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Impartial Journalism's Enduring Value

By Tom Kent
AP Standards Editor

For years now, advocates of new forms of journalism have been blasting away at impartiality as a hopeless goal. They're still blasting.

At the International Journalism Festival this spring in Italy, laughter and applause greeted a speaker who declared, "Objectivity is bullshit."

Yet impartial journalism is remarkably resilient, despite the mocking and stereotyping it has endured. There's plenty of room for other models, but it's worth recognizing the value impartiality delivers.



Critics of impartiality often start by saying everyone has an opinion. Trying to write without one, they say, yields mushy he-said, she-said reporting with no clear conclusions.

Critics propose this alternative: journalists should flaunt their biases -- posting their

beliefs and acknowledging they may be reflected in their stories.

Both assertions reflect stereotypes of how impartial journalism works.

First, impartial journalism is a profession. That means exercising a skill that's separate from personal beliefs.

Doctors may not like their patients' politics, but they don't kill them in the operating room. Lawyers eloquently defend even the sleaziest clients.

Journalists who seek to be impartial should be able to cover people and events irrespective of personal feelings.

Critics also confuse impartial reporting with impartial conclusions. Just because a reporter canvasses all points of view doesn't mean her completed story will be a mishmash of he-said, she-said.

When the Sun Sentinel of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., exposed police officers as among the worst speeders on south Florida roads, the paper's data-driven conclusions were unambiguous. When AP discovered negligence and cheating in America's nuclear forces, its stories were hardly wishy-washy.

At the same time, not every story needs to be written like an indictment. Sometimes, fairly presenting diverse points of view isn't shrinking from the truth, but the only honest way to report:

.A story may still be developing, or we may not have the resources available to reach a bottom line. In such cases, it's absolutely better to present what we know on all sides than to be either silent, or pressured into picking a villain by the next newscast.

"What is true" may be just unknowable. How often have we seen common wisdom turned on its head: peak oil found not to be peak oil, healthy eating redefined, powerful-looking regimes suddenly collapsing? Reporters can't judge and predict everything. We shouldn't pretend we can.

How much bias do journalists have to begin with? It's true that any culture has beliefs that permeate everyone's soul. In many places, for instance, people share a belief that governments should not oppress citizens and the powerful should not undermine the common good. It's because of these beliefs that reporters consider it newsworthy when governments and the powerful overreach.

The more cultural diversity our newsrooms have, the more stories we'll perceive as worthy of coverage.

But while cultural perspectives help identify stories to cover, they don't make it impossible to present them fairly. And not every story risks biased reporting to begin with. Sometimes spot news -- a wildfire, a tsunami -- simply is what it is.

Clearly, journalists with personal beliefs that are truly going to affect their stories or photos should disclose them.

Jay Rosen advocates experimenting with systems where clicking on a byline takes you to "a disclosure page where there is a bio, a kind of mission statement, and a creative attempt to say: here's where I'm coming from ..." (My disclosure: I'm involved in an Online News Association project to help journalists be transparent about factors that may influence their coverage.)

But we need to accept that not every journalist is the prisoner of beliefs that skew his reporting. By one measure, half of U.S. journalists are political independents, up about 18 percentage points in 11 years. Little will come from trying to beat political confessions out of them.

And nothing guarantees that a mission statement will be honest, or that a reporter's biography will tell you whether he is trustworthy. If a reporter used to work for the chemical industry, does that mean he's a propagandist for his former employers? Or that with his inside information, he's the best source around?

Ultimately a journalist's credibility rests not on what he says about his beliefs or his past, but on the correctness over time of what he reports.

That's why millions of busy people who have limited time for news expect it quickly and compactly from a journalist or news brand they've previously found reliable and impartial. Try following links to a reporter's mission statement when you're listening to the news in the car.

