Journalism is the only media enterprise that democracy absolutely requires—and it is the only media practice and actual business that is specifically mentioned and protected by the U.S. Constitution.

However, with the gradual decline in traditional news audiences, the growing criticism of a corps of East Coast celebrity journalists, and the rise of twenty-four-hour cable news and Internet news blogs, mainstream journalists are searching for ways to reconnect with citizens.

Modern Journalism in the Information Age

- First, in a world entangled in media outlets and computer highways, we may be producing too much information.

- Second, related problem suggests that the amount of information the media now provide has made little impact on improving public and political life.

- “When watchdogs, bird dogs, and bull dogs morph into lap dogs, lazy dogs, or yellow dogs, the nation is in trouble.”

  —Ted Stannard, former UPI reporter
What Is News?

- **newsworthiness**: the often unstated criteria that journalists use to determine which events and issues should become news reports, including timeliness, proximity, conflict, prominence, human interest, consequence, usefulness, novelty, and deviance.

- **news**: the process of gathering information and making narrative reports—edited by individuals in a news organization—that create selected frames of reference and help the public make sense of prominent people, important events, and unusual happenings in everyday life.

Neutrality and Other Values in American Journalism

- The idea of respectable detachment wasn’t conceived as a moral principle so much as a marketing device.

  - Once newspapers began to mass market themselves in the mid-1880s, after steam- and rotary-powered presses made it possible to print lots of papers and make lots of money, publishers ceased being working, opinionated journalists. They mutated instead into businessmen eager to reach the broadest number of readers and antagonize the fewest.

Neutrality and Other Values in American Journalism

- Reporters and editors turn some events into reports and discard many others. This process is governed by a deeper set of subjective beliefs that are not neutral.
Neutrality and Other Values in American Journalism

- Sociologist Herbert Gans, who studied the newsroom cultures of CBS, NBC, Newsweek, and Time in the 1970s, has generalized that several basic "enduring values" are shared by most American reporters and editors.

- Neutrality and Other Values in American Journalism
  - Ethnocentrism: an underlying value held by many U.S. journalists and citizens, it involves judging other countries and cultures according to how they live up to or imitate American practices and ideals.
  - Responsible Capitalism: an underlying value held by many U.S. journalists and citizens, it assumes that businesspeople compete with one another not primarily to maximize profits but to increase prosperity for all.
  - Small-town Pastoralism: an underlying value held by many U.S. journalists and citizens, it favors the small over the large and the rural over the urban.
  - Individualism: an underlying value held by most U.S. journalists and citizens, it favors individual rights and responsibilities over group needs or institutional mandates.

Ethics and the News Media: Ethical Predicaments

- Deploying Deception
  - Does the end justify the means?
  - Should a journalist withhold information about his or her professional identity to get a quote or a story from an interview subject?

- the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) is fairly silent on issues of deception. The code "requires journalists to perform with intelligence, objectivity, accuracy, and fairness," but it also says that "truth is our ultimate goal."
Ethics and the News Media: Ethical Predicaments

- **Invading Privacy** –
  - At the very least, in our digital age, when reporters can gain access to private e-mail messages as well as voice mail, such reporting practices raise serious questions about how far a reporter can or should go to get information.
  - “The public’s right to know of events of public importance and interest is the overriding mission of the mass media.”
  - When these two ethical standards collide, journalists usually err on the side of the public’s right to know.

Ethics and the News Media: Ethical Predicaments

- **Conflict of Interest** - considered unethical, a compromising situation in which a journalist stands to benefit personally from the news report he or she produces.

Reporting Rituals and the Legacy of Print Journalism

- **Getting a Good Story**
  - “There’s a very simple formula if you’re in Hollywood, Broadway, opera, publishing, broadcasting, newspapering. It’s four very simple words—tell me a story.”

- **Getting a Story First**
  - Journalistic scoops and exclusive stories attempt to portray reporters in a heroic light: They have won a race for facts, which they have gathered and presented ahead of their rivals.
Relying on Experts

- Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) conducted a major study of the 14,632 sources used on the 2001 evening news programs on ABC, CBS, and NBC—where most Americans get their news. FAIR found that of all those sources,
- only 15 percent were women—and 52 percent of them represented “average citizens” or “non-experts.”
- Of the 85 percent of male sources, 86 percent were cast in “authoritative” or “expert” roles in these newscasts.
- On race, among “U.S. sources” where race could be determined, “whites made up 92 percent of the total, blacks 7 percent, Latinos and Arab–Americans 0.6 percent each, and Asian Americans 0.2 percent. (According to the 2000 census, the U.S population [stood at] 69 percent non–Hispanic white, 13 percent Hispanic, 12 percent black, and 4 percent Asian.).”

Balancing Story Conflict

- For most journalists, balance means presenting all sides of an issue without appearing to favor any one position. Unfortunately, because time and space constraints do not always permit representing all sides, in practice this value has often been reduced to “telling both sides of a story.”

Acting as Adversaries

- Many journalists assume that leaders are hiding something and that the reporter’s main job is to ferret out the truth through tenacious fact-gathering and “gotcha” questions.
- The bottom line for neutral or conventional journalists, who claim to have no political agenda, is maintaining an adversarial stance rather than improving the quality of political stories and discussions. When journalists employ the gotcha model to cover news, being tough often becomes an end in itself.

Differences between Print and Television News

- First, broadcast news is often driven by its technology. If a camera crew and microwave-relay van (which bounces a broadcast signal back to the station) are dispatched to a remote location for a live broadcast, reporters are expected to justify the expense by developing a story, even if nothing significant is occurring.
Differences between Print and Television News

- Second, although print editors must cut stories to fit a physical space around the slots allocated for ads, TV news directors have to time stories to fit news in between commercials. They are under pressure to condense the day’s main events into a visual show.

- Despite the fact that a much higher percentage of space is devoted to print ads (more than 60 percent at most dailies), TV ads (which take up less than 25 percent of the time in a typical thirty-minute news program) generally seem more intrusive to viewers, perhaps because TV ads take up time rather than space.

- Third, whereas modern print journalists are expected to be detached, TV news derives its credibility from live, on-the-spot reporting, believable imagery, and viewers’ trust in the reporters and anchors who read the news.

  - sound bite: in TV journalism, the equivalent of a quote in print; the part of a news report in which an expert, a celebrity, a victim, or a person on the street is interviewed about some aspect of an event or issue.

Public Journalism, Fake News, and Democracy

- The Public Journalism Movement
  - It moves beyond the limited mission of “telling the news” to a broader mission of helping public life go well, and acts out that imperative.
  - It moves from detachment to being a fair-minded participant in public life.
  - It moves beyond only describing what is “going wrong” to also imagining what “going right” would be like.
  - It moves from seeing people as consumers—as readers or nonreaders, as bystanders to be informed—to seeing them as a public, as potential actors in arriving at democratic solutions to public problems.
Fake News and Satiric Journalism –

It is this cynicism that has drawn more and more younger people to “fake news” shows like The Daily Show with Jon Stewart and The Colbert Report on cable's Comedy Central. Following in the tradition of Saturday Night Live's “Weekend Update” sketches—which began in 1975—

these half-hour cable satires tell their audiences something that seems truthful about politicians and other public figures, and they do so with humor.

It is no wonder then why young people are looking to The Daily Show, The Colbert Report, Blogs, YouTube.com, and other alternatives for information.

Maybe they want news that better matches the complicated storytelling that surrounds them in everything from TV dramas to interactive video games to their own conversations. As citizens we should demand news stories that better represent the complexity of our world.

Public Journalism, Fake News, and Democracy