The Year That Defined American Journalism

1897 and the Clash of Paradigms

W. Joseph Campbell

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
New York London

Routledge is an imprint of the
Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

INTRODUCTION

On the agenda when the American Newspaper Publishers' Association convened its annual meeting in New York City in February 1897 were questions such as: "Should a newspaper furnish members of the editorial staff with stationery supplies, especially lead pencils?" Do typewriters "lower the literary grade of work done by reporters?" And: "What is the rule in regard to paying car fare for reporters on the local staff of newspapers?"[1]

While offering a glimpse into late nineteenth-century journalism, the mundane agenda items[2] were inadvertently deceptive: they contained no hint that the year 1897 was unfolding as an important moment of transition in American journalism. The topics before the publishers in early 1897 seem quaint and trivial now; that year in journalism was anything but.

As the publishers gathered in New York, evidence of the exceptionality of 1897 was slowly emerging. Shortly before the publishers convened, the *New York Tribune* published a halftone photograph on its front page, an image that "startled New York" journalism[3] and signaled a breakthrough in newspaper illustration.[4] The *Tribune*'s halftone was printed on newsprint, on web perfecting presses running at full speed—a combination long thought improbable. But on January 21, 1897, there it was—evidence of an unambiguous advance in halftone technology, which ultimately contributed to a dramatic recasting of the appearance of the daily newspaper.

Not long after the *Tribune*'s breakthrough, the scathing pejorative—"yellow journalism"—first appeared in print, in the *New York Press*. The newspaper had seized on the term to censure the aggressive, self-promoting "new journalism" of William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal* and Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World*.[5] The emergence of "yellow journalism" was emblematic of name-calling in print that was commonplace among newspapers of the time—and not unlike the sneers often directed at Web logs and other "new media" of the early twenty-first century.[6] But "yellow journalism" was singularly evocative and colorful, a pejorative that was immediately and forever linked with the *Journal* and the *World*. The epithet spread rapidly; newspapers across the country began invoking "yellow journalism" in 1897. And it lives on, as shorthand for journalistic misconduct of all kinds.

Just days before the publishers met, Adolph S. Ochs, the new publisher of the *New York Times*, placed the smug motto, "All the News That's Fit to Print," on the front page of his fledgling newspaper. The phrase thereafter would occupy a permanent place adjacent to the *Times*' nameplate. In time it became the most famous and most-recited slogan in journalism. A few days before that, Hearst's *New York Journal* published the year's finest work of foreign correspondence—Richard Harding Davis' moving and detail-rich account of the firing-squad execution of a Cuban insurgent captured during the rebellion against Spain's colonial rule. The Cuban uprising was to give rise in 1898 to the Spanish-American War, a conflict that confirmed America's rise as a global power. In October 1897, only six months before the war began, the *Journal* organized a stunning escape from jail of Evangelina Cosío y Cisneros, a political prisoner in Havana. For lawlessness and breathtaking audacity, the case of "jail-breaking journalism"[7] was never again matched or rivaled in American journalism. For its part, the *Journal* declared the Cisneros rescue "the greatest journalistic coup of this age."[8]

Eighteen-ninety-seven was the year of publication of American journalism's most famous editorial[9]—the *New York Sun*'s timeless paean to childhood and the Christmas spirit, "Is There A Santa Claus?"[10] No single artifact of American journalism has been so often reprinted as that editorial. Eighteen-ninety-seven was also the year of origin of the "Katzenjammer Kids" cartoon. The hell-raising Kids made their debut in the *New York Journal* in December 1897, and the strip has since become America's longest-running newspaper comic. The *Jewish Forward* of New York first appeared in April 1897 as the *Forverts*, a Yiddish daily devoted to socialist causes.[11] The *Forward* is still published, as a weekly, in Yiddish and English.

The emergent cinema was in its "novelty year" in 1897.[12] The presidential inauguration of William McKinley in March 1897 was the first to be captured on film. The heavyweight prizefight in Carson City, Nevada, that month between Robert Fitzsimmons and James Corbett was staged with the motion-picture camera in mind, and film footage of the bout attracted sizable audiences across the country.[13] In the spring of the year, a motion-picture camera was taken to war for the first time: Frederick Villiers lugged a crank-operated camera to the theater of the brief conflict between Greece and Turkey, and shot images that afterward were described as "foggy."[14]

The forerunner of broadcast journalism was taking shape. In July 1897, Guglielmo Marconi incorporated the Wireless Telegraph and Signal Company Ltd., an important step in wireless telegraphy's move "from the scientific-academic sector to the marketplace."[15] Eighteen-ninety-seven was the year, say some scholars, of the first modern use of "public relations." The phrase appeared in the preface to the *Yearbook*

Figure 1 The heavyweight boxing match in March 1897 between Robert Fitzsimmons and James Corbett was staged with motion pictures in mind. Film footage of the bout was shown across the country, attracting large audiences of men and women. The *New York Journal's* Winifred Black attended a showing and reported: "The whole thing was so shadowy—yet real, vividly, dreadfully real." (Library of Congress.)


NEW YORK JOURNAL

HOW PRESIDENT M'KINLEY WAS INAUGURATED.

The Nation's New President Took the Oath Amid the Wild Cheers of Many Thousands.

Illustrated by Pictures Made on the Spot and Brought to New York on a Special Train That Broke the Record.

The Journal's Special Commissioner, Ex-Senator Ingalls, Describes the Inaugural.

PRESIDENT MCKINLEY TAKING THE OATH OF OFFICE.

FROM WASHINGTON TO NEW YORK IN 4 HOURS!

Figure 2 William McKinley's presidential inauguration in March 1897 ushered in a prolonged period of Republican dominance in American political life. It was also the first U.S. presidential inaugural ceremony to be captured by a motion-picture camera. The *New York Journal* thoroughly covered the inauguration, arranging for a special, high-speed train to rush its artists back to New York with illustrations of McKinley's swearing-in. (Library of Congress.)

of Railway Literature.[16] Other scholars have traced the origins of the modern White House press corps to 1897, the first year of the McKinley administration.[17] The president went out of his way in 1897 to develop cordial ties with reporters. He refused, for example, to enter the Vanderbilts' Biltmore mansion in North Carolina unless correspondents who accompanied him also were admitted. And they were.[18]

This work considers these and other moments in positing that 1897 merits recognition as a year pivotal in the trajectory of American journalism. That these events and developments took place in 1897 signals unequivocally that the year was a time of great ferment and experimentation in the field. Journalists then grappled with new technologies in ways that evoke the sometimes-uncertain embrace of new technologies these days. As this study will make clear, however, the exceptionality of 1897 was defined by more than notable accomplishments and breakthroughs.

THE BUSINESS OF A NEWSPAPER

(THE CONDUCT OF GREAT BUSINESSES—SIXTH PAPER)

By J. Lincoln Steffens

With Illustrations by W. R. Leigh

THE executive heads of some two-score of the great newspapers in America, "talking shop" on a railway train last spring, spoke of their properties as factories, and when the editorial department was mentioned discussed "their traffic in news," and likened the management of it to that of a department store. White paper was the raw material which was bought in bulk by the ton to be sold at a profit retail, and the price and quality of the several brands was the favorite topic of conversation. The machinery by which it was prepared for the market was interesting; circulation and advertising were fascinating subjects, too delicate and dangerous, however, for easy chat. Public questions were not once raised, and editorial policies might never have existed. These men were the publishers and business managers and proprietors of newspapers, not editors and writers, but they "ran" their papers; they represented "the press." Journalism to-day is a business. To write of it as such is to write of it as it is.

This may seem to the "constant reader" a rather brutal conception of the fourth estate, but it is the inside view, and Mr. Leigh, who has taken it for his illustrations, partly accounts for, if he does not wholly justify, it. His pictures of the press, composing, and stereotyping rooms, with their immense, complicated, delicate machinery look like glimpses of a factory plant. The paper on which the news is printed is the heaviest single item of expense; the manager of a New York newspaper who used 337,558 miles of it last year, said his bill was $617,000. The mechanical apparatus and processes have been as potent a factor in the growth of the newspaper as the enterprise of men or the price of white paper. And in the editorial-rooms the comparison with the department store is borne out in principle and method. The managing editor aims to supply all the wants of all sorts of people, and the variety of interests handled there is divided into departments, each with a sub-editor: the foreign news, with a cable editor; the national and state news with a telegraph editor; the local news, with a city editor; and so on through the dramatic, the financial, the society, the exchange, the art, the literary, the sporting departments, with their expert managers and corps of assistants.

