

## CHAPTER A

# The Chicago school

Park, R.E. (1967) 'The natural history of the newspaper', in Park, R.E., Burgess, E.W. and McKenzie, R.D. (eds) *The City*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

### INTRODUCTION TO THE CHICAGO SCHOOL

Why include a chapter on a school of thought which had its 'golden years' in the 1920s (Harvey 1987: 10)? There are five responses to this question, all of which mark out the Chicago school as a key and influential institution, and one which made a key contribution to theoretical ideas and approaches that have informed media, culture and communication studies.

The first is that researchers at the Chicago school were interested primarily in the relationship between communication and society. The second is that they were pioneers of qualitative research methods of social investigation (Scannell 2007: 10). The third is that their approach to the study of media and communication would today be more likely to be characterised as cultural studies (Williams 2003: 33). The fourth is that Robert Ezra Park, a founding member of the Chicago school, is renowned for producing some of journalism's classic texts (Briggs and Burke 2002: 2004).

The fifth and final reason is that Park produced an extremely innovative book, *The City*, which was first published in 1925, and from which the selected reading in this chapter is drawn. Today, some 80 or so years after this publication by Park, research into cities is very much back in vogue. This is particularly evident in the research and policy work being undertaken around the world in the creative and cultural industries (see, for example, Florida 2005; Hartley 2005).

In the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century mass society theories were prominent, with concerns about depersonalisation and the anonymity of society widely held. In this respect, Chicago, a fast growing and extremely diverse city, provided an ideal 'social laboratory' for a group of researchers who were

‘concerned with comprehensive schemes of social change and social planning [and] critical of superficial steps aimed at amelioration’ (Janowitz 1967: ix).

Initially a small town in the early part of the nineteenth century, the population of Chicago reached 1 million in 1890 – when the university was established – and by 1930 had expanded to 3,375,000. This growth relied largely on immigration, mainly Germans, Scandinavians, Irish, Poles, Jews, Czechs, Lithuanians and Croats, and by 1900 over half the city’s population had been born outside the United States (Bulmer 1984: 13).

Chicago was described as a city of paradoxes because of obvious exploitation and degradation – evidenced by industrial conflicts and criminality – but it was equally regarded as a centre of learning and culture as a result of its Symphony Orchestra, Art Institute and, later, its university (Bulmer 1984: 14). It was the burgeoning industrialisation, urbanisation and immigration of Chicago that led to a decision in the second decade of the twentieth century by the faculty of social sciences to make the city a focal point of study (Hughes 1969: 166).

The first major work on the city, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, was written by W.I. Thomas, a Chicago sociologist, and published by the University of Chicago Press in 1918–20 (Bulmer 1984: 3). This substantial work was the first of many research projects carried out by the Chicagoans and typified what was to become their *modus operandi*, that is, theoretically informed empirical research.

For example, their approach to a research problem generally relied on a number of methods, such as personal interviews and observation, life histories, personal documents and, to some degree, the use of statistics, in order to build up a ‘multifaceted picture of the problem under investigation’ (Bulmer 1984: 108). This approach signalled a marked shift from earlier research methods, which up until this period had relied predominantly on library-based work and abstract theorising (Bulmer 1984: 51).

While the city was the focal point of study, the subjects or topics of the research were varied. For example, studies published in the 1920s and 1930s included *The Negro in Chicago* (Johnson 1922), *The Hobo* (Anderson 1923), *Family Disorganization* (Mowrer 1927), *The Gang* (Thrasher 1927), *Suicide* (Cavan 1928), *The Ghetto* (Wirth 1928), *The Gold Coast and the Slum* (Zorbaugh 1929), *The Negro Family in Chicago* (Frazier 1931), *The Taxi-Dance Hall* (Cressy 1932), *Vice in Chicago* (Reckless 1933) and *Hotel Life* (Hayner 1936).

Whatever the population being studied, communication was always a primary focus and, for the Chicagoans, it was ‘a productively ambiguous concept’, as it ‘could refer to empirical practices such as journalism, or correspondence between America and the old country, but it could also serve as a normative criterion for judging human association’ (Katz et al. 2003: 104).

Although the subject of the reading in this chapter is the newspaper, work on mass communication by Chicago sociologists tended to occur in later years (see, for example, Horton and Wohl 1956; Lang and Lang 1953; Wirth 1948). For the Chicagoans, ‘communication processes, technologies and institutions’ were considered ‘fundamental to modern society’ (Rothenbuhler 2003: 108).

When media and communication studies emerged within university departments in the United States in the 1940s, it was the work of the Chicagoans that provided the ‘intellectual foundations’, even though their ‘cultural/historical interpretation of communication’ was soon displaced by ‘social-scientific explanation’. The latter approach relied on quantitative methods, such as survey research and content analysis (Hardt 1992, cited in Boyd-Barrett and Newbold 1995: 10).

The legacy of the Chicagoans is also evident in other ways. For example, their intent in discovering and documenting everyday life and its meaning for a variety of individuals and groups – be they Negroes, criminals, hobos, gangs or immigrants – in a new, vibrant and emergent city such as Chicago have since been described as anticipating cultural studies (Rothenbuhler 2003: 110). Moreover, it is argued that scholars in contemporary cultural studies have a similar world-view to that held by members of the Chicago school, in the sense that culture and communication are seen as ‘inherently intertwined’ (Rothenbuhler 2003: 110).

Although sociology remains a key discipline at the University of Chicago, the so-called ‘golden years’ came to an end in mid-1930s (Harvey 1987: 176–7). Various reasons have been suggested for this decline, one being the loss, through retirement, of the dynamic leadership exercised by Robert E. Park whose reading appears below.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE READING

In 1914, at 50 years old, Robert E. Park (1864–1944) joined the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Chicago. He retired in 1933 and was judged by many to have been the key figure in driving the development of empirical research at the Chicago school during the 1920s (Harvey 1987: 15). Park believed in gathering data first-hand and this is evident in an oft-quoted address to graduate students:

You have been told to go grubbing in the library, thereby accumulating a mass of notes and a liberal coating of grime. You have been told to choose problems wherever you can find musty stacks of routine records based on trivial schedules prepared by tired bureaucrats and filled out by reluctant applicants for aid or fussy do-gooders or indifferent clerks. This is called ‘getting your hands dirty in real research.’ Those who counsel you are wise and honourable; the reasons they offer are of great value. But one more thing is needful: first-hand observation. Go and sit in the lounges of the luxury hotels and on the doorsteps of the flophouses; sit on the Gold Coast settees and on the slum shakedown; sit in the Orchestra Hall and in the Star and Garter Burlesk. In short, gentlemen, go get the seat of your pants dirty in real research.

*(cited in Bulmer 1984: 97)*

After graduating with a degree in philosophy, Park worked as a newspaper reporter in New York, Denver, Detroit and Chicago before an interest in public opinion and news prompted his enrolment for an MA in psychology and philosophy at Harvard (Bulmer 1984: 90; Hughes 1969: 162–3). He went on to study in Germany, completing a PhD, ‘The Crowd and the Public, a methodological and sociological investigation’, at Heidelberg.

After returning to the United States, Park worked briefly at Harvard before taking up employment with the Congo Reform Association, a Baptist organisation, and then became ‘publicity man’ for Booker T. Washington, ‘the leading American Negro of that generation’ (Hughes 1969: 164). This involved a combination of roles, including press agent, ghost-writing and public relations. Most of Park’s sociological writing occurred during his tenure at Chicago.

Although he never produced a major work, or *magnum opus*, Park wrote *The Immigrant Press and Its Control* (1922), co-authored (with H.A. Miller) *Old World Traits Transplanted* (1921), and with Burgess (a close colleague at Chicago) *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (1921) (Bulmer 1984: 93; Hughes 1969: 167).

While Park produced numerous articles and wrote the introductions to many of the monographs produced by the Chicago school, he is renowned for devoting much of his time to assisting graduate students, perhaps to the detriment of his own writing (Bulmer 1984: 97; Harvey 1987: 168). For Hughes (1969: 169), Park ‘was part of a great social movement for the investigation of human societies, great and small’.

The reading, ‘The natural history of the newspaper’, written by Park, is a chapter taken from, *The City*, a book first published in 1925 – and reprinted in 1967 – which is edited by Park, Burgess and McKenzie. In the introduction, the book’s chapters are described as a collection of ‘theoretical expositions and interpretive essays about the cultural patterns of urban life’ which represent a ‘cross-section of the intellectual concerns’ at Chicago during Park’s period of employment (Janowitz 1967: viii).

*The City* proved influential, being seen as ‘the manual and guide to sociological research on cities for a number of years’ (Hughes 1969: 168). The opening chapter by Park, ‘The city: suggestions for the investigation of human behaviour in the urban environment’, was first published in 1915. Even in 1967 this essay was still believed to be a ‘striking contemporary statement of the issues that research must still confront’ (Janowitz 1967: ix). Park’s aim in this opening chapter is to set out a programme of study ‘for the study of urban life: its physical organization, its occupations, and its culture’ (Park 1967a: 3).