There's room out there both for defenders of impartial journalism and those who continue to insist it should be replaced by opinion-with-transparency. In a world that already has enough intolerance and polarization, we should keep testing and improving all approaches to journalism instead of slamming the door on techniques that retain significant value.

(Written for [The Blog](#), Huffington Post Media.) Shared by Paul Colford

Lisa Gibbs appointed AP business editor

NEW YORK - **Lisa Gibbs**, a former executive business editor at the Miami Herald and a senior writer at Money, has been appointed AP's business editor.

Gibbs will oversee more than 65 business reporters and editors worldwide. She will be based in New York and start the job in late August.



"We are thrilled to have Lisa joining the AP team," said Lou Ferrara, the managing editor who oversees business news. "Lisa brings passion and experience that will help AP as we continue to adjust to a changing marketplace with a voracious appetite for business news."

At Money magazine, Gibbs was a three-time finalist for the Gerald Loeb Award for Distinguished Business and Financial Journalism and shared the honor with her colleagues in 2012 for a series on protecting aging parents' money. Most recently, she has been the real estate section chief of the newly launched Money.com.

Before joining Money in 2009, Gibbs, 48, was executive business editor at the Miami Herald. The Herald's business section was honored twice by the Society of American Business Editors and Writers with its top award for general excellence during her five-year tenure. A native of Hollywood, Fla., she also has worked as the South Florida editor for Florida Trend magazine.

Gibbs graduated from the University of Miami with majors in journalism and economics. She previously served on the board of SABEW and now chairs its international committee.

AP's Guttenfelder among first NatGeo Photo Fellows

On Day Two of the National Geographic Explorers Symposium—an annual gathering of scientists, innovators, and change agents from all corners of the world—a surprise announcement was made amid the lineup of inspiring presentations. Joining this cadre of explorers will be a group of A-1 visual storytellers—the newly-named National Geographic Photography Fellows.



In this photo by Becky Hale are, from left: chief content officer Chris Johns, Brian Skerry, Lynn Johnson, Cory Richards, David Guttenfelder, and chief science and exploration officer Terry Garcia.

AP's chief Asia photographer **David Guttenfelder**, along with Lynn Johnson, Cory Richards, and Brian Skerry - each with an equally strong passion for the different subjects they cover - have been named as the members of this inaugural group. Over the next two years, they will be sharing their visual expertise with diverse areas of the National Geographic Society and with the public, producing stories, sharing their storytelling knowledge with other explorers, and bringing the Society's mission to illuminate, teach, and inspire the world at large.

"The Photography Fellows program acknowledges that there are photographers out there whose work deeply aligns with our nonprofit research and exploration goals," says Alex Moen, who oversees the Explorers programs for National Geographic Society. "By embracing these individuals, the Society is positioning them to support our broader mission from a unique and fresh perspective."

"We've chosen people who are not only strong photographers but wonderful leaders-spokespeople for the Society on photographic storytelling," says director of photography Sarah Leen.

"It's a start," Leen continues, embracing the fluidity that accompanies any new endeavor, and one that will be evolving over the course of the coming months. "We have high hopes for this program-it's the beginning of something that will evolve and be a beautiful opportunity for photography."

There are explorers, scientists, writers, photographers who go out furthest, and alone, to the very edges of the world. And the National Geographic Society is where they come, when they come in from the cold, to put their heads together to do and share the most

amazing things. I'm inspired by every person around me here. It feels like home. -*David Guttenfelder*

Click [here](#) to read more.

What a catch!



Retired AP broadcast sales executive Steve Crowley ventured out to the ball park Monday night in Kansas City, and he caught this off the upper-deck facing on a foul by the Dodgers' Andre Ethier.

And another kind of catch!



Connecting colleague **Jim Donna** enjoys the fruits of retirement in this photo of him fishing for striped bass on the Atlantic beach near his home in Montauk on the eastern tip of Long Island. Jim's daughter, **Sarah Donna**, took this fantastic picture and it was shared by Jim's fellow Human Resources colleague **Margy McCay**.