"Extr', extras! just out."

The man who paid the paper bill of $617,000 expended altogether that year more than two millions of dollars. He has a morning and an evening paper, and he employs 1,300 men and women every day in the year, besides twice that number who serve him at occasional critical moments. His stock in trade, the news, is collected from all over the world. The course of his business affects and is affected by every interest in the civilized world, and he has

Figure 3 This is the first page of Lincoln Steffens' in-depth assessment of *fin-de-siècle* American journalism. The article appeared in *Scribner's Monthly* in October 1897 and focused on the changes wrought by the commercialization of journalism. "The magnitude of the financial operations of the newspaper," Steffens wrote, "is turning journalism upside down." (From *Scribner's*.)

THE CLASH OF PARADIGMS

Significantly, 1897 was the year when American journalism came face-to-face with a choice among three rival and incompatible visions, or paradigms, for the profession's future. The emergence of these rival visions is central to the exceptionality of 1897. The choices that materialized then were to set a course for American journalism in the twentieth century and beyond.

The most dramatic of the three paradigms was the self-activated, participatory model of Hearst's yellow journalism. Hearst called it the "journalism of action" or the "journalism that acts." It was a paradigm of agency and engagement that went beyond gathering and publishing the news. Hearst's *New York Journal*, the leading exemplar of the activist paradigm, argued that newspapers were obliged to inject themselves, conspicuously and vigorously, in righting the wrongs of public life, and in filling the void of government inaction and incompetence. There was no more dramatic or celebrated manifestation of the "journalism of action" than the Cisneros jailbreak in Havana.

The antithesis of the "journalism of action" was the conservative, counteractivist paradigm represented by the *New York Times* and its lofty commitment to "All the News That's Fit to Print." The *Times* model emphasized the detached, impartial, yet authoritative treatment of news. Unlike its conservative counterparts such as the *New York Sun*, the *Times* was not reluctant to adapt innovative technologies of the 1890s. The *Times* in 1897 made memorable use of halftone photographs in its upscale Sunday magazine supplement, presenting the images in a sober, restrained manner quite unlike the flashy treatment typical of Hearst's newspapers.

The most eccentric of the three paradigms was non-journalistic, even anti-journalistic: it was a literary approach pursued by Lincoln Steffens upon his becoming city editor of the *New York Commercial Advertiser* in late 1897. Deliberately, and even demonstratively, Steffens shunned veteran newspapermen and instead recruited college-educated writers who had little or no experience in journalism. He then sent them out to write, to hone their talent by telling stories about the joys, hardships, and serendipity of life in New York City.

Resolution of the three-sided clash of paradigms would take years and result ultimately in the ascendancy of the *Times*' detached, counteractivist model—which still is the standard that undergirds mainstream American journalism. Journalists are trained and expected not to participate in the events and topics they cover; they are to treat the news impartially, in an even-handed manner. Those normative values are fundamental to the orthodoxy of American journalism and they can be traced to the Ochsian vision for the *New York Times*. His counteractivist model proved best able to absorb and accommodate the multiple stresses and pressures that were reshaping American journalism at the end of the nineteenth century, transforming it into a decidedly big business that attracted well-educated professionals to its editorial and reporting ranks. In 1897, though it seemed highly unlikely that the *Times*' emergent model had any chance of prevailing, given the newspaper's modest circulation and its precarious financial status. In any event, the choice among the three rival paradigms was clearly laid down in 1897. During that crowded year, the character and future of American journalism were put in play.

This is not to say that no other models were contemplated or developed in 1897. Several were. A small, struggling newspaper in Bloomfield, New Jersey, announced at the end of the year that its editorial positions would thereafter be "'guided and controlled'" by the vote of paying subscribers.[19] In some ways, the Bloomfield experiment anticipated the "civic journalism" experiment of the late 1990s, in

which editors and publishers of a number of small newspapers enlisted nonjournalists to help shape editorial decisionmaking. Also contemplated in the late nineteenth century was the notion of "endowed journalism," in which a wealthy philanthropist would establish and bankroll a newspaper, allowing it to appear without the support and presumed taint of advertising. William T. Stead, a prominent British editor who advocated activism in journalism, was a prominent exponent of advertising-free "endowed" newspapers.[20]

But the paradigms developed and tested by Hearst, Ochs, and Steffens were by far the most significant and vital. Each was rolled out in New York City, the widely acknowledged "Mecca" of American journalism,[21] where the field was at its most competitive, demonstrative, and alluring.[22] The *Journal* was the most emphatic in asserting the originality and inevitability of its vision. The "journalism of action," it declared, represented "the final state in the evolution of the modern newspaper"[23] and that a participatory ethos would "likely … become an accepted part of the functions of newspapers of this country."[24] Ochs offered no similarly bold claims in 1897 about the *Times*' standard. Because he had recently acquired the newspaper at a foreclosure, such an assertion would have seemed strained, even ludicrous. But in the *Times*' persistent criticism in 1897 of the techniques and practices of the yellow press, Ochs sensed that his emergent model possessed wide appeal. Soon enough, Ochs was touting his newspaper as the best in America—long "before it was true."[25] Steffens for his part claimed that he and his staff at the *Commercial Advertiser* were "doing some things that were never done in journalism before…."[26] One of his biographers, Justin Kaplan, called the Steffens model "a new kind of daily journalism, personal, literary and immediate."[27]

The depiction of a three-sided clash of paradigms may invite criticism for its decided New York focus. But it should be kept in mind that Hearst and Ochs developed their respective paradigms after lengthy experience in journalism outside of New York City. Hearst had run the *San Francisco Examiner* for eight years before entering the New York market in September 1895. Ochs had been publisher of the *Chattanooga Times* for eighteen years before gaining control of the *New York Times* in August 1896. The formative years preceding the emergence of their respective models were spent in the American hinterland. While Steffens had worked for several years on the *New York Evening Post* before joining the *Commercial Advertiser*, his iconoclastic, anti-journalistic model was in part an answer to the effects of the commercialization of the American press, which in 1897 were rippling through newspaper markets in New York and beyond.

Figure 4 Newspaper Row in lower Manhattan was the nerve center of American journalism in the late nineteenth century. The domed edifice at far left was the *New York World's* headquarters. The squat structure next to it was home of the *New York Sun*. The Tribune Building in the center housed the *New York Tribune* and the *New York Journal*. New York's remaining daily newspapers have long since moved uptown. (Library of Congress.)

That new paradigms would present themselves in 1897 is scarcely surprising. American journalism of the late 1890s reflected the activism, ferment, and "clamorous vitality"[28] at large in the country. As will be discussed in Chapter 1, a sense of novelty, the appeal of things "new," imbued the *fin-de-siècle* years. "Not to be 'new' is, in these days, to be nothing," Henry D. Traill, a British journalist and literary critic, said of the 1890s.[29] By 1897, Hearst had borrowed from Britain the term "new journalism" to describe the aggressive, sometimes manic, and usually self-congratulatory character of his *Journal*. The emergent clash of paradigms called attention to the new possibilities and directions in American journalism. The time of the dominant editor, the "one-man-ruled-press,"[30] was fast giving way to the forces of commercialization and the enormous capital investment required of big-city dailies. The organizational structure and the mechanized equipment required to publish a metropolitan daily newspaper—from circulation managers to batteries of linotype machines and multiple high-speed presses—prompted Steffens to write in 1897: "The magnitude of the financial operations of the newspaper is turning journalism upside down."[31]