The chapter selected for the reading, ‘The natural history of the newspaper’, has four main sections. It is the third, ‘Secondary relations and social control’, that is of particular interest. This section, which is further subdivided, includes a segment entitled, ‘Advertising and social control’, which deals specifically with the press. Here, with a keen interest in the relationship between social control and public opinion – an ongoing concern of the Chicagoans – Park sets out a series of research questions which, as you will see, provide a framework for the reading that follows:

Some of the questions that arise in regard to the nature and function of the newspaper and of publicity are:

What is news?

What are the methods and motives of the newspaper man? Are they those of an artist? a historian? or merely those of a merchant?

To what extent does the newspaper control and to what extent is it controlled by public sentiment?

What is a ‘fake’ and why?

What is yellow journalism and why is it yellow?

What would be the effect of making the newspaper a municipal monopoly?

What is the difference between advertising and news?

(Park 1967b: 39)

While the reading focuses primarily on the history of the newspaper in the United States, Park’s wider perspective on the world, enabled through study and travel in Europe, is also in evidence (see, for example, Robinson 1996: 164–5). Perhaps reflecting his journalistic

background, the reading is also accessible, being relatively jargon-free and clearly organised – seemingly chronologically – into five main sections.

In engaging with this reading it is necessary to remember that it was first published in 1925, a time when radio was in its infancy, similarly cinema and film, and an era well before the emergence of television. Newspapers were at that time the predominant medium of mass communication.

## READING

1

**Robert E. Park**

## The natural history of the newspaper

### I. THE STRUGGLE FOR EXISTENCE

The newspaper has a history; but it has, likewise, a natural history. The press, as it exists, is not, as our moralists sometimes seem to assume, the wilful product of any little group of living men. On the contrary, it is the outcome of a historic process in which many individuals participated without foreseeing what the ultimate product of their labors was to be.

The newspaper, like the modern city, is not wholly a rational product. No one sought to make it just what it is. In spite of all the efforts of individual men and generations of men to control it and to make it something after their own heart, it has continued to grow and change in its own incalculable ways.

The type of newspaper that exists is the type that has survived under the conditions of modern life. The men who may be said to have made the modern newspaper—James Gordon Bennett, Charles A. Dana, Joseph Pulitzer, and William Randolph Hearst—are the men who discovered the kind of paper that men and women would read and had the courage to publish it.

The natural history of the press is the history of this surviving species. It is an account of the conditions under which the existing newspaper has grown up and taken form.

2

A newspaper is not merely printed. It is circulated and read. Otherwise it is not a newspaper. The struggle for existence, in the case of the newspaper, has been a struggle for circulation. The newspaper that is not read ceases to be an influence in the community. The power of the press may be roughly measured by the number of people who read it.

The growth of great cities has enormously increased the size of the reading public. Reading, which was a luxury in the country, has become a necessity in the city. In the urban environment literacy is almost as much a necessity as speech itself. That is one reason there are so many foreign-language newspapers.

Mark Villchur, editor of the *Russkoye Slovo*, New York City, asked his readers how many of them had read newspapers in the old country. He found that out of 312 correspondents only 16 had regularly read newspapers in Russia; 10 others from time to time read newspapers in the Volast, the village administration center, and 12 were subscribers to weekly magazines. In America all of them were subscribers or readers of Russian newspapers.

This is interesting because the immigrant has had, first and last, a profound influence on the character of our native newspapers. How to bring the immigrant and his descendants into the circle of newspaper readers has been one of the problems of modern journalism.

## NOTES

## 1

**Structure**

Two features are immediately noticeable about this reading. The first is the size of the paragraphs, which are generally quite brief when compared to other readings in this volume of ours. The second is that the reading is structured by subheadings, each of which provides a clear signal about the issues, themes or topics to be addressed. In what ways do these two features help or hinder your reading of this material?

**Content**

Park suggests that there is more than one way of constructing a history of the newspaper and his preference is that such a history takes account of economic, political, social and cultural factors. Who are the 'moralists' that he refers to and why does he reject their version of newspaper history?

The second point to be made about content is the reference to men and women. This is a reminder about the era in which the reading was published. Thus, it is men – and not women – who are the 'makers' of newspapers and cities.

**Context**

Two points might be made here. First, when the author draws a comparison between the development of the newspaper and the city, we need to remember that this reading is taken from a book about the city. Secondly, you will note that the names of the men associated with the development of the 'modern newspaper' are all American. Who in the United Kingdom in the 1920s and 1930s would be the British equivalents?

## 2

**Content**

Here, Park makes three key points. First, he sets out what he sees as the key characteristics of a newspaper. In doing so, emphasis is laid on the relationship between circulation, influence and power. How do you respond to the point that the power of the press is related to the number of readers?

Secondly, he reminds us that newspapers require a reading public, that cities have helped provide those readers, and that this has been assisted because literacy is essential in order for survival in an urban environment.

Thirdly, that immigration has had a major influence on the character of the press in the United States. Apart from growth in circulation and profits, why else would newspaper owners be keen to 'bring the immigrant and his descendants into the circle of newspaper readers'?

**Structure**

Two points might be made here. First, note how the author substantiates his comment about there being many foreign-language newspapers by drawing on a survey of readers of a Russian newspaper. However, the second point is that he doesn't cite a reference for this source. This means that we,

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## 3

The immigrant who has, perhaps, acquired the newspaper habit from reading a foreign-language newspaper is eventually attracted to the native American newspapers. They are for him a window looking out into the larger world outside the narrow circle of the immigrant community in which he has been compelled to live. The newspapers have discovered that even men who can perhaps read no more than the headlines in the daily press will buy a Sunday paper to look at the pictures.

It is said that the most successful of the Hearst papers, the *New York Evening Journal*, gains a new body of subscribers every six years. Apparently it gets its readers mainly from immigrants. They graduate into Mr. Hearst's papers from the foreign-language press, and when the sensationalism of these papers begins to pall, they acquire a taste for some of the soberer journals. At any rate, Mr. Hearst has been a great Americanizer.

In their efforts to make the newspaper readable to the least-instructed reader, to find in the daily news material that would thrill the crudest intelligence, publishers have made one important discovery. They have found that the difference between the high-brow and the low-brow, which once seemed so profound, is largely a difference in vocabularies. In short, if the press can make itself intelligible to the common man, it will have even less difficulty in being understood by the intellectual. The character of present-day newspapers has been profoundly influenced by this fact.



## NOTES

2

(continued)

the readers, are unable to access this data should we wish to do so. One might judge the author as not being 'reader friendly' in this instance.

### Context

Three points might be made here. First, that Park makes one of many comparisons between the city and the country, both in terms of the role of the newspaper and also the nature of life for people in each of these two geographic contexts.

Secondly, the impact of immigration acts as a reminder about the differing societal context of the United States and the United Kingdom, and the need to take this into account if comparisons are to be made about the development of the newspaper in each of these two settings.

The third point is that these matters are considered essential by *this* author in constructing *his* account of the history of newspapers in the mid-1920s. We need to be conscious that his research centred on the city – and Chicago in particular – that he had previously researched and written about immigration, and that he had also been employed as a journalist.

3

### Content

Here, the author writes knowingly about four matters relating to newspaper use by immigrants. First, the immigrant's eventual transition to indigenous American newspapers. Secondly, that these newspapers provide a view of the world beyond the one in which the immigrant 'has been compelled to live'. Thirdly, that those whose reading skills were lacking – presumably because of having to engage with a second language – would tend to purchase the picture-led Sunday papers rather than the daily editions. Fourthly, that some immigrants would eventually progress from Hearst's papers to the 'soberer journals'.

We have to presume that the 'knowing' of the author comes about as a result of the research that he has undertaken in respect of these matters. He doesn't cite such evidence, but appropriate sources would include earlier work undertaken by the author (see, for example, Park 1922). However, Park makes no comment in this reading about whether American newspapers portrayed a less than positive image of immigrants and the immigrant communities that flocked to the big cities in that era.

### Context

Three points might be made here. First, in relation to citing – or failing to cite – sources, one key factor in making such a decision is the nature of the target, or anticipated, audience(s). If this reading was aimed at an audience beyond that of academia and policymakers, which appears to be the case, the author probably felt little inclination to conform to the academic traditions that would have been required by an academic journal. Nevertheless, if the aim of a writer is to empower the reader, then the citing of appropriate sources might be considered in a different light.

The second point on context is geographic, and raises the possibility of using footnotes. For example, readers outside the United States may not know, but may wish to know, details of Hearst's papers and they may also be interested in knowing the names of the 'soberer journals'.

## READING

## 4

## II. THE FIRST NEWSPAPERS

What is a newspaper? Many answers have been given. It is the tribune of the people; it is the fourth estate; the Palladium of our civil liberties, etc.

On the other hand, this same newspaper has been characterized as the great sophist. What the popular teachers did for Athens in the period of Socrates and Plato the press has done in modern times for the common man.

The modern newspaper has been accused of being a business enterprise. “Yes,” say the newspaper men “and the commodity it sells is news.” It is the truth shop. (The editor is the philosopher turned merchant.) By making information about our common life accessible to every individual at less than the price of a telephone call we are to regain, it is urged—even in the complicated life of what Graham Wallas calls the “Great Society”—some sort of working democracy.

