes first.

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**BODY**

Develop your "news peg" with  
supporting info, interviews,  
overviews or references.

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As the story goes  
on, your details  
should become  
less & less  
important.

## The inverted pyramid

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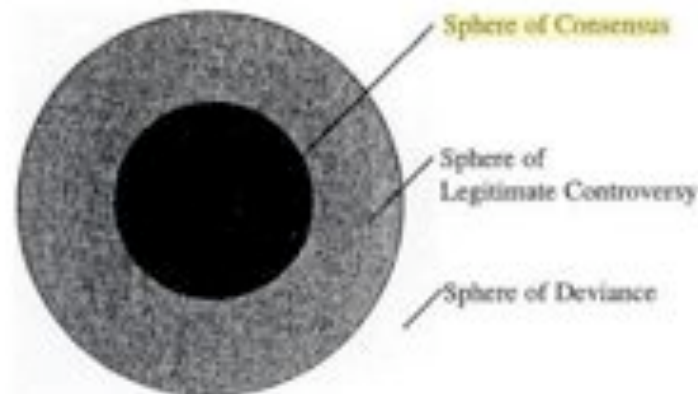
NY Herald, 4/15/1865



# What calls for objectivity – and what doesn't?

Balance etc. presume a common perspective

Cf. Hallin on “spheres” of public discourse



Shifting status: slavery, votes for women, gay marriage

## NEGROES LYNCHED BY A MOB

THREE SHOT TO DEATH AT MEMPHIS, TENN.

BINGLEADERS OF A PARTY WHICH AMBUSHED AND SHOT FOUR DEPUTY SHERIFFS — THE WATCHMAN WAS BOUND AND THE JAILER SLEPT.

MEMPHIS, Tenn., March 9.—At dawn this morning the dead bodies of three negroes riddled with bullets and partly covered with brush were found in a lot about one and a half miles from the heart of the city. The bodies as they lay outstretched told of the terrible work of masked men at 3 o'clock this morning.

The negroes, whose bodies were literally shot to pieces by this mob, were Calvin McDowell, William Stuart, and Theodore Moss.

The crime for which this summary vengeance was wreaked upon them was the ambushing and shooting down on Saturday night last of four Deputy Sheriffs in a negro locality known as the Curve while the officers were fulfilling their duty in looking for a negro for whose arrest they had a warrant.

About 3 o'clock this morning seventy-five men, all wearing masks, appeared in Front Street, near the jail. Whence they came no one hazards a guess. No one saw them assemble; no officer of the law noticed their passage through any streets, nor did any person intercept them in their quick and quiet march to the Shelby County Jail. At this time Watchman O'Donnell sat in the jail office having a chat with a friend named Seat. Suddenly

## The price of "impartiality"

ern circles that the British committee was moved to action upon the ex parte statements of a mulatto refugee, who was a refugee because she had imputed unchastity to the victims of negro outrages in the South. Upon the whole, we

"It is a peculiar fact that the crime for which Negroes have frequently been lynched, and occasionally been put to death with frightful tortures, is a crime to which negroes are particularly prone." NY Times editorial, 1894, decrying mob violence

"Nobody in this section of the country believes the old threadbare lie that Negro men rape white women."



Ida B. Wells



# The Rise of “Propaganda”

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Propaganda (OED) (More fully, Congregation or College of the Propaganda.) A committee of Cardinals of the Roman Catholic Church having the care and oversight of foreign missions, founded in 1622 by Pope Gregory XV.