The three-sided clash of paradigms took shape at a highly competitive and challenging time in American journalism. Newspaper editors and publishers across the country grappled with strategies and methods of reaching audiences that were increasingly urban, educated, and literate. As they grappled, editors quarreled and fought among themselves. They eagerly traded insults in print. The *New York Journal*, for example, had few more persistent critics in 1897 than the *New York Times*, which deplored the "freak journalism"[32] of Hearst's newspaper. The *New York World* in March 1897 assailed nearly all of its local competitors as the "derelicts of journalism," dismissing them as "syndicate-owned and sinking newspapers."[33]

The enthusiasm with which newspapers exchanged insults and brickbats seems strange and oddly humorous today. But in the 1890s, they were exchanged in decided seriousness. *Fin-de-siècle* American newspapers took themselves seriously, notably as agents for mass education and cultural refinement. The trade journal *Fourth Estate* called the press "the great engine of modern civilization and its efforts are equally effective for good or for evil."[34]

At the same time, evidence was gathering that the influence of the press was vastly overstated. One disturbing example came when the U.S. Senate failed in 1897 to ratify a proposed treaty of arbitration with Britain, even though the pact had won wide editorial support among American newspapers. In the 1897 mayoral election in New York, nearly all the city's newspapers backed losing candidates. Such embarrassments prompted *The Journalist* to scoff: "what a hollow sham the boasted power of the press is." It added: "'The Power of the Press' is a myth and the sooner we hunt up some other new delusion to hug [to] our bosoms the more quickly will we avoid making ourselves ridiculous."[35]

THE CENTRALITY OF NEWSPAPERS

Evidence of declining influence notwithstanding, American newspapers probably were never more popular or integral than they were in the late 1890s. In his study of newspaper penetration in urban America, historian Ted Curtis Smythe found that, on average, 2.61 newspaper copies circulated within an urban dwelling unit in 1900—compared with 0.72 copies in 2000. Those averages were much greater in the country's largest cities in 1900, Smythe reported.[36] Such penetration rates can be attributed in part to widespread per-issue price-cutting in the late nineteenth century, which was made possible by dramatically lower costs of newsprint.[37] And of course, newspapers in the late 1890s faced no competition from the likes of radio, television, or the Internet.

In ways that are difficult to fathom now, newspapers in 1897 were integral, even organic, to American life, which visitors from abroad found striking. In his *America and the Americans: From A French Point of View*, Price Collier wrote: "The Americans are such voracious readers of their own newspapers, that the newspapers must be taken into account as an important—not to say the chief—factor in what may be termed the secondary education of the mass of the people."[38]

The centrality of newspapers[39] was evident in the apparently spontaneous enthusiasm that greeted publication of the *Chicago Tribune*'s fiftieth anniversary edition on June 10, 1897. So keen was the demand for the *Tribune*'s superbly illustrated, forty-eight page "golden jubilee" issue[40] that blocks-long lines of customers formed near the newspaper's offices on the morning of the anniversary. Newsboys shouting "'strated jubiloo" and "lustrous Trib" quickly raised the price of the souvenir edition from a penny to five cents. Before the morning was out, they had doubled the price again, to ten cents. Some shrewd street vendors in the city were asking twenty-five cents a copy.[41]

"The *Tribune* was everywhere," the newspaper said of its anniversary issue, which offered readers stunning color lithography as well as detailed articles about the rise of the newspaper and the city. "Its handsome colors flashed in every store," the *Tribune* exulted. "It was carried by nearly every shopper on State and the other retail streets. It was in sight in every passing [street] car."[42] For "artistic excellence," the newspaper declared, the jubilee issue "has never been equaled by any daily newspaper in the world."[43]

Hyperbole certainly marked the *Tribune*'s account of its fiftieth anniversary issue. But the self-congratulatory tone was neither out of place nor uncommon among newspapers of 1897. It was, notably, a defining feature of the yellow press. The *New York Journal* and the *New York World* were relentless in announcing their exploits and calling attention to their accomplishments.[44] Self-promotion was a way for newspapers of the 1890s to differentiate themselves in highly competitive urban markets. Self-promotion was also a way for newspapers to assert an attachment with the communities in which they circulated. By boasting and promoting themselves, newspapers sought to project a sense of irresistibility, which readers could ill afford to miss. The *Chicago Tribune* clearly used its fiftieth anniversary to project an irresistibility. "It has not been an accident," the newspaper declared, "that the Tribune has grown into the heart of the people" through "unflagging loyalty to the best interests of the whole people of Chicago."[45]

Another common way in which newspapers of the 1890s asserted their local attachment was by acting as agents of charity. The *New York*

World, for example, prepared thousands of Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners for the poor of New York and helped establish schools for newsboys.[46] The *New York Tribune* offered summer outings for the city's poor children.[47] Hearst's *Journal* set up soup kitchens to ease the harsh consequences of winter snowstorms.[48] *The Journalist* attributed the *Journal*'s popularity in part to the newspaper's big-heartedness—to the sense "that behind and through the paper there beats a warm, generous, human heart alive to the troubles and miseries of humanity and anxious to alleviate them."[49] More conservative newspapers would do well, *The Journalist* said, to "bring themselves in closer touch with the hearts of the people."[50]

The centrality of newspapers in the life of Americans in the late 1890s would seem alien today. Few large-city newspapers of the twenty-first century speak in their columns of the importance of winning their readers' heartfelt affection. Given that newspaper circulation has been in nearly unbroken decline for many years, few readers nowadays regard newspapers as organic, or as essential to the fabric of American society.

Other aspects of the journalism of 1897 would seem peculiar and even off-putting today. Some leading regional newspapers, such as the *Boston Globe* and *Cleveland Press*, routinely devoted large portions of their front pages to display advertising, for products such as patent medicines, men's suits, and the latest models of bicycles. The front page of the *New York Herald* in the 1890s contained no news at all. The first two or three pages of the *Herald* were typically devoted to classified advertising, including personal advertisements that were sometimes fairly *risqué*.

Newspapers in 1897 often crammed twenty to thirty articles—many of them a paragraph or two in length—onto their front pages. On February 10, 1897, the day "All the News That's Fit to Print" first appeared adjacent to the newspaper's nameplate, the *New York Times* offered twenty-seven articles on its front page. These included brief, oddball stories such as "Dying of Hiccoughs," "Tin-Plate Factory to Start Up," and "Indicted for Making a Bet." A detailed index stretching for a column and a half also appeared on the *Times*' front page that day, as it did on most days in 1897. But neither pictures nor illustrations graced the front page of February 10, 1897—another feature of a newspaper which, for ample good reason, came to be called "the gray lady."

The crowded, chaotic makeup of the *Times* was fairly common among U.S. newspapers in the late 1890s. Foreign visitors were known to sneer at the newspapers' disorderly appearance. "There is a lack of discrimination in the daily bill of fare served up by the American press

that cannot but disgust the refined and tutored palate," declared James Fullarton Muirhead, a fastidious British travel writer who visited the United States in the mid-1890s and wrote a handbook for visitors to the United States.[51] "The very end for which the newspaper avowedly exists," Muirhead added, "is often defeated by the impossibility of finding out what is the important news of the day."[52]

Another feature of the American press of 1897 that would seem quaint and alien today were the newsboys who loudly and aggressively hawked newspapers on city streets. More than a few people thought them nuisances, and the city commissioners of Washington, D.C., adopted a measure in 1897 forbidding newsboys from calling out on Sundays. The so-called "crying ban" was advocated by a group of Protestant clergy who claimed that the yelling of newsboys disturbed worship services.[53] The Secular League of Washington opposed the ban as an attack on "the poor newsboy's … attempt to earn an honest living." The organization claimed that the crying of newsboys was no less disruptive than "the clanging of church bells" on Sunday mornings.[54] One dissident clergyman, the Rev. A. G. Rogers, suggested the ban was sought because Sunday newspapers had become more popular and entertaining than church-going. "If it comes to a contest for popular favor between the Sunday newspaper and the church, … the only way in which the church can come out on top is to offer the most inducements for a pleasant time," he said. "Make the church entertaining and people will come to them."[55]

But the crying ban remained in force. Four newsboys were arrested in a test case in early 1897 and an appellate judge upheld the ordinance.[56] Police occasionally brought in a law-breaking newsboy.[57] By early 1898, Washington was said to be more quiet on Sundays than any other American city.[58]