The advertising manager’s notion is again something different. For him the newspaper is a medium for creating advertising values. The business of the editor is to provide the envelope which incloses the space which the advertising man sells. Eventually the newspaper may be conceived as a sort of common carrier, like the railway or the post office.

The newspaper, according to the author of the *Brass Check*, is crime. The brass check is a symbol of prostitution. “The brass check is found in your pay envelope every week—you who write and print and distribute our newspapers and magazines. The brass check is the price of your shame—you who take the fair body of truth and sell it in the market place, who betray the virgin hopes of mankind into the loathsome brothel of big business.”

This is the conception of a moralist and a socialist—Upton Sinclair.

Evidently the newspaper is an institution that is not yet fully understood. What it is, or seems to be, for any one of us at any time is determined by our differing points of view. As a matter of fact, we do not know much about the newspaper. It has never been studied.

One reason we know so little about the newspaper is that as it exists today it is a very recent manifestation. Besides, in the course of its relatively brief history, it has gone through a remarkable series of transfigurations. The press today is, however, all that it was and something more. To understand it we must see in its historic perspective.

The first newspapers were written or printed letters; news-letters they were called. In the seventeenth century English country gentlemen used to employ correspondents to write them once a week from London the gossip of the court and of the town.

## NOTES

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*(continued)*

The third matter that relates to context is the substance of the final three sentences. To what extent could the assertion made in the final sentence be applied in the United Kingdom's context?

### Writing Style

While the writing style might generally be described as easy and relaxed, how do you react to the author's use of, 'It is said that . . .'. If you were to include such a phrase in an essay or term paper, the likelihood is that it would attract critical comments along the following lines: 'Said by whom? Reference please!'

4

### Structure

We can see the chronological organisation of the reading emerging with the title of this second subsection. Also, note how the author 'sets up' this section with a question. This question is then explored in the first five paragraphs before the author 'closes' the initial discussion and 'opens' the next by insisting on the need for a historical perspective.

### Content

When the author asks, 'What is a newspaper?', he is enquiring not about its characteristics but about its role and purpose. A number of 'answers' are then generated by addressing the question from a variety of perspectives. Would you agree that a similarly posed question today might generate the same range of responses?

Before moving on, make sure that you are clear about the meanings of 'a tribune of the people', 'the fourth estate', 'the Palladium of our civil liberties', and 'the great sophist'.

The opening theme then concludes with the author making three points. First, our understanding about the role and purpose of a newspaper may depend on a variety of factors. Secondly, the (then) modern press was a 'very recent manifestation' and yet to be studied. Thirdly, if the press were to be studied, a historical perspective would be required.

Note again that the work of two other authors is used to support, or highlight, the arguments being made, but the citation details are not provided.

### Context

Three points can be made about the context, each relating to the era in which this reading was published. The first, which is somewhat startling for a reader in the twenty-first century, is the author's observation, almost in passing, that no substantial study had been made of the press at that time.

The second is the remark about the cost of a newspaper being less than half the cost of a phone call. While phone calls now tend to cost much less than newspapers, the author's observation brings to mind the ease of access to information today, but also the costs of the required hardware and software.

The third contextual matter, which becomes apparent as the reading progresses, is that the history of the press in America cannot be told without reference to developments in the United Kingdom.

## READING

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The first newspaper in America, at least the first newspaper that lasted beyond its first issue, was the *Boston News-Letter*. It was published by the postmaster. The village post-office has always been a public forum, where all the affairs of the nation and the community were discussed. It was to be expected that there, in close proximity to the sources of intelligence, if anywhere, a newspaper would spring up. For a long time the position of postmaster and the vocation of editor were regarded as inseparable.

The first newspapers were simply devices for organizing gossip, and that, to a greater or less extent, they have remained. Horace Greeley's advice to a friend who was about to start a country paper is as good today as it was then.

Begin with a clear conception that the subject of deepest interest to an average human being is himself; next to that, he is most concerned about his neighbors. Asia and the Tongo Islands stand a long way after these in his regard. It does seem to me that most country journals are oblivious as to these vital truths. If you will, so soon as may be, secure a wide awake, judicious correspondent in each village and township of your county, some young lawyer, doctor, clerk in a store, or assistant in a post office who will promptly send you whatever of moment occurs in his vicinity, and will make up at least half your journal of local matter thus collected, nobody in the county can long do without it. Do not let a new church be organized, or new members be added to one already existing, a farm be sold, a new house be raised, a mill be set in motion, a store be opened, nor anything of interest to a dozen families occur, without having the fact duly though briefly chronicled in your columns. If a farmer cuts a big tree, or grows a mammoth beet, or harvests a bounteous yield of wheat or corn, set forth the fact as concisely and unexceptionally as possible.

What Greeley advises friend Fletcher to do with his country paper the city editor of every newspaper, as far as it humanly is possible, is still trying to do. It is not practicable, in a city of 3,000,000 and more, to mention everybody's name. For that reason attention is focused upon a few prominent figures. In a city where everything happens every day, it is not possible to record every petty incident, every variation from the routine of the city life. It is possible, however, to select certain particularly picturesque or romantic incidents and treat them symbolically, for their human interest rather than their individual and personal significance. In this way news ceases to be wholly personal and assumes the form of art. It ceases to be the record of the doings of individual men and women and becomes an impersonal account of manners and life.

The motive, conscious or unconscious, of the writers and of the press in all this is to reproduce, as far as possible, in the city the conditions of life in the village. In the village everyone knew everyone else. Everyone called everyone by his first name. The village was democratic. We are a nation of villagers. Our institutions are fundamentally village institutions. In the village, gossip and public opinion were the main sources of social control.

## NOTES

## 5

**Content**

It is obviously impossible to provide a full account of the first newspapers in the space allowed here, so what we get is an extremely brief ‘snapshot’. Essentially, the author makes six key points, but not necessarily in this order.

First, that the newsletter preceded the newspaper. Secondly, that gossip was, and continues to be, a core part of newspapers. Thirdly, that writers and editors of city newspapers aim to replicate country, or village, life in their publications because ‘we are a nation of villagers’ and our institutions are ‘fundamentally village institutions’. Fourthly – and logically, given the last point – country, or village, newspapers provide a model for city newspapers. Fifthly, because city editors are unable to replicate country newspapers, the city newspapers become reliant on stories about prominent figures and a selection of ‘picturesque or romantic incidents’, thereby transforming news into a ‘form of art’. Sixthly, in the village, or country, social control is achieved, at least in part, by means of gossip and public opinion.

In this last sentence we see the author raising the matter of public opinion and social control, both of which were central to the work of the Chicago school. Although the author doesn’t do so, how would you distinguish between gossip and public opinion? (See our chapter on the public sphere.)

**Context**

Three points can be made here. The first two relate to time or era, and the third raises questions about geographic and cultural contexts. First, no dates are provided on when the first newspaper in America was issued. Of course, the author may be presuming a certain amount of knowledge on our part!

Secondly, in respect of the large quote that is included here, the author gives no details about who Horace Greeley was, when the advice was provided, in what context, and whether or not it appears in any published form. Such information may have helped us, as readers, to form an opinion on its worth or otherwise.

The third point on context relates to the author’s use of ‘village’ and whether readers are likely to understand the concept in the way intended by the author. For example, references to ‘village’ and ‘village life’ in the United Kingdom, particularly in relation to issues of social class, would be understood differently in the United States, and certainly in the 1920s. Or maybe, in this instance, the notion of village life is thought to be so widely understood that its meaning is not dependent on specific cultural knowledge. If this is the case, what do you understand by the assertion that our institutions are all ‘fundamentally village institutions’?

**Writing Style**

Note how Park tends towards the use of generalisations in this part of the reading. For example, without providing any ‘evidence’ in the form of quotations, specific examples, or additional references, Park refers to ‘the city editor of every newspaper’ having the same ambitions, and similarly characterises the ‘conscious or unconscious’ motives of all those who write for the press and the press itself.

Do generalisations such as these have any impact on your interpretation of the reading and the standing of the author? This matter also prompts questions about whether and in what circumstances the use of generalisation is acceptable in our own writing.

## READING

6

“I would rather live,” said Thomas Jefferson, “in a country with newspapers and without a government than in a country with a government and without newspapers.”

If public opinion is to continue to govern in the future as it has in the past, if we propose to maintain a democracy as Jefferson conceived it, the newspaper must continue to tell us about ourselves. We must somehow learn to know our community and its affairs in the same intimate way in which we knew them in the country villages. The newspaper must continue to be the printed diary of the home community. Marriages and divorce, crime and politics, must continue to make up the main body of our news. Local news is the very stuff that democracy is made of.