Jim, we're all making plans to join you!

Welcome to Connecting



[David Royse](#) - AP newsman in Louisville (1995-97), Miami (97-98), and Tallahassee ('98-2008).

[Joe Schula](#) - Worked in AP's Dallas and Portland, Oregon, bureaus.

Stories of interest

[Rieder: Journalism innovation lab may be 'game-changing'](#)

In recent years, as the journalism industry has been thoroughly disrupted by the Internet and traditional news outlets have shrunk, the notion of journalism schools as teaching hospitals has gained traction.

The idea is that J-schools should focus heavily on professional skills and have their students produce actual journalism, just like the pros. And, in fact, student work increasingly is showcased by legacy news organizations hungry for content as a result of their diminished staffs. There's also hope the schools can be incubators for innovation in a field that desperately needs it.

Often, though, the hospitals are really more like clinics, valuable but one-off programs like bureaus covering the state capital.

Arizona State University's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication is about to take the concept to the next level.

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[ABC News changes mark a big 'turning point'](#)

David Muir tweeted that Wednesday was an "incredibly humbling day," as he was named to succeed Diane Sawyer as anchor of ABC's World News. But the day was equally humbling for the evening newscast: George Stephanopoulos, and not Muir, will become the "chief anchor" at the network, the go-to guy for major breaking news and political coverage.

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[Brick by brick: After years of shrinking ambition, Jeff Bezos has The Washington Post thinking global domination](#) (Bob Daugherty)

In April, six months after her family sold the newspaper it had controlled for eight decades to Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, Washington Post publisher Katharine Weymouth walked onstage in the paper's auditorium to reverse what had been the signature strategy of her six years at the helm. Since she was named publisher in February 2008, a

year the newspaper division of The Washington Post Company declared a loss of \$193 million, Weymouth had sought to codify the Post's identity as a paper "For and about Washington." While touted as a strategy to leverage the Post's brand of national politics reporting in the digital era, "For and about Washington" was, in the grand tradition of Beltway wordsmithing, a phrase meant to put a positive spin on a period of retrenchment.

Women and minorities still just a whisper among op-ed voices

In a study of the op-ed pages of 10 newspapers around the U.S., from The New York Times to the Dallas Morning News, researchers looked at 22 columnists, Bridget Lewis wrote Tuesday for Phys.org. The study, by Dustin Harp at University of Texas at Arlington, Ingrid Bachmann at Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile and Jaime Loke at the University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma, ran in the June issue of Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly.

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A third of Americans can't name any First Amendment rights

Freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of the press...what were the other ones? If you're flummoxed by that question, you can at least take solace in the fact that you're not alone. Just 1 percent of U.S. adults know that the First Amendment guarantees the right to petition the government, according to the 2014 State of the First Amendment survey released by the Newseum Institute today. The survey, which is conducted by the First Amendment Center, also revealed that about 38 percent of adults surveyed think the First Amendment goes too far in protecting freedom of expression.

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Tale of man, mule hoofing it too good to be true

Randy Tucker did ride from Missouri to Iowa with just his animal, but the rest of his story is nebulous.

The tale of a Florida man riding a mule across the country to give to his granddaughter was a bit too good to be true, said a De-Soto rancher who lent a helping hand last week.



And finally...

'World's Oldest Paperboy' dies at 90

Marvin Teel died Saturday at 90. He delivered the Benton Evening News in Illinois via bicycle until two weeks ago, when he went to the emergency room - after he finished his three-mile route. "So even the day he went into the hospital, he delivered," Teel's daughter Sherry Bullock told The Southern Illinoisan's Becky Malkovich.

Before he delivered the Evening News, Teel was a rural mail carrier for 45 years, Malkovich writes. In a story last year, Teel said he was "in contention" for the title World's Oldest Paperboy. (Photo below taken in 2013)



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