PARALLELS, THEN AND NOW

Yelling newsboys and the mild controversies they prompted long ago disappeared from urban America. But other issues and controversies that percolated in American journalism in 1897 would seem very familiar in the early twenty-first century. Then, as now, New York was the nerve center of American journalism, home to the most prestigious news outlets, the city where many journalists aspired to work.[59] So alluring was New York in 1897 that the *Fourth Estate* spoke of "a veritable deluge of talent" that had reached New York in recent years. But the city proved rudely inhospitable to many job-seekers in journalism, and *Fourth Estate* felt compelled to offer this blunt advice: "Go anywhere,

but leave New York. It is today the poorest field for anything but the highest talents, and these are often crowded into insignificance."[60]

Newspapers of the late 1890s were known to inflate their circulation figures, not unlike the deceptive practices one hundred or so years later of *Newsday*, the *Chicago Sun-Times*, and a few other titles.[61] Newspaper circulations were not audited in the late nineteenth century, which allowed for egregious exaggeration, despite the insistence of many newspapers that their books were open to anyone who wished to inspect them. *Fourth Estate* said such claims served as a reminder "that perjury is not a forgotten vice."[62] As will be discussed in Chapter 2, Adolph Ochs' inflated claims about the circulation of the *New York Times* precipitated a crisis at the newspaper in 1898, when a former employee threatened to tell advertisers of the exaggerated figures. Ochs escaped the quandary by trimming the newspaper's daily price to a penny from three cents to boost circulation.[63] This desperate move also had the unexpected effect of ensuring the *Times*' survival and ultimately establishing its counteractivist paradigm as the gold standard of American journalism.

Then, as now, the use and protection of anonymous sources by reporters gave rise to messy controversies and threats of jail. Two reporters were brought to trial in June 1897, three years after they had refused to tell a U.S. Senate committee the source for their reports that senators had been improperly speculating in sugar stocks. The reporters, John S. Shriver of the *New York Mail and Express* and E. J. Edwards of the *Philadelphia Press*, were acquitted separately on technicalities about whether the Senate committee had properly summoned them and whether the questions they were asked were pertinent.[64] In his directed verdicts clearing the reporters, the judge made clear the verdicts were not meant to be extensions of journalistic privilege. Even so, the *Fourth Estate* hailed the outcomes as indirect support for allowing journalists "to hold inviolate confidences"[65] akin to those of lawyer and client and doctor and patient. Such broad interpretations of journalistic privilege have never been recognized, and even in the early twenty-first century journalists face time in jail if they refuse to testify before grand juries.[66]

Then, as now, newspapers stood accused of barely concealing their partisan ways. The political preference or party orientation of major newspapers in 1897 was readily apparent, and that prompted press critic Harry Thurston Peck to write: "The most fundamental defect … in our American journals is an absolute and lamentable lack of fairness in everything that touches upon political opinion." Peck asserted that "political news reports are tinctured with a partisanship

that destroys their value as news, and that does more than any other thing to discredit the claim of our journalists to be taken seriously."[67] Peck, a Columbia University professor and sometimes press critic, was scarcely alone in charging of partisanship. Muirhead, the fussy British travel writer, said "the want of impartiality" in U.S. newspapers was "another of the patent defects of the American daily press." He said the press in America was so "unscrupulous" in its partisanship that it more resembled "the ethics of the ward politician … than the seeker after truth."[68]

As it is today—when books are written about the urgent obligation of "saving journalism"[69]—the American press in 1897 was the target of harsh and withering critiques. In a lament that would be familiar today, a magazine called *The Dial* published in 1897 an assessment of what it called the "decay" of American journalism. *The Dial* said it was an "undeniable fact that most of the newspapers published in our large cities are so devoid of principle that they constitute a perpetual menace to every genuine interest of our civilization."[70] Then, as now, the critiques of American journalism sprang partly from the demands and uncertainties associated with new techniques and technologies. In 1897, "the fad for illustrations"—the expanding use of engravings and halftones—was seen as contributing to the "decadence of newspapers" and a decline in their literary quality.[71] Then as now, technology was seen as contributing to lowered standards. The Linotype typesetting machine was blamed for what *The Journalist* called a "deteriorating effect of modern journalistic methods. … Never before were sheets which made a pretense to respectability so slouchily printed as now."[72] But for all the qualms of traditionalists, Linotypes were in wide usage in 1897—4,150 of them were in use at 600 places across North America.[73] The *New York Herald* owned the country's largest Linotype battery in 1897—52 machines. The *New York World* had 51 linotypes and the *Journal* 50.[74]

Other innovations were catching on in 1897. Newer models of the typewriter had passed the threshold of reliability and ease of use, and were gaining favor in American newsrooms. Trade journals of 1897 noted the "marked increase in typewriter usage among literary workers and journalists"[75] and waxed enthusiastic about the machine's capabilities. "There is no modern invention except, perhaps, the bicycle, which has so evidently filled a long-felt want and taken its position in the economy of modern business life as the typewriter," Allan Forman, the editor of *The Journalist*, wrote in May 1897.[76] Forman said his first piece of advice to any novice in journalism would be: "'Get a typewriter and learn how to use it.' It is easy, and anybody who has

brains enough to write anything worth reading can learn to put it into good shape on a machine in a week."[77] Forman figured that learning to use a typewriter could enhance a journalist's earning capacity by perhaps one-third.[78]

But the typewriter was not unanimously received with warmth and enthusiasm in American newsrooms. Just as some journalists expressed skepticism about the Internet and emergent media technologies in the mid-1990s,[79] some veteran reporters of the 1890s resented the noisy, intrusive typewriter. They preferred to compose articles by longhand while seated at sloped desks, and they greeted the typewriter with hostility and disdain. At the *New York Times*, typewriters were set up on a "felt-covered table in a remote part of the city room" so that their clatter "wouldn't drive the older men nuts."[80]

Expense was another barrier to adopting the typewriter. A reliable model cost about $100 in 1897, which *The Journalist* acknowledged was almost prohibitively expensive for most young writers.[81] But *Fourth Estate* argued that price should be no barrier and advised journalists to regard the typewriter as a "good friend":[82]

> Though it is unfortunately true that many of the best reporters fail to save enough to begin a bank account, yet there is no reason why any man earning a decent salary should not possess a typewriter. It is more than a mechanical connivance, for it is a stimulus to extra work while it is a reliever of much manual labor. It is the good friend who eases regular work and incites ambitions above receiving a salary.[83]

The typewriter's convenience as a time-saving device[84] was well-suited to the "rush and hurry" pace[85] of *fin-de-siècle* America—and was an important factor in what *Fourth Estate* described in 1897 as the "rapid introduction of the typewriter into newspaper offices."[86] The typewriter's capacity to accelerate the flow of copy from reporter to editor to typesetter was vital to its adoption in newsrooms, a factor particularly important in deadline writing. It was not at all hypothetical for a reporter using a typewriter to compose the day's most important story only minutes before the presses would roll. "The sharp click of the machine sounds like a telegraph instrument wildly out of order," *Fourth Estate* said in describing such a scenario. "Bits of copy are cut off without interrupting the writer, and the whole story is in type before he has had time to get his breath. The seemingly impossible has been accomplished … and the newspaper presents the very latest news to its readers."[87]

By 1897, famous correspondents, including Sylvester Scovel of the *New York World*, had begun carrying typewriters on their assignments.[88] Typewritten manuscripts for books and magazines were becoming *de rigueur*. "A modern Thackeray," said *Fourth Estate*, "would in all probability be overlooked unless he handed in his manuscript in type-written form."[89]

INTRODUCING THE YEAR STUDY

In presenting the case that 1897 was a pivotal year in American journalism, this work pursues a methodological frame—the single-year study—that has been neglected or overlooked in journalism history,[90] a field that leading scholars periodically have criticized for its "restrictions on methodological approaches"[91] and its resistance to "new and better ways to study [journalism's] past."[92] Thus, another important objective of this work is to introduce the year study to journalism history.