But that, according to Walter Lippmann, is just the difficulty. “As social truth is organized today, so he says, “the press is not constituted to furnish from one edition to the next the amount of knowledge which the democratic theory of public opinion demands. . . . When we expect it to supply such a body of truth, we employ a misleading standard of judgment. We misunderstand the limited nature of news, the illimitable complexity of society; we over-estimate our own endurance, public spirit, and all-round competence. We suppose an appetite for uninteresting truths which is not discovered by any honest analysis of our own tastes. . . . Unconsciously the theory sets up the single reader as theoretically incompetent, and puts upon the press the burden of accomplishing whatever representative government, industrial organization, and diplomacy have failed to accomplish. Acting upon everybody for thirty minutes in twenty-four hours, the press is asked to create a mystical force called ‘public opinion’ that will take up the slack in public institutions.”<sup>1</sup>

It is evident that a newspaper cannot do for a community of 1,000,000 inhabitants what the village did spontaneously for itself through the medium of gossip and personal contact. Nevertheless the efforts of the newspaper to achieve this impossible result are an interesting chapter in the history of politics as well as of the press.

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### III. THE PARTY PAPERS

The first newspapers, the news-letters, were not party papers. Political journals began to supersede the news-letters at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The news with which the reading public was most concerned at that time was the reports of the debates in Parliament.

Even before the rise of the party press certain prying and curious individuals had made a business of visiting the Strangers’ Gallery during the sessions of the House of Commons in order to write up from memory, or from notes taken down surreptitiously, accounts of the



1. Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, pp. 361–62.

## NOTES

## 6

**Content**

Note, again, the technique that the author uses to ‘set up’ the latter part of this section. On this occasion it is a very short quotation that is used to provide a means of engaging more closely with the role of the press and public opinion. While the quote itself is apposite to the discussion at hand, its brevity suggests that the person uttering such words must have been someone of great standing. The author presumes that we know. Do you? If not, try Google.

Park then goes on to link public opinion and the role of the press and, in doing so, outlines the subject matter of an ‘ideal’ newspaper. Having done so, the author draws on a quotation by Walter Lippmann to illustrate why newspapers are not capable of achieving the ‘ideal’ that he has previously articulated, even though he lauds their attempt to do so.

Note that there is no attempt to engage with, or enlarge upon, the ideas, issues and concepts raised by Lippmann – as the author did when he quoted the words of Horace Greeley. Therefore, you might wish to ponder on the meaning of ‘social truth’, and what Lippmann means when he refers to ‘the slack in public institutions’.

**Context**

Two points might be made here. The first relates to the original context of the two quotations referred to above. On some occasions it is very helpful to access the cited sources in order to see and understand how the extracted quotations relate to their original textual context, and whether your interpretation of the said material is similar to that of the author citing it.

This is not possible in the case of Jefferson as the source is not cited, and although Lippmann can be found on the basis of the information provided, it would have been useful, for the purpose of the discussion, to have listed the year of publication.

**Structure**

More a typo than an issue of sentence structure, but you may have noticed that there appears to be a missing apostrophe after the first phrase of the quotation. As it stands, that sentence is unclear and interrupts the ‘flow’ for the reader.

## 7

**Content**

Having discussed the introduction of newsletters and early versions of newspapers in the seventeenth century, in this third section of the reading the author begins the process of relating the history of the ‘party papers’, or political journals, that emerged in the early years of the eighteenth century.

In order to do so, the author turns again to developments in the United Kingdom and on this occasion to debates in Parliament. Surprising as it may seem in the contemporary period when information about Parliament is not the first news that many people seek out, in that era this was exactly what was required by the ‘reading public’. In part, at least, this was because the discussion about matters of wider public interest – including law-making – were being held almost in private, as formal reporting of events from the House of Commons was barred and not relaxed until much

## READING

## 7

(continued)

speeches and discussions during an important debate. At this time all the deliberations of Parliament were secret, and it was not until 100 years later that the right of reporters to attend the sessions of the House of Commons and record its proceedings was officially recognized. In the meantime reporters were compelled to resort to all sorts of subterfuges and indirect methods in order to get information. It is upon this information, gathered in this way, that much of our present history of English politics is based.

One of the most distinguished of these parliamentary reporters was Samuel Johnson. One evening in 1770, it is reported, Johnson, with a number of other celebrities, was taking dinner in London. Conversation turned upon parliamentary oratory. Someone spoke of a famous speech delivered in the House of Commons by the elder Pitt in 1741. Someone else, amid the applause of the company, quoted a passage from this speech as an illustration of an orator who had surpassed in feeling and beauty of language the finest efforts of the orators of antiquity. Then Johnson, who up to that point had taken no part in the discussion, spoke up. "I wrote that speech," he said, "in a garret in Exeter Street."

The guests were struck with amazement. He was asked, "How could it have been written by you, sir?"

"Sir," said Johnson, "I wrote it in Exeter Street. I never was in the gallery of the House of Commons but once. Cave had interest with the doorkeepers; he and the persons employed under him got admittance; they brought away the subjects of discussion, the names of the speakers, the side they took, and the order in which they rose, together with notes of the various arguments adduced in the course of the debate. The whole was afterward communicated to me, and I composed the speeches in the form they now have in the 'Parliamentary Debates,' for the speeches of that period are all printed from Cave's magazine."<sup>2</sup>

Someone undertook to praise Johnson's impartiality, saying that in his reports he seems to have dealt out reason and eloquence with an equal hand to both political parties. "That is not quite true," was Johnson's reply. "I saved appearances tolerably well; but I took care that the Whig dogs should not have the best of it."

This speech of William Pitt, composed by Johnson in Exeter Street, has long held a place in school books and collections of oratory. It is the famous speech in which Pitt answered the accusation of the "atrocious crime of being a young man."

Perhaps Pitt thought he delivered that speech. At any rate there is no evidence that he repudiated it. I might add that Pitt, if he was the first, was not the last statesman who is indebted to the reporters for his reputation as an orator.

The significant thing about this incident is that it illustrates the manner in which, under the influence of the parliamentary reporters, something like a constitutional change was effected in the character of parliamentary government. As soon as the parliamentary orators discovered that they were addressing not only their fellow-members but, indirectly, through the medium of the press, the people of England, the whole character of parliamentary proceedings changed. Through the newspapers the whole country was enabled to participate in the discussions by which issues were framed and legislation was enacted.

2. Michael MacDonagh, *The Reporters' Gallery*, pp. 139–40.



## NOTES

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*(continued)*

later. As a result, it was only through the use of 'subterfuge' and other 'indirect methods' that the content and nature of parliamentary debates and the names of those involved became known.

How this material came to be published is illuminated by way of an amusing anecdote that the author has drawn from another published source – which is footnoted but without the inclusion of a year of publication. The significance of this process of reporting and publication is that it influenced parliamentary proceedings once parliamentarians realised that they were addressing a wider audience than those sitting in the chamber of the House of Commons.

This summary prompts at least one question. What is implied by the author's reference to a 'reading public'?

## Context

Two contextual matters are worth pointing out. First, note that in relating what is primarily a history of the press in the United States of America, the author judges it necessary to provide details of the British context. The message that we might take from this, as writers, is the need to be clear about what constitutes an appropriate historical context in order that a reader can have a clear understanding of the subject or topic under discussion.

The second contextual matter concerns historical records. In this case, as the anecdote illustrates, early parliamentary records resulted from the involvement of a number of people and a final published account that may have been intentionally partial.

## Structure

It is worth reflecting on how the author has structured the early stages of this section of the reading.

First, he makes clear in the opening paragraph the subject matter that is to be dealt with. Then he provides some background material which is deemed necessary in order to provide an adequate historical account of the party papers. This is followed by the inclusion of an anecdote to illustrate the point being made about the use of subterfuge in composing and reporting parliamentary debates. Finally, before moving on to the next matter for discussion, the author outlines, if only briefly, the significance of the preceding discussion, noting the change in parliamentary proceedings and the role played by the press.

## Writing Style

Three minor points might be made here. First, when the author uses the phrase, 'it is reported', details of the reporter could also have been provided. We are left to presume that the reporter is Michael MacDonagh and, if so, the footnote could have been inserted at this point.

The second point to note is that the author reverts to the first person when discussing Pitt not being the last statesman to benefit from the eloquent words of a reporter. As the author of the reading, does he really need to move into the first person? Thirdly, it would have been helpful if the author had provided some information about Cave when he was first mentioned.

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## 8

Meanwhile, the newspapers themselves, under the influence of the very discussions which they themselves instigated, had become party organs. Whereupon the party press ceased to be a mere chronicle of small gossip and came to be what we know as a “journal of opinion.” The editor, meanwhile, no longer a mere newsmonger and humble recorder of events, found himself the mouthpiece of a political party, playing a rôle in politics.

During the long struggle for freedom of thought and speech in the seventeenth century, popular discontent had found literary expression in the pamphlet and broadside. The most notable of these pamphleteers was John Milton, and the most famous of these pamphlets was Milton’s *Areopagitica: A Defence of the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing*, published in 1646; “the noblest piece of English prose” it has been called by Henry Morley.

When the newspaper became, in the early part of the eighteenth century, a journal of opinion, it took over the function of the political pamphlet. The opinion that had formerly found expression in a broadside was now expressed in the form of editorial leading articles. The editorial writer, who had inherited the mantle of the pamphleteer, now assumed the rôle of a tribune of the people.