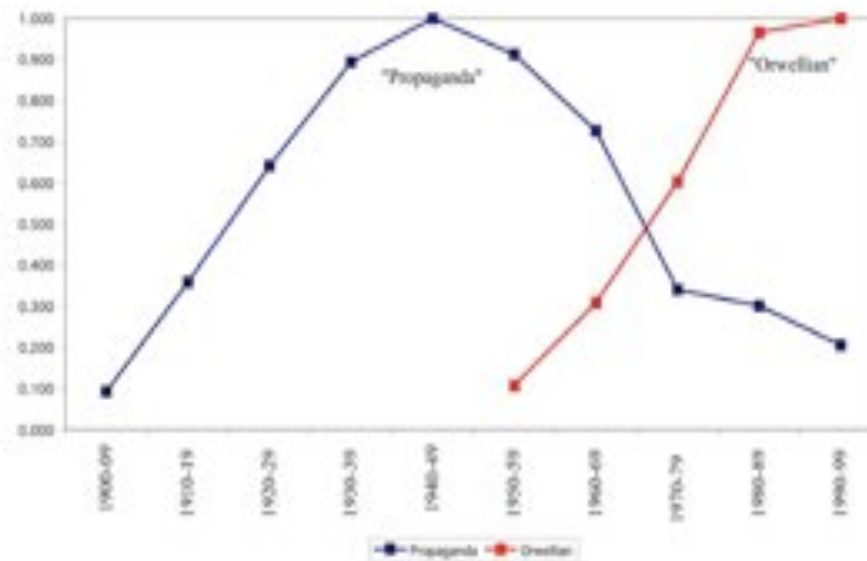
"Before 1914, 'propaganda' belonged only to literate vocabularies and possessed a reputable, dignified meaning... Two years later the word had come into the vocabulary of peasants and ditchdiggers and had begun to acquire its miasmatic aura." Will Irwin, Propaganda and the News

1922: Encyclopedia Britannica first includes propaganda as entry  
States begin to take a direct role in creating & diffusing pro-government views.



# The Rise of "Propaganda"

Average Annual Frequency of "Propaganda" and "Orwellian" in The New York Times, by Decade



# The rise of propaganda: 1914-1917

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WWI: Creel Committee, "4-minute men," etc.

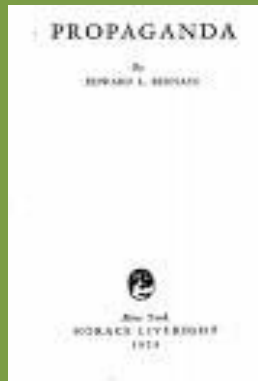
75,000 speakers to give short speeches & lantern-slide presentations

75 million booklets distributed, in multiple languages

"We did not call it propaganda, for that word, in German hands, had come to be associated with deceit and corruption. Our effort was educational and informative throughout. No other argument was needed than the simple, straightforward presentation of facts." George Creel



# After the War: The birth of the press agent



## Rise of publicists, press services.

The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country. ...We are governed, our minds are molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of.

Edward Bernays, 1928

## Increasing suspicion of propaganda:

1939 poll shows 40 percent of Americans blame propaganda for the US entry into the First World War.





# Reactions to Objectivity

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## Reactions to Objectivity

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Emergence of the daily columnist

Attacks on “objectivity” from the left

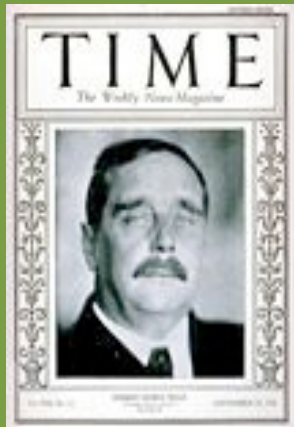
Arguments that objectivity is unattainable; the inevitability of subjectivity

The question is not whether the news shall be unprejudiced but whose prejudices shall color the news. Morris Ernst, 1937



# Reactions to Objectivity

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## The rise of “interpretive journalism”

Birth of *Time* magazine, 1926; offers “intelligent criticism, representation, and evaluation of the men who hold offices of public trust.” Henry Luce

“Show me a man who thinks he’s objective, and I’ll show you a man who’s deceiving himself.” Henry Luce

“a language in which nobody could tell the truth” -- Marshall McLuhan on *Time*-style



## Reactions to Objectivity, 2

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Acknowledgement of public's difficulty in digesting & interpreting "raw facts"

Cf Walter Lippmann, *Liberty and the News*, 1920:

Men who have lost their grip upon the relevant facts of their environment are the inevitable victims of agitation and propaganda. The quack, the charlatan, the jingo, and the terrorist can flourish only where the audience is deprived of independent access to information. But where all news comes at second-hand, where all the testimony is uncertain, men cease to respond to truths...