Year studies have been common enough in other fields. Recent and popular year studies have focused, for example, on 1000,[93] 1215,[94] 1759,[95] 1776,[96] 1777,[97] 1912,[98] 1919,[99] and 1968.[100] On occasion a single month,[101] or even a single day,[102] has been the subject of book-length treatment. An important reason for the popularity of year studies is that they are intriguingly flexible and inclusive—"durational and punctual at the same time." [103] As Michael North, the author of *Reading 1922*,[104] has observed, "In the telling of history … a year can be used as a date, as if it were punctual and precise, or as a period containing a great many other dates."[105] Such versatility is apparent in the single-year works that have examined the world on the cusp of modernity,[106] the United States at a critical moment thirty years before its civil war,[107] and the United States on the eve of the "American century."[108]

While year studies notably have been missing from journalism research, occasional attempts have been made to identify and celebrate the profession's pivotal moments. Perhaps the best example of such an effort was the 1997 issue of the now-defunct *Media Studies Journal* that offered short essays on "defining moments in journalism" since the 1940s. The collection was topical, anecdotal, and fairly predictable. It included discussions about "Vietnam and War Reporting,"[109] "The Weight of Watergate,"[110] and "Covering Politics—Is There a Female Difference?"[111]

Although not in the form of year studies, American journalism of the late 1890s has attracted considerable and sustained interest from scholars over the years, many of whom have focused on the press and the Spanish-American War,[112] or on the personalities of Hearst and Pulitzer. These works often have presented the seriously misleading

characterization of the yellow press as wretched and trivial, prone to trafficking in lurid sensation and fabrication.[113] Nearly all of Hearst's biographers have been harsh and unforgiving,[114] while Pulitzer's have been largely sympathetic and often fawning.[115] W. A. Swanberg, who wrote biographies about both men, disparaged Hearst's newspapers of the late 1890s as little more than "printed entertainment and excitement—the equivalent in newsprint of bombs exploding, bands blaring, firecrackers popping, victims screaming, flags waving, cannons roaring … and smoke rising from the singed flesh of executed criminals."[116]

More recent and dispassionate studies—written by scholars who clearly spent considerable time *reading* Hearst's newspapers—have rejected such simplistic and unrevealing characterizations. They have instead identified earnestness and a degree of sophistication in Hearst's newspapers, especially the *New York Journal*. In his admirably even-handed biography, *The Chief*, David Nasaw said of the 1895–1897 period at Hearst's *Journal*:

> Day after day, Hearst and his staff improved on their product. Their headlines were more provocative than anyone else's, their drawings more lifelike; the cartoons by Homer Davenport were sharply focused and brilliantly drawn, the writing throughout the paper outstanding, if, at times, a bit long-winded. Equally important in attracting new readers, the newspaper's layout was excellent, with text and drawings breaking through columns to create new full-page landscapes, and sensational bold headlines that seized the eye and quickened the imagination.[117]

John D. Stevens, in his insightful study of sensationalism in the New York City press, similarly identified an intensity and industriousness in the yellow press which, he argued, was probably "read by people in all social classes."[118] Stevens also wrote: "If they titillated, the yellow papers also told New Yorkers what was going on, what forces were shaping their lives. Each issue bulged with news accounts and feature stories which were little parables about life in the big city."[119] However, neither Nasaw nor Stevens recognized the clash of paradigms that took shape in *fin-de-siècle* New York journalism. Other writers and scholars have hinted at something resembling that clash, but have defined it narrowly, usually as a dichotomy of "journalism-as-information" against "journalism-as-entertainment."

An early expression of this dichotomy appeared in 1932, in a *Vanity Fair* essay that reviewed the long careers and contributions of Ochs and Hearst.[120] The essay, which was notably sympathetic to both

men, declared that "Ochs specialized in information, Hearst in entertainment."[121] In his 1978 study, *Discovering the News*, the sociologist Michael Schudson took up and modified the information-*versus*-entertainment dichotomy. Schudson called the dichotomy "the two journalisms of the 1890s," and he substituted Pulitzer for Hearst as the most prominent representative of "journalism as entertainment." Pulitzer's *World*, Schudson wrote, "may have set the pace for modern mass-circulation journalism, but after 1896 the *New York Times* established the standard."[122]According to Schudson, Ochs best represented "journalism as information."[123]

Schudson's was an intriguing and thoughtful construct, but was encumbered by a focus on class. The *Times*' "information" model appealed to "wealthier people in New York," Schudson wrote,[124] while the *World*'s storytelling approach resonated with "the working class reader."[125] This part of his analysis rests more on conjecture than persuasive evidence. Indeed, the best evidence suggests that the *Times* and the *World* sought and doubtlessly attracted readers across the social and economic strata, as Stevens and others have noted.[126]

Moreover, the construct of "the two journalisms" is fuzzy, imprecise, and contradicted by a fair amount of evidence. [127] As readers readily discern in moving from the news sections to the sport pages, newspaper content is, and long has been, an amalgam of news *and* entertainment. This certainly was true of the yellow press of Pulitzer and Hearst of the late 1890s, as critics of the time pointed out. Hearst "would have one of the best papers published in the English language," *The Journalist* observed, were he to "cut his newspaper in two, and publish the real, vital news in one part, and the sensations, rot, and nonsense in the other."[128] While Pulitzer was notoriously tight-fisted, the *World* was known to devote considerable resources to gathering the news. The commitment to far-flung newsgathering was suggested by the assignments that the *World*'s Scovel—perhaps the most prominent foreign correspondent of the time—took on in 1897. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, Scovel's reporting that year traced the arc of the most important international events—from the insurrection in Cuba, to the brief war between Greece and Turkey and the mad rush to the gold fields of the subarctic Klondike.[129]

Not only did the *World* devote resources to gathering news, it moved in 1898 to *de-emphasize* its sensational content (or "journalism-as-entertainment"). Pulitzer instructed his editors to tone down the *World*, typographically—a decision announced at a staff meeting in November 1898.[130] Thereafter, the *World* became steadily more conservative in appearance and in content. The *Times*, meanwhile, was

not above frivolity and entertainment in promoting itself. During his first months as the newspaper's publisher in 1896 and 1897, Ochs "promoted the *Times* with every gimmick he could think of," according to Susan Tifft and Alex Jones in their revealing study of Ochs and his heirs.[131] As will be discussed in Chapter 2, Ochs pursued a variety of schemes—including a contest for a new motto—to call attention to his newspaper and attract badly needed readers.[132]

Schudson's "two journalisms" construct not only draws sharper contrasts than are warranted, it ignores the *Journal*'s ascendancy as America's most compelling and energetic newspaper and fails to identify the elaborate nature of the *Journal*'s activist paradigm. One of the few scholars who explicitly considered the implications of the *Journal*'s activism was Gerald Linderman in *The Mirror of War: American Society and the Spanish-American War*. While noting that Hearst believed the newspaper could be "an instrument of government vis-à-vis government," Linderman inaccurately characterized the "journalism of action" as an irregular and inconsistent force which, "in limited categories of action would rival and occasionally displace government."[133] As will be explored in Chapter 2, the "journalism of action" was far more complex than that characterization. The paradigm, as Hearst saw it, was hardly self-limiting or constrained, and it certainly was not meant to be episodic. The "journalism of action" was defined by a panoply of strategies through which Hearst's *Journal* would inject itself as a *participant*, ranging widely to "fitly render any public service within its power."[134] The *Journal* insisted that a "newspaper, hardly less than a government, is the guardian of the people's rights."[135] As we shall see, the *Journal*'s activism was seldom at rest in 1897.

While no work of American journalism has specifically identified or analyzed the watershed character of 1897, a few studies have focused on the exploits of Scovel and other journalists at that time. For example, Joyce Milton's engaging, if flawed, work, *The Yellow Kids: Foreign Correspondents in the Heyday of Yellow Journalism*, devoted considerable attention to Scovel and Richard Harding Davis. Their exceptional reporting in 1897 will be considered in Chapter 3. David Traxel's insightful year study, *1898: The Birth of the American Century*, explored the lasting political and military significance of 1898—notably, the decisiveness of the Spanish-American War to American foreign policy and the country's emergence as a global power.[136] Traxel, however, offered only passing reference to Hearst's activist vision[137] and instead embraced the conventional and misleading critique that the yellow press sought "to entertain and inform an audience of the imperfectly literate and barely educated."[138] Its readership was certainly much more

diverse than that. Traxel in any case did not explore in detail the ferment and tensions the roiled American journalism in 1897.