It was in this rôle, as the protagonist of the popular cause, that the newspaper captured the imagination of our intelligentsia.

When we read in the political literature of a generation ago references to “the power of the press,” it is the editor and the editorial, rather than the reporter and the news, of which these writers are thinking. Even now when we speak of the liberty of the press it is the liberty to express an opinion, rather than the liberty to investigate and publish the facts, which is meant. The activities of the reporter, upon which any opinion that is relevant to existing conditions is likely to be based, are more often regarded as an infringement of our personal rights than an exercise of our political liberties.

The liberty of the press for which Milton wrote the *Areopagitica* was the liberty to express an opinion. “Give me the liberty,” he said, “to know, to alter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties.”

Carlyle was thinking of the editorial writer and not of the reporter when he wrote: “Great is journalism! Is not every able editor a ruler of the world, being a persuader of it?”

## NOTES

## 8

**Structure**

Note, again, how this first paragraph is used to ‘introduce’ the next key matters that are the subject of this section. Having flagged them up, each one is then examined and discussed in more detail.

**Content**

Essentially, Park suggests that as a result of their reporting of parliamentary matters, newspapers and their editors underwent a process of transformation. Three transformations are identified. First, newspapers are seen to become ‘journals of opinion’, or ‘party organs’, once they move from being simple chroniclers of gossip to dealing with matters of a political nature.

Secondly, in encompassing matters political, newspapers become the purveyors of ‘public discontent’, delivering the ‘broadside’ once regarded as the sole domain of the earlier pamphleteers. In this regard, the author provides the example of John Milton, a renowned pamphleteer in the United Kingdom, and he might also have included Tom Paine in the United States (Downing 1995). (See our Chapter 4 on liberal press theory.)

The third example of transformation relates to the role of the editor once newspapers become ‘journals of opinion’. Previously a ‘humble recorder of events’, the editor now assumes the role of the pamphleteer, and the editorial leading articles include the type of opinion that would once have constituted the broadside of the pamphlet. Thus, the transformation is now complete, with newspapers and editors assuming the role of ‘tribune of the people’ – a description used by the author in the first paragraph of the reading – and ‘the protagonist of the popular cause’.

Park then follows this account of transformation by reminding us of the (then) meaning of two key concepts: ‘the power of the press’ and ‘the liberty of the press’. He substantiates his interpretation by quoting the words of two respected individuals, one being Milton who is cited earlier, and the other, Carlyle, about whom no more is said.

In attributing the liberty, or power, of the press to the role of the editor, Park is rather dismissive of the role of the reporter. What is the author getting at in the sentence that begins, ‘The activities of the reporter . . .’?

**Context**

As we have pointed out previously, note how the author delves back to previous eras – in this case to focus on the pamphleteers of the seventeenth century – to provide the historical context that he deems necessary in order for the reader to understand developments in the eighteenth-century press.

**Writing Style**

Two points might be made here. The first relates to the author’s very direct style, in the sense that there is no weighing up of ideas or evidence and very few additional sources are used to substantiate the arguments being made. Why might the inclusion of more references have been useful?

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## 9

The United States inherited its parliamentary government, its party system, and its newspapers from England. The rôle which the political journals played in English politics was re-enacted in America. The American newspapers were a power with which the British government had to reckon in the struggle of the colonies for independence. After the British took possession of New York City, Ambrose Serle, who had undertaken to publish the *New York Gazette* in the interest of the invaders, wrote as follows to Lord Dartmouth in regard to the patriot-party press.

Among other engines which have raised the present commotion, next to the indecent harangues of the preachers, none has had a more extensive or stronger influence than the newspapers of the respective colonies. One is astonished to see with what avidity they are sought after, and how implicitly they are believed by the great bulk of the people.<sup>3</sup>

It was nearly a century later, in the person of Horace Greeley, editor of the *New York Tribune* during the anti-slavery struggle, that the journal of opinion reached its highest expression in America. America has had better newspaper men than Horace Greeley, although none, perhaps, whose opinions exercised so wide an influence. “The *New York Tribune*,” says Charles Francis Adams, “during those years was the greatest educational factor, economically and morally, this country has ever known.”

3. George Henry Payne, *History of Journalism in the United States*, p. 120.

## NOTES

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(continued)

Secondly, there is an issue about how best to deal with different eras when the discussion moves so often between the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as it does in this instance. For example, at different points the author writes, 'it was not until a 100 years later . . .', 'in the political literature of a generation ago', '[e]ven now when we speak of . . .' and, 'it was nearly a century later . . .'.

In each instance, the reader has to be clear in her/his mind that this reading was first published in 1925. How could the dates of these periods have been better presented in order to avoid the potential for confusion?

9

## Content

In the final part of this section of the reading Park returns to the American context, reminding about the influence of parliamentary government, party politics and newspapers in England.

To further underline what he means by the power and liberty of the press, that is, editorial opinion, Park uses two examples from the American context, each one occurring in a different century. One centres on the struggle for independence from Britain and recalls how the popularity of, and belief in, the American 'patriot-party press' – as well as the church – had caused the British invaders some difficulties.

The other refers to the anti-slavery campaigning work of Horace Greeley, who is mentioned earlier in the reading, but about whom we learn now was editor of the *New York Tribune*.

Note how the author is consistent with his earlier analysis, as he refers to this publication as a 'journal of opinion' rather than a newspaper.

## Context

Park makes it slightly difficult for the reader to grasp the enormity of the contribution of the *New York Tribune* because the quotation by Charles Francis Adams is not dated. Neither is it made clear who Adams was and why his words are given such prominence. Without this information, a reader is unable to reach their own judgement about the worth of such words and the validity of the praise lavished on the editor of the *New York Tribune*, Horace Greeley.

## Writing Style

A minor point might be made here which relates to the second point included above under *Context*. For the inquisitive reader, the author might have been more expansive about why America had 'better newspaper men' than Horace Greeley. While it might be implied, perhaps the author could have been more specific about what constitutes 'better' in this instance.

## READING

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## IV. THE INDEPENDENT PRESS

The power of the press, as represented by the older type of newspaper, rested in the final analysis upon the ability of its editors to create a party and lead it. The journal of opinion is, by its very nature, predestined to become the organ of a party, or at any rate the mouthpiece of a school.

So long as political activities were organized on the basis of village life, the party system worked. In the village community, where life was and still is relatively fixed and settled, custom and tradition provided for most of the exigencies of daily life. In such a community, where every deviation from the ordinary routine of life was a matter of observation and comment and all the facts were known, the political process was, at any rate, a comparatively simple matter. Under these circumstances the work of the newspaper, as a gatherer and interpreter of the news, was but an extension of the function which was otherwise performed spontaneously by the community itself through the medium of personal contact and gossip.

But as our cities expanded and life grew more complicated, it turned out that political parties, in order to survive, must have a permanent organization. Eventually party morale became a greater value than the issues for the determination of which the parties are supposed to exist. The effect upon the party press was to reduce it to the position of a sort of house organ of the party organization. It no longer knew from day to day just what its opinions were. The editor was no longer a free agent. It was of this subjugated *Tribune* that Walt Whitman was thinking when he coined the phrase, “the kept editor.”

When, finally, the exigencies of party politics, under conditions of life in great cities, developed the political machine, some of the more independent newspapers revolted. This was the origin of the independent press. It was one of the independent papers, the *New York Times* of that day, that first assailed and eventually overthrew, with the aid of a cartoonist, Thomas Nast, the Tweed Ring, the first and most outrageous of the political machines that party politics in this country has so far produced. Presently there was a general breaking away, particularly by the metropolitan, as distinguished from the country, papers, from the domination of the parties. Party loyalty ceased to be a virtue.

## NOTES

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## Content

The fourth and penultimate section in this reading sees Park detail the transformation of the newspaper from 'the party press' to 'the independent press'. While Park makes mention of the role of 'great men' in this process of change, as he does throughout the reading, he is true to his earlier dictum in the sense that these transformations are always seen as resulting from various combinations of economic, political, social and cultural factors, and not *solely* from the actions of particular individuals.

In order to begin explaining the demise of the 'journal of opinion' of the party press, Park elucidates a contrast between political life and party politics in the country and in the city. In the former (see below under *Context*), the role of the newspaper is suggested as far easier and more straightforward than in the latter, where party politics requires a more organised and strategic operation in order to survive. Inevitably, then, according to the author, once the importance of party morale is seen to take precedence over debates about issues, the party press becomes 'a house organ of the party organization'.

Here we see the displacement of the editorial power of opinion – so carefully enunciated in the preceding section – with that of the 'party line'. The outcome of which is so powerfully conveyed here in one simple phrase, that of 'the kept editor'. This signalled the beginning of the independent press, particularly in the cities, and the author closes these opening paragraphs by providing an example of one of the first so-called independent papers.

Two questions emerge, more in the sense of clarifying some of the words and phrases used by the author. Why is 'house organ' used in this context, and can we really speak of an editor being a 'free agent'? (See our Chapter B on Marxism, Chapter 12 on political economy and Chapter 13 on the public sphere.)

