

# COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

With every issue, CJR produces a study guide for journalism students to delve into the areas we've covered, providing topics for classroom discussion and additional activities to test the ideas put forward.

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**1. SIGNAL AND NOISE (pp. 26–29):** The US is missing an all-encompassing news channel and website like the BBC. Does it matter, and if so, could PBS fill the gap?

- a) Where do you go first to learn about breaking news? A cable channel like CNN? Blogs? Twitter? Do you feel like you lose anything by not having one central site to rely on for your news?
- b) Has the Internet made the notion of “national” news sites obsolete? What could a US-based news channel and website provide US residents that the BBC doesn't already?
- c) Is there anything wrong with journalism on social media being “increasingly generated by non-US sources”? Will US readers shun sources that don't originate in their country, or can it help provide them with a less parochial view of the world?
- d) Given that the UK outspends the US more than ten-to-one on public TV subsidies, is there any way to bridge that gap in the US that would be politically acceptable? Would you support a new TV tax if it went toward building a stronger public news network?

**BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: e)** Do you think that public funding a la Britain is necessary for a strong central news source, or could CNN or another private channel fill the same role as the BBC? Write a 700-word op-ed supporting your view. **f)** Visit blogs that covered the Fukushima nuclear crisis. Do you think these could form the basis of a new news ecosystem? What structures would you propose to “help sort the fake from the real”?

**2. NEWS FOR THE WORLD (pp. 29–32):** Suggestions for how to build a US-based world news service.

## In This Issue



In Great Britain, when there's a major news story, everyone knows where to turn first: the BBC, which has the mission—and the funding—to bring world events to British viewers. The United States' equivalent, PBS, doesn't even try to be that kind of central news source. But could that change? And should it?

In the first of three articles in this issue on the news role of public broadcasting, Emily Bell looks at the United States' public news shortcomings, and what it would take to fix them. Lee Bollinger provides his own ideas for an American World Service to compete with the BBC's own international offering. Finally, Elizabeth Jensen explores the reasons why individual PBS affiliates have been hesitant to dive into local news reporting.

Also included in this issue of *CJR* are critical evaluations of two new journalistic experiments: the *Daily Caller*, erstwhile TV pundit Tucker Carlson's attempt to build a better conservative news site; and John Paton's reinvention of the *Journal Register* newspaper chain as a web-driven news enterprise.

- a) Do you agree that the reduction in world coverage by the US press as a result of the financial crisis is distressing? Is there an argument to be made that it's better for most US outlets to focus their limited resources on US events, and leave international coverage to those countries' news outlets?
- b) Would you say it's ironic that NPR provides US listeners with BBC coverage of world events? What are the pros and cons of letting British taxpayers pay for our news?

**BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: c)** Listen to the BBC World Service ([bbc.co.uk/worldservice](http://bbc.co.uk/worldservice)). Can you envision an audience, or a need, for a US version? Write a one-page proposal for such a service, indicating what listener niche it would fill.

**d)** Research the origins of the BBC World Service. How would you replicate that in the current media environment?

**3. BIG BIRD TO THE RESCUE? (pp. 33–37):** Even with a great need for local news reporting, PBS affiliates have been slow to enter the news realm.

- a) With limited resources, should public broadcasters prioritize local news over national reporting? If you were in charge of PBS, would you rather see local newscasts in place of the NewsHour?

**BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: b)** Read PBS ombudsman Michael Getler's discussion of the cancellation of NOW and Bill Moyers Journal ([to.pbs.org/cjr-now](http://to.pbs.org/cjr-now)). Do you think it reflects weakened public interest in news? Or is something else at work here? **c)** Look at KCET's ([kcet.org](http://kcet.org)) program schedule, now that the station has left PBS to avoid paying dues. How does it compare with your local PBS affiliate? Which would you prefer to watch, and which do you think does a better job of providing viewers with news?

**4. THE GREAT RIGHT HYPE (pp. 38–42):** TV pundit Tucker Carlson returns to his writing roots with the *Daily Caller*.

- a) Do you agree with Carlson that the world needs a conservative analogue to *The New York Times*? Are there other newspapers that already fill that role?
- b) Do you think the *Daily Caller* was justified in publishing excerpts from posts by left-leaning journalists to a private Google Group? Does a news outlet have a responsibility to provide context when reporting on conversations that participants believed to be private?

**BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: c)** Visit the Daily Caller ([dailycaller.com](http://dailycaller.com)). Do you think it resembles more a conservative publication dedicated to "accuracy," as Carlson described his vision, or a "twenty-sixth Fox News," as Meares says? What improvements would you like to see?

**5. JOHN PATON'S BIG BET (pp. 43–47):** A new kind of journalism CEO sets out to remake local newspapers for the Internet age.

- a) If digital ad revenue, previously only 6 percent of the *Journal Register's* ad sales, went up 67 percent under Paton while print ad revenue went down 7 percent, does this mean the paper's overall ad revenue went up or down? What, if anything, does this tell you about Paton's business model?
- b) Would you use an "open newsroom" site like the one the *Journal Register* started in Torrington? What can a newspaper offer to would-be bloggers that they can't get by starting their own blogs?

**BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: c)** Visit one of the Journal Register newspapers (links at [bit.ly/cjr-journal-register](http://bit.ly/cjr-journal-register)). What do you think of the quality of the journalism provided? Would you read a site like this about your hometown? Subscribe to the print edition?

## Quick Takes

Read these short articles in class and discuss:

- 1) Kling's Warning (p. 13–14):** Do you think the American public would support the kind of funding for public radio stations that Kling says is necessary? Do you think that the argument that democracy needs to be "tended" to survive is likely to be a convincing one?
- 2) Darts & Laurels (p. 15):** Why do you think so many reporters have relied on Brian Condra for quotes? The desire to cut corners on research time? To not get beat by other outlets to a good quote? Can you think of any ways to encourage journalists to broaden the number of sources they cite?
- 3) Life Near the Center of the Story (pp. 16–18):** Does life as a reporter in Istanbul sound attractive to you? How do you think the problems freelancers face there differ from those faced by freelancers elsewhere?
- 4) How to Cover the Money Race (pp. 19–20):** Does reading this article change the way that you view elections and democracy? What role do you think the media has in calling attention to campaign spending, as opposed to candidates' positions and "horse race" coverage of who's winning?