This is not to say that 1897 has no prospective rival as American journalism's exceptional year. There are other candidates, including: 1798 and the promulgation of the Alien and Sedition Acts, under which ten journalists eventually were convicted;[139] 1833 and the emergence (disputed by some scholars) of innovative techniques associated with the penny press;[140] 1972 and the *Washington Post*'s disclosures about the Watergate scandal, a constitutional crisis that led to the resignation of President Richard M. Nixon,[141] and 1995 and the popular embrace of the Internet and its World Wide Web.[142] Each of those years was significant, even extraordinary, in the historiography of American journalism. But none of them offered the rich variety of salient, decisive moments that so distinguished 1897.

THE MERITS OF YEAR STUDIES

While critiques of journalism history have not specifically identified single-year studies as representative of methodological freshness, such approaches offer "a manageable way to narrow the scope, deal in specifics, yet still work with a beginning, middle, and end."[143] Because they are sharply focused, year studies can clarify trends, issues, and developments that otherwise might be obscured in the sweep of historiography. For example, the intense if ultimately passing interest among many newspapers in Hearst's "journalism of action" is rarely recognized by historians. But a detailed examination of 1897 reveals that the "journalism of action" won considerable interest and even admiration among journalists, including some of Hearst's many rivals and foes. For a time, the "journalism of action" was regarded as a promising agent, as "honest, fearless, unpurchaseable journalism"[144] that seemed powerful enough to take on official corruption and the excesses of monopoly interests that were gathering strength in *fin-de-siècle* America. "It is not too much to say," Henry A. Crittenden, a reform-minded commentator wrote in *The Journalist*, "that the vital interests of the national progress and of the civilization demand that Mr. Hearst and the new journalism shall win in this titanic battle"[145] against trusts and corruption.[146]

Year studies, moreover, can yield insight into what are regarded as familiar, even mundane topics. Chapter 2 of this work, for example, will revisit the emergence of the *New York Times*' famous motto and describe how "All the News That's Fit to Print" was first an advertising

and marketing tool before being assigned to a permanent and prominent place on the newspaper's front page.

Year studies of course are not without risks, the most acute of which is reductive—claiming too much significance for a single year while ignoring the broader, evolutionary context. And indeed it would be erroneous to characterize the succession of decisive developments in American journalism in 1897 as solely the harvest of sudden inspiration. Some of those developments were, to be sure. The *New York Sun*'s classic Santa Claus editorial was, according to an account by the newspaper's editor, quickly written, in the course of a day's work.[147] But other pivotal moments in 1897 were the result of extended periods of testing. A year study can capture or freeze-frame key moments amid the trajectory of long-term change, and then consider those moments in detail. An example of the flexibility of this approach is apparent in considering the breakthrough in halftone technology—the development of the mechanical process allowing photographic images to be printed in the main section of a newspaper as it was published on a high-speed web perfecting press. While a method for printing halftones on flatbed presses had been developed by 1880, it had been thought "an impossible method" to apply the technology to a large daily newspaper that was published on high-speed web presses, which were becoming ever more sophisticated.[148] But in January 1897, the *New York Tribune* demonstrated that it could be done—becoming "the first mass circulation newspaper to publish a halftone photograph" in its news pages. [149]

The subject of the *Tribune*'s photograph was not particularly memorable: the image was a profile view of Thomas Platt, the New York Republican party boss and a U.S. senator-elect.[150] But the significance of the Platt photograph was readily apparent. *Fourth Estate* called its appearance "a new step in the art of newspaper illustration, proving that a half-tone could be used successfully, not only in a supplement but in the news pages."[151] The *Tribune* later congratulated itself on becoming "the first of all the metropolitan newspapers to make and print a satisfactory half-tone picture in its main sheet with its rapid, web perfecting presses, running at full speed, and using simply the regular everyday quality of printing paper." The newspaper asserted: "We do not say The Tribune's half-tones cannot be improved. … But the mechanical difficulty, hitherto deemed insuperable, has been at last overcome."[152] Within six weeks, the *Fourth Estate* reported a "distinct passion for half-tones" had taken hold "throughout the country."[153]

Although his name was nowhere mentioned in the reports about the *Tribune*'s success, the breakthrough was a personal triumph for the newspaper's art manager, Stephen H. Horgan.[154] For years, Horgan had

maintained that a process for printing halftones on high-speed presses was practical and could be developed. His enthusiasm was not widely shared, however, and it reportedly cost him his job at the *New York Herald*. Printers there scoffed at Horgan's advocacy of the halftone process. They regarded it as preposterous, especially after the *Herald*'s experiments with halftones turned out to be little short of miserable.[155] The publisher, James Gordon Bennett Jr., was said to have ordered Horgan dismissed.[156] Horgan subsequently joined the *Tribune*.

Long before photojournalism was fashionable, or imaginable, Horgan recognized the importance of marrying photography and journalism. "The newspaper aims to give a faithful picture of current history," he said in 1886. "How much more truthful would that record be if it were made by the unprejudiced and impartial camera[?]"[157] By then, he and others had pioneered the use of halftones in illustrated newspapers and weeklies, including the *New York Daily Graphic*, where Horgan had worked as a photographer.[158] He helped develop the process by which halftones appeared in that newspaper—among them the famous upper Fifth Avenue "Shantytown" image, published March 4, 1880, on the *Graphic*'s eighth anniversary.[159] It was among the first halftones ever published in a newspaper. But the process used by the *Graphic* was rudimentary compared to the technique Horgan successfully demonstrated in 1897, to embed halftones in the curved stereotype plates used on the *Tribune*'s presses.[160] The *Tribune*'s application of the halftone process to high-speed presses was soon recognized as signaling a "wonderful revolution … in the illustration of great metropolitan daily papers."[161] In his social history of photography, Robert Taft wrote: "The year 1897 really marks the advent of half-tone illustration as a regular feature of American newspaper journalism."[162]

The most significant aspect of Horgan's breakthrough was not the process but its promise of rapidly transferring high-fidelity photographic images to the printed page. The ready application of the halftone process in daily journalism led to nothing less than a realtering of the appearance of American newspapers—a development that *Fourth Estate* detected as early as 1899.[163] The halftone process allowed the newspaper to become a more vivid and more visual medium, and encouraged the eventual ascendancy of graphic illustrations (or "visuals") in newspaper design. The contemporary formula for American newspapers favors fewer articles and more "visuals"—a dramatic reversal of the equation that prevailed in 1897. For confirmation, one need only compare the front pages of the *New York Times* in 1897 with those of today. Instead of twenty to thirty articles crowded onto page one, the *Times*' front page is striking in its use of color photographs. Fewer

than a dozen articles appear on the *Times*' front "cover." Other newspapers in the early twenty-first century—among them the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, which Pulitzer and his heirs owned for decades—usually offered two or three articles on front pages that were dominated by large color photographs.[164] The altered appearance of the newspaper's front page was not necessarily a direct and inevitable consequence of Horgan's breakthrough of 1897. But his accomplishment was vital in making possible the graphic transformation of newspapers.

DEATH OF THE "POPE"

The transitory nature of 1897 was underscored in October that year by the death after a months-long illness of Charles A. Dana, the "pope" of American journalism.[165] Dana was the brilliant but ill-tempered editor of the *New York Sun*. He ran the *Sun* for nearly thirty years and the newspaper thoroughly bore his imprint. Dana's spectacles, bald pate, and long beard made him one of journalism's instantly recognizable figures. He was as cerebral as he looked, and he cultivated an intellectualism at the *Sun*.