## Context

The author's contrasting descriptions of life in a country village and in the city bear some resemblance to the distinction between the traditional community and the post-industrial living environments characterised by Tonnies, respectively *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* (Marshall 1998: 249–250).

This distinction suggests that the author's analysis is informed, at least to some degree, by mass society theory. (See our Chapter 9 on C. Wright Mills.) A second point might also be made about context, that being the dating of some of the events addressed by the author. For example, no date is provided for the quotation by Walt Whitman and neither is one offered for the origins of the independent press, even though this breakthrough was marked by a particular cartoon in the *New York Times*. Moreover, no references are provided that allow the reader the opportunity to follow up on these two events.

## Structure

By now you will have recognised that the author tends to use a short opening paragraph, as he does here, to signal the key matters that are to be discussed in each section of the reading.

## READING

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Meanwhile a new political power had arisen and found expression in the press. This power was embodied, not in the editorial and the editorial writer, however, but in the news and the reporter. In spite of the fact that the prestige of the press, up to this time, had rested on its rôle of champion of popular causes, the older newspapers were not read by the masses of the people.

The ordinary man is more interested in news than he is in political doctrines or abstract ideas. H. L. Mencken has called attention to the fact that the average man does not understand more than two-thirds of what “comes from the lips of the average political orator or clergyman.”

The ordinary man, as the *Saturday Evening Post* has discovered, thinks in concrete images, anecdotes, pictures, and parables. He finds it difficult and tiresome to read a long article unless it is dramatized and takes the form of what newspapers call a “story.” “News story” and “fiction story” are two forms of modern literature that are now so like one another that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish them.

The *Saturday Evening Post*, for example, writes the news in the form of fiction, while the daily press frequently writes fiction in the form of news. When it is not possible to present ideas in the concrete, dramatic form of a story, the ordinary reader likes them stated in a short paragraph.

It is said that James E. Scripps, founder of the *Detroit News*, which specializes in afternoon papers in secondary cities, built up his whole string of papers upon the basis of the very simple psychological principle that the ordinary man will read newspaper items in the inverse ratio to their length. His method of measuring the efficiency of his newspapers, therefore, was to count the number of items they contained. The paper that had the largest number of items was the best paper. This is just the reverse of Mr. Hearst’s methods; his papers have fewer items than other papers.

The old-time journalist was inclined to have a contempt for news. News was for him simply material upon which to base an editorial. If God let things happen that were not in accordance with his conception of the fitness of things, he simply suppressed them. He refused to take the responsibility of letting his readers learn about things that he knew ought not to have happened.

Manton Marble, who was editor of the *New York World* before Joseph Pulitzer took it and made it yellow, used to say there were not 18,000 people in New York City to whom a well-conducted newspaper could offer to address itself. If the circulation of the paper went above that figure he thought there must be something wrong with the paper. Before Mr. Pulitzer took it over, the circulation had actually sunk to 10,000. The old *New York World* preserved the type of the old conservative high-brow paper down to the eighties. By that time in the larger cities the political independent newspapers had become the accepted type of journal.



## NOTES

11

**Content**

As a way of distinguishing between the earlier party press and the newly emerging independent newspaper, the author suggests a number of distinctions. First, he suggests a change in political power. By this he means that news becomes more important than the editorial and, as a result, elevates the status of the news reporter in relation to the editor.

Secondly, as the aim of the independent press is to expand circulation, the author begins to explain how this will occur. Thus, a distinction is made between the 'average' or 'ordinary' reader and the intellectual – both of which, at this point, are still presumed to be men. The former has poor reading skills and a limited attention span and is more interested in 'concrete images, anecdotes, pictures and parables', while the latter has an interest in 'political doctrines and abstract ideas'.

Thirdly, as it is the ordinary reader that the independent press are looking to attract, the author notes how early examples of this emergent form of newspaper began to blur the line between news and fiction and, in some cases, shorten the stories. The *Detroit News* is cited as an example of the latter, with the editor believing that the best editions were those that carried the most stories. This is contrasted with the example of an 'old conservative high-brow paper', the *New York World*, which was judged to be successful only if it achieved a limited circulation. The implication being that a rise in circulation equalled less sophisticated content.

**Writing Style**

Note how the author differentiates between the men to which he refers. For example, it is James E. Scripps, H.L. Mencken and Manton Marble, but Mr. Hearst and Mr. Pulitzer, except in one instance where the latter is referred to as Joseph Pulitzer. Why do you think this is? You may also have noted that the author refers to 'yellow' when he describes a particular paper, but doesn't explain its meaning at this point. What do you think it means?

**Context**

Three points might be made here. First, while the author does not date the exact years to which he is referring, nor the recorded observations of men such as Mencken, Scripps or Marble, he does suggest that the politically independent newspapers became the dominant form of journal by the 1880s, at least in the cities.

Secondly, the notion of 'independence' being used here only refers to political independence. There is no direct reference to independence being undermined by commercial considerations.

Thirdly, the author's description – in the mid-1920s – of an emerging form of newspaper, one that was seeking a mass readership, that merged news and fiction and incorporated pictures and shorter stories, is not altogether distinct from the way in which some commentators may describe elements of the contemporary press.

## READING

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Long before the rise of what was later to be called the independent press, there had appeared in New York two journals that were the forerunners of the present-day newspapers. In 1883 Benjamin Day, with a few associates, started a paper for “mechanics and the masses generally.” The price of this paper was one cent, but the publishers expected to make up by larger circulation and by advertising the loss sustained by the lower price. At that time most of the other New York papers were selling for six cents.

It was, however, the enterprise of James Gordon Bennett, the founder of the *New York Herald*, who set the pace in the new form of journalism. In fact, as Will Irwin says in the only adequate account that has ever been written of the American newspaper, “James Gordon Bennett invented news as we know it.” Bennett, like some others who have contributed most to modern journalism, was a disillusioned man, and for that very reason, perhaps, a ruthless and cynical one. “I renounce all so-called principles,” he said in his announcement of the new enterprise. By principles he meant, perhaps, editorial policies. His salutatory was at the same time a valedictory. In announcing the purposes of the new journalism he bade adieu to the aims and aspirations of the old. Henceforth the editors were to be news gatherers and the newspaper staked its future on its ability to gather, print, and circulate news.

What is news? There have been many answers. I think it was Charles A. Dana who said, “News is anything that will make people talk.” This definition suggests at any rate the aims of the new journalism. Its purpose was to print anything that would make people talk and think, for most people do not think until they begin to talk. Thought is after all a sort of internal conversation.

A later version of the same definition is this: “News is anything that makes the reader say, ‘Gee Whiz!’” This is the definition of Arthur McEwen, one of the men who helped make the Hearst papers. It is at the same time the definition of the latest and most successful type of journal, the yellow press. Not all successful journals are, to be sure, yellow. The *New York Times*, for example, is not. But the *New York Times* is not yet a type.

## NOTES

12

**Content**

The author opens the first of the last four paragraphs of this section with a useful reminder that labels, such as the ‘party press’, ‘independent press’ and ‘yellow press’ are all socially constructed and often only emerge some time after the period in which the said artefact was produced.

Yet another label is introduced here to describe the emergent independent press, that of ‘new journalism’ (see, for example, Bromley and O’Malley 1997: 2). Two individuals are suggested as its pioneers, their journals being the forerunners of what the author refers to as ‘present-day newspapers’, that is, publications in the mid-1920s.

One of the two forerunners – the *New York Herald* – is named but not dated, while the other is dated – 1883 – but not named. While both were produced with the aim of attracting a mass readership, they are each judged to be significant for different reasons. First, because it broke the norm by reducing the purchase price well below that of its competitors, on the assumption that increased circulation and advertising revenue would compensate for the loss of income caused by the lower cost price. Secondly, because editorial policies were abandoned in favour of gathering, printing, and circulating news.

The author ends this section of the reading with two paragraphs which attempt a definition of ‘news’. The reference to news being something that attracts a ‘Gee Whiz’ response from the reader confirms that it is the American context under consideration, and the nature of the definition also hints at the types of readers being sought.

**Structure**

This attempt at a definition of news seems somewhat belated. Should it have been included earlier, or maybe even considered briefly in each subsection of the reading?

**Writing Style**

Three points appear relevant. First, the author seems to err from the certainty that generally pervades this reading. For example, ‘perhaps’ is used on a couple of occasions, and he also introduces the discussion about news with, ‘I think it was Charles A. Dana who said . . .’. Is this acceptable in a reading such as this?

Secondly, the author fails to provide a reference for Will Irwin’s publication, even though it is supposed to be ‘the only adequate account’ of the American newspaper. This is not reader-friendly.

Thirdly, the author’s summary of Bennett’s approach to newspaper ownership – ‘His salutatory was at the same time a valedictory’ – is almost poetic and certainly apposite, but what do you understand by this?