## The Shifting Meaning of "Bias"



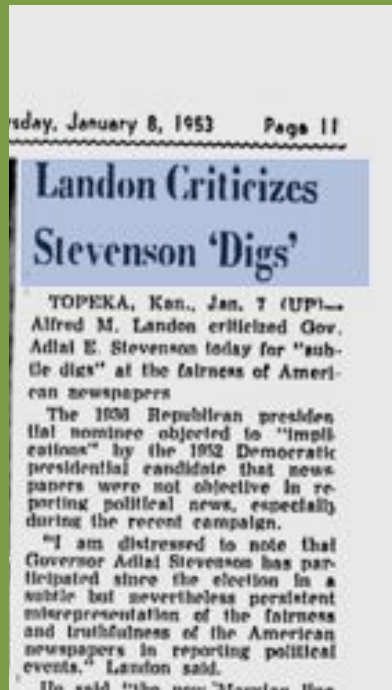
Cf Harold Ickes on press bias in early 1940's:

"The American press is not free.... because of its own financial and economic tie-ups [instead of] what it should be, a free servant of a free democracy."

Cites absence of newspaper reports on dep't store elevator accidents, Gannett's opposition to public ownership of utilities, etc.



## The Shifting Meaning of "Bias"



"I am distressed to note that Governor Adlai Stevenson has participated since the election in a subtle but nevertheless persistent misrepresentation of the fairness and truthfulness of the American newspapers in reporting public events. .. The new Marxian line of propaganda no longer is centering on Wall Streeters but the American press... [undermining] public confidence in the newspapers." Alf Landon, Jan 8, 1953



# The Shifting Meaning of "Bias"

1969 WSJ discounts Agnew's charge of media conspiracy to discredit Nixon administration; cites "unconscious slant" introduced by the "prevailing liberal tendencies of the national media."

Cf Albert H. Hastorf and Hadley Cantrill on 1951 Princeton/Dartmouth game: "They Saw a Game," 1954; selective perception

Changing meanings of "bias," "prejudice," etc. (not in OED)

TABLE 2  
DATA FROM SECOND QUESTIONNAIRE CHECKED WHILE SEEING FILM

GROUP	N	TOTAL NUMBER OF INFRACTIONS CHECKED AGAINST			
		DARTMOUTH TEAM		PRINCETON TEAM	
		MEAN	SD	MEAN	SD
Dartmouth students	48	4.3*	2.7	4.4	2.8
Princeton students	49	9.8*	5.7	4.2	3.5

\* Significant at the .01 level.



## Recent Attacks on Objectivity

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[M]embers of the media argued that while personally liberal, they are professionally neutral. They argued their opinions do not matter because as professional journalists, they report what they observe without letting their opinions affect their judgment. But being a journalist is not like being a surveillance camera at an ATM, faithfully recording every scene for future playback. Journalists make subjective decisions every minute of their professional lives. They choose what to cover and what not to cover, which sources are credible and which are not, which quotes to use in a story and which to toss out.

Brent Bozell, Media Research Center





# Recent Attacks on Objectivity, cont.

Attacks gather strength in 1990's

Rise in mentions of "liberal media bias"; outnumber mentions of "conservative media bias" by more than 20 to 1 (proportion rises to 30 to 1 by 2006).

"Bias" taken as matter of undisputed fact:

WSJ, 2002: media bias is "one of the facts of life so long obvious they would seem to be beyond dispute."