Dana was an accomplished linguist who spoke French, knew Gaelic, was familiar with Russian and Norwegian, and read Dante in the original Italian.[166] He impressed visitors with his powers of concentration. Even late in life, Dana was known to absorb the contents of a book or magazine while carrying on a conversation.[167] He developed one of the world's finest private collections of ceramics and objets d'art, and spent upwards of $400,000 in doing so.[168]

The *Sun* during Dana's long stewardship became known as a writer's paper. In its newsroom, the author of a particularly fine story was held in higher esteem "than he who conquers kingdoms," according to the press critic Will Irwin.[169] By 1897, however, Dana's prominence in American journalism had slipped into eclipse. He was then seventy-eight-years old and the last of the nineteenth-century's famous "old-time American editors."[170] Better than any editor, Dana represented the fading concept of "personal journalism," in which the editor's voice, experience, intellect, and opinion infused the newspaper with singular character and personality.[171] The decline of "personal journalism" sometimes was a topic of debate in 1897. *Fourth Estate* insisted, for example, that "personal journalism" was not *passé*, writing:

> It is our belief that individuality still counts and that the people like to feel the personality of the editor. They agree or disagree with him as they see fit, and in either case they still demand

> a personal head distinct from the business office, though they often care most for papers whose editors are also proprietors. The day of the editor is not gone. His training and intimate acquaintance with men and affairs make him an authority on many subjects. His power as an educator and instructor is not gone. He is still a leader among men.[172]

But that was a romantic view. The intimacy of "personal journalism" was untenable and even implausible as newspapers of the late nineteenth century inexorably grew into capital-intensive big businesses sustained increasingly by advertising revenues.[173] A large-city American daily newspaper in 1897 could expect to raise two-thirds of its revenues by selling space to advertisers.[174]

Dana tried to hold out against the changes sweeping American journalism of the late nineteenth century. He likened himself as "an old-fashioned expert," but was more hopeful than prescient in predicting that illustrations in newspapers would prove "a passing fashion."[175] Dana conceded never having taken a liking to the Linotype machine "because it didn't seem to me to turn out a page as handsome, in a typographical point of view, as a page set by hand."[176]

In death, Dana was not deeply mourned. Many leading journalists of New York were conspicuous by their absence from his funeral. The old editor, as *Fourth Estate* noted, had accumulated "hosts of admirers and legions of enemies."[177] In an editorial eulogizing Dana, the *Los Angeles Times* characterized him as "a born fighter who was wont to slay and spare not."[178] He had made many enemies during the bitter war that pitted the Associated Press news cooperative against the privately owned United Press, of which Dana was president.

That war had broken out in 1893 and both news agencies raided the other's clients.[179] Slowly, the Associated Press began to gain the upper hand, thanks largely to its membership in a cartel of international news agencies. Cartel membership allowed the Associated Press to send its subscribers a steady diet of news from abroad, including reports of the Sino-Japanese War in 1894.[180] The defection in early 1897 of several prominent United Press clients, including the *New York Herald* and *New York Tribune*,[181] signaled the end of the bitter struggle. By early April 1897, United Press had declared bankruptcy and Dana filed the documents that formalized the agency's collapse.[182]

It was a staggering defeat for the old editor, the humiliation of which deepened a few weeks later when the *Sun* was obliged to publish an apology[183] to Frank B. Noyes, an Associated Press director and publisher of the *Washington Evening Star*, to settle a case of criminal

libel.[184] Noyes had sued the *Sun* over an editorial in 1895 that described him as "a thoroughly dishonest director" of the Associated Press.[185] In apologizing to Noyes, the *Sun* said it retracted "any remarks reflecting either upon his personal or business integrity."[186]

During Dana's last months, the *Sun* was at the forefront of two other failed campaigns, both of them widely publicized if clumsy assaults on what the *Sun* termed the "leprous new journalism"[187] of Hearst and Pulitzer. One campaign sought to destroy the *Journal* and the *World* by expelling them from social clubs, reading rooms, and libraries across metropolitan New York. The other was legislation—aimed principally at the *Journal*—to outlaw the unauthorized publication of caricatures in newspapers in New York state. Although both campaigns were ill-conceived and had little lasting effect, they nonetheless demonstrated how the transformations in American journalism in 1897 troubled and unnerved not only journalists but politicians as well.

The boycott against the *Journal* and the *World* was an amorphous campaign that gathered considerable momentum in late winter 1897. The Newark Free Public Library was the first institution to ban what the *Sun* called "the chronicles of crime, of lust and of general nastiness."[188] The library's trustees voted on February 4, 1897, to cancel subscriptions to the *Journal* and the *World* and remove back issues of the newspapers from the library's files.[189] The *Sun* devoted more than two columns of newsprint to a glowing and approving report about the library's rebuke. It quotes the young woman in charge of the library's reading room as saying:

> Many times every day, ladies and gentlemen, young and old, come in here and say: 'Oh, what a relief it is to come in here and not find that horrible *World* and *Journal*! It is safe now for boys and girls to come here and read now. Those papers ought to be kept out of every public library in the country!'

The boycott spread quickly and by May 1897, the *Journal* and *World* had been banned by nearly ninety institutions,[190] including the Century Club and Merchants' Club in New York City, the New York Yacht Club, the Harlem Branch of the YMCA, the Montauk Club of Brooklyn, the Flatbush Young Republican Club in Brooklyn, public libraries in Bridgeport and New Haven, Connecticut, [191] as well as the library reading room at Yale University Library.[192] Clubs and organizations in Syracuse [193] and Portland, Oregon, [194] also joined in what the *Sun* called "the protest of decency."[195]

Other New York newspapers joined the *Sun* in welcoming the boycott. The *New York Times* approvingly declared it "a moral revolt against the unclean and sensational examples of the 'new journalism.'"[196] Essential to the boycott's success, the *Times* said, must be an element of shame. "Respectable men must be made to blush and hang their heads when caught reading these polluting sheets or having them in their houses," it said.[197]

The inchoate protest—which evoked the "moral war" in 1840 against the *New York Herald* of the elder James Gordon Bennett[198]—tended to be long on denunciation and short on explicit grievance. Rarely did the *Sun* or other newspapers cite examples of the vulgar and reprehensible content of the *Journal* or *World*, both of which were certainly more flamboyant in appearance than their conservative rivals. It was vaguely asserted that in their coverage of crime and corruption, the yellow journals abetted even more crime and corruption.[199] But for the most part, the assaults against the yellow press were invective-filled generalizations.[200] Typical was this passage from the *Sun*: "The procuress corrupting her sex is not more an enemy to society than the 'new journalism,' with its prurient wares—the suggestiveness of the pencil and the salaciousness of the pen."[201] As the boycott gathered momentum, the *Times* declared: "The moral disease germs of the new journals are as big and hideous as rattlesnakes. Every eye sees them, every mind comprehends their poisonous nature."[202]

The "protest of decency" also won support among conservative clergymen who, like the *Sun* and *Times*, invested great hope in the boycott. "Would to God the exclusion might become universal and extend to every family in the land," declared the Rev. W. H. P. Faunce of Fifth Avenue Baptist Church. "The man who allows [the yellow press] in his family opens a connection between the cradle and the sewer, the nursery and the swamp, and is inviting the germs of moral typhoid."[203]

That was the hope, that the boycott would "become universal and extend to every family," and thus kill off the yellow press. Such an outcome would "cleanse" the American press and ease the ferment roiling the profession. Such expectations were hopelessly naïve, however, and the boycott against the yellow press collapsed by mid-1897. The prospect of shaming people for reading "polluting sheets" proved to be no match for the energy and enterprise of the *Journal* (and, to a lesser extent, the *World*). The content of the yellow press proved irresistible—too exciting and engaging to shun for very long.