## READING

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## V. THE YELLOW PRESS

There seem to be, as Walter Lippmann has observed, two types of newspaper readers. “Those who find their own lives interesting” and “those who find their own lives dull, and wish to live a more thrilling existence.” There are, correspondingly, two types of newspapers: papers edited on the principle that readers are mainly interested in reading about themselves, and papers edited upon the principle that their readers, seeking some escape from the dull routine of their own lives, are interested in anything which offers them what the psychoanalysts call “a flight from reality.”

The provincial newspaper with its record of weddings, funerals, lodge meetings, oyster suppers, and all the small patter of the small town represents the first type. The metropolitan press, with its persistent search in the drab episodes of city life for the romantic and the picturesque, its dramatic accounts of vice and crime, and its unflagging interest in the movements of personages of a more or less mythical high society represents the latter type.

Up to the last quarter of the nineteenth century, that is to say, up to about 1880, most newspapers, even in our large cities, were conducted on the theory that the best news a paper can print is a death notice or marriage announcement.

Up to that time the newspapers had not yet begun to break into the tenements, and most people who supported a newspaper lived in homes rather than in apartments. The telephone had not yet come into popular use; the automobile was unheard of; the city was still a mosaic of little neighborhoods, like our foreign-language communities of the present day, in which the city dweller still maintained something of the provincialism of the small town.

Great changes, however, were impending. The independent press was already driving some of the old-time newspapers to the wall. There were more newspapers than either the public or the advertisers were willing to support. It was at this time and under these circumstances that newspaper men discovered that circulation could be greatly increased by making literature out of the news. Charles A. Dana had already done this in the *Sun*, but there still was a large section of the population for whom the clever writing of Mr. Dana’s young men was caviar.

## NOTES

13

**Structure**

Unlike in the preceding sections, Park begins the final section of the reading with a quotation and without any reference to the key ideas or issues that he is about to address. Turning to the end of the reading, we find there is no conclusion or summary of the sort that we might expect. Rather, the ending reads more like a homily.

**Content**

Again, we need to remind ourselves that the author is writing in the mid-1920s and that this account is his interpretation of the history of the newspaper in America. We are not alerted to any opposing views and neither does he suggest that others may see things differently. That is left for the reader to find out, if they wish to do so.

We also need to be alert to the fact that the transformations of the press suggested here by the author were not neatly demarcated. For example, it is evident from the preceding section that the 'yellow press', as categorised here, was already emerging during the era of the independent press.

Before addressing the yellow press specifically, the author – to suit his purpose – argues that there are two types of readers and two types of newspapers. Note how the latter are now described as provincial (rather than country or village) newspapers, and the former as metropolitan (rather than city) newspapers.

After outlining the content of each of these two types of papers – which should now be of no surprise to us, as this distinction was made clear earlier in the reading – the author moves on to provide a useful reminder of the wider social and economic context in the latter decades of the nineteenth century.

This is particularly helpful because it highlights the key role of the newspaper as a medium of communication at a time when the telephone was not widely available and the introduction of radio would not occur until the early part of the twentieth century.

With competition rife as newspapers searched for readers, means had to be found to widen the market and increase circulation. One way forward, Park reports, was to follow the example of Charles A. Dana, whose tactic for increasing circulation was to make 'literature out of the news'.

**Writing Style**

Two points are worthy of comment. First, note how the author uses polar opposites as a way of introducing and tackling the issues that he wishes to address. In the previous section it was high-brow and low-brow, the ordinary man and the intellectual, and news and fiction. In this instance, it is two types of readers and two types of newspapers. What are the pros and cons of using this technique when writing?

You may have noted that yet again Park fails to provide full citation details relating to the quotation by Lippmann and no information is offered about Dana.

## READING

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The yellow press grew up in an attempt to capture for the newspaper a public whose only literature was the family story paper or the cheap novel. The problem was to write the news in such a way that it would appeal to the fundamental passions. The formula was: love and romance for the women; sport and politics for the men.

The effect of the application of this formula was enormously to increase the circulation of the newspapers, not only in the great cities, but all over the country. These changes were brought about mainly under the leadership of two men, Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst.

Pulitzer had discovered, while he was editor of the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, that the way to fight popular causes was not to advocate them on the editorial page but to advertise them—write them up—in the news columns. It was Pulitzer who invented muckraking. It was this kind of journalism which enabled Pulitzer, within a period of six years, to convert the old *New York World*, which was dying of inanition when he took it, into the most talked about, if not the most widely circulated, paper in New York City.

Meanwhile, out in San Francisco Mr. Hearst had succeeded in galvanizing the old moribund *Examiner* into new life, making it the most widely read newspaper on the Pacific Coast.

It was under Mr. Hearst that the “sob sister” came into vogue. This is her story, as Will Irwin told it in *Collier's*, February 18, 1911:

Chamberlain (managing editor of the *Examiner*) conceived the idea that the city hospital was badly managed. He picked a little slip of a girl from among his cub reporters and assigned her to the investigation. She invented her own method; she “fainted” on the street, and was carried to the hospital for treatment. She turned out a story “with a sob for the unfortunate in every line.” That was the professional beginning of “Annie Laurie” or Winifred Black, and of a departure in newspaper writing. For she came to have many imitators, but none other could ever so well stir up the primitive emotions of sympathy and pity; she was a “sob squad” all by herself. Indeed, in the discovery of this symphathetic “woman writing,” Hearst broke through the crust into the thing he was after.

With the experience that he had gained on the *Examiner* in San Francisco and with a large fortune that he had inherited from his father, Hearst invaded New York in 1896. It was not until he reached New York and started out to make the *New York Journal* the most widely read paper in the United States that yellow journalism reached the limit.

Pulitzer’s principal contribution to yellow journalism was muckraking, Hearst’s was mainly “jazz.” The newspaper had been conducted up to this time upon the theory that its business was to instruct. Hearst rejected that conception. His appeal was frankly not to the intellect but to the heart. The newspaper was for him first and last a form of entertainment.

## NOTES

14

**Content**

The aim of yellow journalism was to achieve a mass readership, and the key target group was signalled in the previous section when the author observed that newspapers had not yet managed to 'break into the tenements'. The key challenge was how to first attract, and then retain, this group as newspaper readers. The formula, as outlined by the author, and practised most effectively by the two names that are generally associated with the emergence of the newspaper industry in America, Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst, will come as little surprise.

The main point here, which the author expands on later in this section, is that women enter the picture for the first time, not as owners or editors, but as writers. However, their involvement as writers is primarily envisaged as a way of attracting a wider body of women as consumers of newspapers and as 'bait' for advertisers.

The author then goes on to outline the three key strategies that were used by Pulitzer and Hearst in order to first expand the circulation of their city-based newspapers on the east and west coasts of America respectively. As with the formula outlined above, these strategies will not be unfamiliar to readers, as they remain in use today and are, to some extent, assisted by the availability of new technologies.

The three strategies are identified by the author as 'muckraking' – a term attributed to the author in his own days as a journalist (see Hughes 1969: 164) – the 'sob-sister' – a technique since adapted for various purposes, one example being investigative journalism – and the third strategy involved a general intent to 'jazz up' newspapers with the aim of making them a 'form of entertainment'.

**Context**

Written in 1911, the words of Irwin, in the inserted quotation, are particularly interesting, in that they describe this journalistic strategy as 'a departure in newspaper writing'. Likewise, the idea of employing women as writers, which is attributed to Hearst, is seen here as a breakthrough in the United States, as it was in the United Kingdom in the 1920s (see, for example, Clarke 1997).

**Writing Style**

In the Irwin quotation, why are the following surrounded by apostrophes: 'fainted', 'Annie Laurie', 'woman writing'? Is it confusing when the writer uses the same apostrophes to indicate reported speech – 'with a sob for the unfortunate in every line' – which appears in the middle of the quotation. If so, what other convention could have been used to avoid this confusion?

## READING

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It was about the time the yellow press was engaged in extending the newspaper habit to the masses of people, including women and immigrants—who up to this time did not read newspapers—that the department store was beginning to attract attention.

The department store is, in a sense, a creation of the Sunday newspaper. At any rate, without the advertising that the Sunday newspaper was able to give it, the department store would hardly have gained the vogue it has today. It is important in this connection that women read the Sunday paper before they did the dailies. The women are buyers.

It was in the Sunday newspaper that the methods of yellow journalism were first completely worked out. The men who are chiefly responsible for them are Morrill Goddard and Arthur Brisbane. It was Goddard's ambition to make a paper that a man would buy even if he could not read it. He went in for pictures, first in black and white and then in colors. It was in the *Sunday World* that the first seven-column cut was printed. Then followed the comic section and all the other devices with which we are familiar for compelling a dull-minded and reluctant public to read.

After these methods had been worked out in the Sunday paper, they were introduced into the daily. The final triumph of the yellow journal was Brisbane's "Heart-to-Heart Editorials"—a column of predigested platitudes and moralizing, with half-page diagrams and illustrations to re-enforce the text. Nowhere has Herbert Spencer's maxim that the art of writing is economy of attention been so completely realized.



## NOTES

15

**Content**

While women and immigrants are clearly imagined as a core part of the mass that yellow journalism was intent on reaching, women were seen to have a particular value. This is made clear by Park as he sketches out a series of connections – suggested as loosely causal – between the rise of the department store, the importance of women as buyers, and the fine-tuning of a Sunday press which acted as a ‘test-bed’ for yellow journalism.