Cf Also Bernard Goldberg, in *Bias*: "The old argument that the networks and other 'media elites' have a liberal bias is so blatantly true that it's hardly worth discussing anymore"

Cf Fox slogan "Fair and Balanced" -- implications of advertising this claim; where is "objectivity"?



## Is "Objectivity" an Illusion?

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"I think we're coming to the end of the era of "objectivity" that has dominated journalism over this time. We need to define a new ethic that lends legitimacy to opinion, honestly disclosed and disciplined by some sense of propriety." Robert Bartley, WSJ

"Anyone listening to Rush Limbaugh knows that what he is saying is his own opinion. But people who listen to the news on ABC, CBS, or NBC may imagine that they are getting the facts, not just those facts which fit the ideology of the media, with the media's spin." Thomas Sowell.

NB: "Biased" now more likely to be applied to "objective" news sources (e.g., CNN, NY Times) than to openly opinionated source (e.g., Rush Limbaugh, Michael Moore)



# Bias, Balance, and Blogs

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2002 (or so) -- political blogs become a major force in political discourse

Unlike columnists, bloggers are (usually) detached from affiliations with newspapers or news institutions. Rather, exist in network of links...

Most (political) blogs are explicitly partisan.

Blogs function to mediate between “news sources” and “public opinion” -- perform interpretive function (despite occasional scoops)

Cf Blog “voice”: the new syntax of public(?) discourse.



# Ruptured Discourses

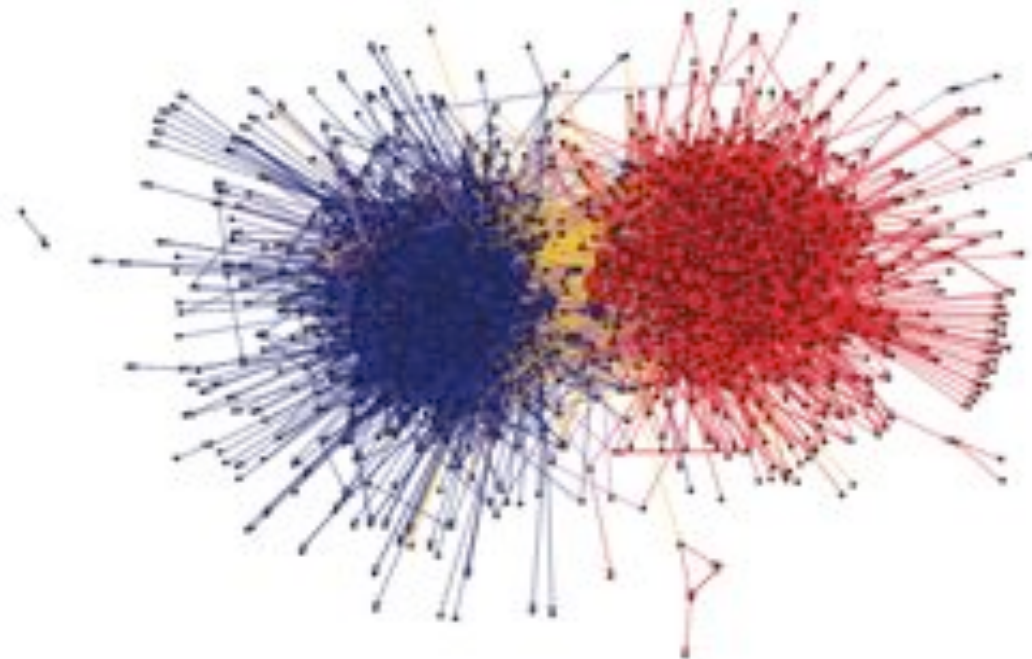


Figure 1: Community structure of political blogs (expanded set), shown using utilizing a GEM layout [11] in the GUESS[3] visualization and analysis tool. The colors reflect political orientation, red for conservative, and blue for liberal. Orange links go from liberal to conservative, and purple ones from conservative to liberal. The size of each blog reflects the number of other blogs that link to it.

Lada Adamic & Nathalie Glance, 2005, "Divided They Blog"