The boycott also suffered the inevitable effects of a self-limiting protest: after banning the yellow journals, there was no other way in which a library, reading room, or social club could register its disapproval.[204]

Moreover, the boycott had the unexpected consequence of modestly *stimulating* the circulation of the *Journal* and the *World*. Unable to find the newspapers at clubs, reading rooms, and libraries, untold numbers of readers bought their own copies. "The crusade was waged with great fury" in the first months of 1897, *Fourth Estate* said, but "there has been nothing … heard of it in a long time."[205]

As the boycott began spreading in metropolitan New York, legislation was introduced in the state legislature that also aimed at curbing the perceived excesses of Hearst's *Journal*. The legislation sought to prohibit publication of portraits and cartoons without the subjects' prior consent, and called for penalties of $1,000 in fines and sentences of up to one year in prison.[206] The measure was sponsored by the state senate's mirthless president *pro tempore*, Timothy E. Ellsworth, an obscure Republican legislator from Lockport, who gained a reputation for introducing bills that attracted little notice[207]—and for "never having smiled in public."[208] It was widely believed that the drab and uninspiring Ellsworth was cynically doing the bidding of Platt, the state's Republican leader.[209] It even was speculated that Dana's *Sun* had quietly encouraged Platt to press ahead with what came to be called the Ellsworth Anti-Cartoon Bill.[210] The measure eventually won the backing of the state Senate[211] before dying without a vote in the lower house.[212]

The Ellsworth Bill was a heavy-handed response to the expanding use of illustrations and caricatures—and an attempt to exert control over an increasingly popular, if controversial[213] feature of American newspapers. There was little doubt that the measure was aimed at the *Journal*, which rightly claimed to have "made more extensive use of pictorial journalism than any other" newspaper.[214] The measure took inspiration[215] in the *Journal*'s irreverence, particularly a gossipy article published in its Sunday supplement in early October 1896. The article fairly oozed with insouciance in discussing the pregnancies of the wives of some of the world's wealthiest men. The *Journal* published the likenesses of several of the women, including the Duchess of Marlborough and the Countess Castellane. "This is to be the biggest Winter for big babies in the history of the United States," the *Journal* declared. "Eight babies, all told, literally worth ten billion times their weight in gold!"[216] Such an article these days would be hardly shocking, not with the publicity and scrutiny routinely given to celebrities and the well-to-do. But genteel society in the late 1890s usually was distanced and the *Journal*'s article was seen as indecent, intrusive, and far outside the bounds of good taste.

The Ellsworth Bill did attract one unlikely ally—Pulitzer's *World*, which endorsed the measure as a much-needed vehicle for curbing the

wayward and irresponsible newspapers. While conceding the measure's dubious constitutionality, the *World* declared that "certain newspapers have carried this abuse of the art of illustrating news to a point which justifies legal interference. … The World is not only willing but anxious to do its share in ridding respectable journalism of this evil."[217] It was a thoroughly transparent, disingenuous argument, allowing the *World* to characterize itself smugly as a newspaper beyond reproach while conveniently hammering at the *Journal*, its keenest rival.

Dana's *Sun*, which largely eschewed cartoons and other illustrations, energetically backed the Ellsworth Bill as "a wholesome, enlightened, and proper measure."[218] The *Sun* justified the measure's severe restrictions by stating:

> No one can now be summoned into public view without the certainty of having not merely his portrait flaunted to the rabble, but of having the same subjected to every conceivable distortion and deformity. No more outrageous assault upon the privacy of a citizen can be devised than is implied in these infamous publications. Their purpose and effect is to hold him up to ridicule by the most vulgar and offensive expedients; to prejudice him permanently in the eyes of the community at large, and to wound with undisguised brutality the sensibilities of his family. If there ever was an evil that called for whole restraint by law, it is surely this.[219]

Unlike the *World* and the *Sun*, most New York newspapers condemned the Ellsworth Bill as legislative overreach, as a shield for political bosses, and as a disconcerting assault on press freedom.[220] To the *Times* it was "an ill-contrived sort of trip-hammer for crushing a loathsome but rather puny reptile, which it might miss after all while smashing a lot of harmless if not useful things that might fall in its way."[221] The *Herald* said "the measure would tend to check the development of the graphic arts [and] would deprive the public of one of the most attractive and innocent features they enjoy in legitimate and cleanly newspapers."[222]

The Journalist likened the Ellsworth Bill to "the man who burned down his house in order to get rid of a flea in his bedroom." But it said that illustrations often were published in newspapers "not because they look like anybody, but because, in the minds of the editors, they ornament the papers."[223] *Fourth Estate* assailed the Ellsworth Bill as "damfoolmania,"[224] a "vicious species of class legislation,"[225] and declared it "certainly not wise for cap-and-bell legislators to try to correct the

follies of even the most foolish of enterprising newspapers."[226] For its part, the *Journal* claimed that its daily circulation of 500,000 stood as persuasive evidence that readers wanted illustrations with their news —and thus wanted nothing akin to the restrictions promised by the Ellsworth Bill.[227]

Though crude and blunt, the Ellsworth Bill and the boycott against the yellow press represented an anxious backlash—rear-guard actions that sought to calm the ferment and channel or regulate it in familiar ways. The failure of the Ellsworth Bill and of the boycott served to underscore the power of the forces reshaping the *fin-de-siècle* press, forces that promised to make American journalism more graphically vivid, more searching, and even more impertinent.

The ferment roiling American journalism was at once stimulating and bewildering. It reflected the broader sentiment of the late 1890s of *épater le bourgeois*,[228] of shocking or shaking up established values. In 1897, no news organization was more inclined to challenge and shake up established norms than the *New York Journal* with its "journalism of action." As suggested by the agenda of the 1897 publishers association meeting, however, the implications of the ferment in journalism were not well understood or well articulated at the time. In its year-end review, *Fourth Estate* identified the triumph of the Associated Press and the bankruptcy of the United Press as the most significant events in American journalism in 1897.[229] The *Fourth Estate*'s year-in-review had little if anything to say about the "journalism of action," or "All the News That's Fit to Print," or "Is There A Santa Claus?" That is scarcely surprising, given that significance is usually identified, clarified, and best understood only with the passage of time.[230] *The Journalist* probably came closest to grasping the importance of the transformations afoot in 1897. "Be the causes what they may," *The Journalist* said, the "methods of journalism are at present changing. Whether they have yet reached the limit of that change … is a question no man can answer."[231]

There is little doubt that 1897 was an exceptional year in American journalism—a critical moment of experimentation and transition that helped reshape the profession and define its modern contours. No other year, arguably, has produced more memorable and singularly important moments than 1897. This study is guided not only by a recognition that 1897 was exceptional and consequential, but that it embraced moments when broader evolutionary forces combined to produce breakthroughs of enduring significance, as well as moments of extraordinary individual accomplishment**.** This work seeks to make more coherent and understandable this defining moment in American

journalism and pursues a methodology never previously utilized in media history. As such, this study has the decided merit of offering a fresh perspective and a fresh assessment about a pivotal time in American journalism.

An orthographic note is in order here. Excerpts of articles, editorials, and correspondence are presented in this study as they appeared in the original version—a decision that accounts for the occasional appearance of such constructions as "half-tone," "Klondyke," "kodak," and "to-day." Newspapers in the 1890s generally did not italicize the names of periodicals, which is why the Roman version of those names is used in direct quotations.

This study is buttressed by, and built around, extensive archival research including the manuscript collections of journalists, political leaders, and diplomats, kept at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., Columbia University, Cornell University, Syracuse University, the University of Virginia, the Missouri Historical Society, the Cuban National Archives in Havana, and the Spanish archives in Madrid. The study also draws upon the contents of numerous period newspapers, including the *New York Journal*, *New York World*, *New York Times*, *New York Commercial Advertiser*, *New York Sun*, *New York Herald*, *New York Tribune*, *New York Evening Post*, *New York Press*, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Chicago Times-Herald*, *Boston Globe*, *Boston Post*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Philadelphia Times*, *Philadelphia Press*, *Philadelphia Daily Item*, *Richmond Times*, *San Francisco Examiner*, *Washington Post*, and *Washington Evening Star*. Other important primary sources include trade journals such as *Fourth Estate* and *The Journalist* as well as period publications including *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's Weekly*, *The Independent*, *Literary Digest*, *Public Opinion*, *Self Culture*, and *Scribner's Magazine*.

As those and other sources make abundantly clear, the pivotal developments in American journalism in 1897 took place in the context of broader upheaval and innovation. Profound change was stirring in American life in 1897, a crowded and remarkable year when heavier-than-air flight was declared accomplished, when the horseless carriage had "apparently come to stay,"[232] when the last great international gold rush unfolded, and when the United States reached the threshold of emerging as a global power. The crowded year of 1897 is the subject of the first chapter, which will serve as context for the chapters beyond.