As usual, Park illustrates his line of argument by drawing on examples of industry practice. On this occasion it is Morrill Goddard and Arthur Brisbane who are considered to have been the pioneers and innovators of yellow journalism. Their task was to convert into readers a ‘dull-minded and reluctant public’.

The use of language of this nature to describe the potential readers gives an indication about the type of content that would be needed to gain their attention. Goddard is credited with the introduction of colour (through photographs), a new column format and a comic section, while Brisbane’s contribution was the creation and introduction of ‘Heart-to-Heart Editorials’.

This enables the author to include a maxim which is attributed to Herbert Spencer: ‘the art of writing is economy of attention’. Following the inclusion and refinement of these new approaches to content in the Sunday press, they then became a standard feature in the daily papers.

**Context**

Having been acquainted with the key features of yellow journalism by the author, which in one form or another still appear in elements of the contemporary press, it is difficult for us to envisage their impact on a ‘virgin’ readership over a century ago.

Also, although the author does not dwell on such matters, this section draws attention to early, but influential, shifts in the newspaper business. In particular, these include the importance of women as readers and consumers, the ability to lower the purchase price on the basis that advertising and an expansion in circulation would still enable a healthy profit, the use of media – in this case the newspaper – to target a particular group of consumers, and the potential for advertisers and advertisements to influence both the format and the content of newspapers.

**Writing Style**

Yet again, we can point to the author’s lack of reader friendliness! Where does the reader go to find details about Morrill Goddard, Arthur Brisbane and Herbert Spencer?

## READING

16

Walter Lippmann, in his recent study of public opinion, calls attention to the fact that no sociologist has ever written a book on news gathering. It strikes him as very strange that an institution like the press, from which we expect so much and get so little of what we expect, should not have been the subject of a more disinterested study.

It is true that we have not studied the newspaper as the biologists have studied, for example, the potato bug. But the same may be said of every political institution, and the newspaper is a political institution quite as much as Tammany Hall or the board of aldermen are political institutions. We have grumbled about our political *institutions*, sometimes we have sought by certain magical legislative devices to exercise and expel the evil spirits that possessed them. On the whole we have been inclined to regard them as sacred and to treat any fundamental criticism of them as a sort of blasphemy. If things went wrong, it was not the institutions, but the persons we elected to conduct them, and an incorrigible human nature, who were at fault.

What then is the remedy for the existing condition of the newspapers? There is no remedy. Humanly speaking, the present newspapers are about as good as they can be. If the newspapers are to be improved, it will come through the education of the people and the organization of political information and intelligence. As Mr. Lippmann well says, “the number of social phenomena which are now recorded is small, the instruments of analysis are very crude, and the concepts often vague and uncriticized.” We must improve our records and that is a serious task. But first of all we must learn to look at political and social life objectively and cease to think of it wholly in moral terms! In that case we shall have less news, but better newspapers.

The real reason that the ordinary newspaper accounts of the incidents of ordinary life are so sensational is because we know so little of human life that we are not able to interpret the events of life when we read them. It is safe to say that when anything shocks us, we do not understand it.

ROBERT E. PARK

## NOTES

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**Content**

No further mention is made of yellow journalism in these final four paragraphs, neither is there any attempt to sum up the key issues or points of the reading. Instead, the author offers some thoughts on two matters, one being the need to study the press in more detail, and the other on how the failings of the press might be mitigated.

First, he draws again on the work of Walter Lippman as a way of expressing both surprise and disappointment that no 'disinterested study' had yet been completed on the press. However, in doing so, the author is keen to establish the press as a political *institution*, implying that the study of any institution should go beyond a focus on individuals in order to consider the wider social, economic and political context in which it is shaped and functions.

The second matter of concern to the author is not to offer any remedy for the perceived limitations of the press, but rather to suggest that newspapers may improve if other changes in society are brought about. Essentially, three are suggested. One being better public education, a second being the introduction of more formalised ways of collecting, analysing, storing and disseminating public information, and the third being a shift towards a more objective – rather than moralistic – view of political and social life.

What Park appears to be suggesting is that people would have a better understanding of the 'real world' and be less attracted by sensationalist newspapers if such changes could be implemented. What does the author mean when he refers to 'disinterested study'? Also, what do you understand by yellow journalism, and why that particular colour?

**Structure**

As suggested above, we might normally have expected a summary or conclusion at the end of a reading such as this. Would you, as the reader, have found this helpful?

**Writing Style**

Two points come to mind. First, why does the author italicise *institutions*? Secondly, note yet again that no citation details are provided for Walter Lippmann.

## REFLECTING ON THE READING

For twenty-first century citizens who have access to mobile and multifunctional communication devices, it is difficult to assess the insights and impact of a reading on the newspaper that was written and published very early in the twentieth century. We also need to take note of the fact that *The City*, the book from which this reading is taken, was regarded as ‘the most popular textbook in sociology of its time’ (Schramm 1996: 125). While this may tell us something about the anticipated audience, the actual readership has, over the years, included many beyond the discipline of sociology.

As you will have found, ‘The natural history of the newspaper’ is relatively jargon-free, clearly organised, illustrated throughout with anecdotes and examples from the newspaper industry, and very obviously sets the history of the newspaper in a wider economic, social, political and cultural context.

In this reading, Park’s history of the newspaper is built around a series of transformations. One of those transformations is the advent of ‘yellow journalism’, an innovative descriptor that is attributed to Park. While the United Kingdom may not have had an exact equivalent of yellow journalism, you may be thinking that the language used by Park to characterise such journalism has similarities with the way in which some of the tabloid press is described in our contemporary era.

Unlike most of the other readings in our volume, Park only really draws on the work of one other writer, Walter Lippmann. This indicates the dearth of ‘disinterested’ writing on the newspaper industry that was available in the 1920s. Park does, though, rely on the words and thoughts of numerous industry sources and commentators, although citation details are not always provided. You may have felt that Park’s use of such sources presumed a greater knowledge on the part of the reader than is the case.

While proprietors such as Hearst and Pulitzer may have been known outside America in the 1920s, most of the editors and the newspapers that the author refers to would only have been known to those who had some degree of familiarity with the newspaper industry in America. However, it is the author’s background as a journalist, and his ability to bring into the academy ‘valuable tools and insights’ from the newspaper industry, that are cited as key reasons for his success as a teacher, researcher and writer (Schramm 1996: 124–5).

Park is regarded in some quarters as a ‘father figure’ of journalism studies, having identified, in 1916, the newspaper as ‘the great medium of communication’, as it was ‘on the basis of the information which it supplied that a public opinion rests’ (cited in Briggs and Burke 2002: 205). He has also been described as ‘the first academic student of mass communication’ (Dennis and Wartella 1996: 189), as his work suggested the media of communication as ‘active sites’ of ‘competition and conflict’, thereby shifting attention to the notion of ‘cultural struggles’ rather than ‘communication effects’ (Carey 1996: 37).

Similarly, Williams (2003: 35) notes that Park and his colleagues at the Chicago school shifted the focus of communications research away from the earlier and prevailing stimulus–response model, with the aim of understanding the cultural contexts in which individuals produced, used and made sense of media.

It is also argued that parallels can be drawn between the questions addressed by the Chicago school in the first decades of the twentieth century and those that need to be asked in the contemporary period. While researchers at the Chicago school focused their

attention on issues of communication in order to understand the implications for a wide range of groups in the fast developing city of Chicago, Carey (1996: 35) suggests that in our 'transnational [or global] structure of politics, commerce and culture', we might ask a similar question: 'What is the relation between the social disorganization of our time and the new forms of communication that have emerged since World War Two?'

The Chicago school of sociology has been described as somewhat of a Mecca for those 'interested in the media and their social, cultural and political meanings' (Katz et al. 2003: 105). It is, therefore, not surprising to find that there are links between the Chicagoans and the later research in media and communication undertaken by scholars at the Columbia, Frankfurt and Toronto schools (Robinson 1996: 160). (See our Chapters 6, 8 and 10.)

### Key terms to explore

fourth estate; liberty of the press; muckraking; power of the press; public opinion; reading public; social truth; the kept editor.

### Key writers who are mentioned

John Milton; Walter Lippmann.

## RECOMMENDED READING

Dennis, E.E. and Wartella, E. (eds) (1996) *American Communication Research: The remembered history*, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Encompasses a number of schools of thought, with chapters by researchers, historians and critics of media and communication studies, including one on the Chicago school by James Carey.

Harvey, L. (1987) *Myths of the Chicago School of Sociology*, Aldershot: Avebury.

Examines different constructions of the Chicago school, sets out its chronology and provides a detailed account of its members and their work.

Katz, E., Peter, J.D., Liebes, T. and Orloff, A. (eds) (2003) *Canonic Texts in Media Research*, Cambridge: Polity.

Outlines five key schools of thought, one being the Chicago school which is discussed by way of critical reflections on works by Rothenbuhler, Katz and Dayan, and Handelman.

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