

News in the 19th century

Technical advances and brilliant ideas forged a new style of journalism.

It was a century of change, and newspapers changed dramatically. The typical newspaper of 1800 was an undisciplined mishmash of legislative proceedings, long-winded essays and secondhand gossip. But by 1900, a new breed of editor had emerged. Journalism had become big business. Reporting was becoming a disciplined craft. And newspapers were becoming more entertaining and essential than ever, with most of the features we expect today: Snappy headlines.

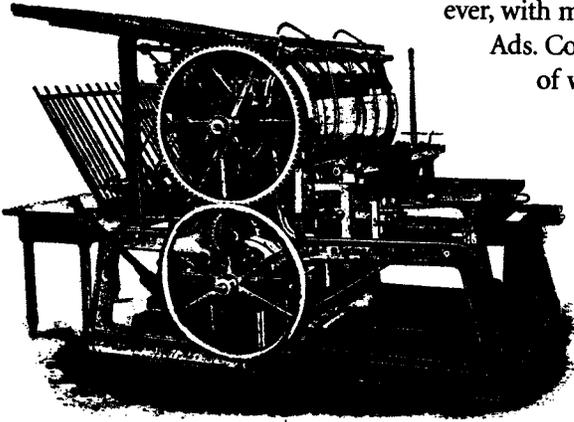
Ads. Comics. Sports pages. And an "inverted pyramid" style of writing that made stories tighter and newsier. ▼

The key changes in the 19th century:

◆ **The emergence of the penny press.** In the 1830s a new kind of newspapering emerged, aimed at the interests of the common citizen: local news, sports, human-interest stories about real people and, above all, crime.

◆ **Innovations in printing.** Cheaper paper and faster presses made news affordable and available like never before, especially to America's growing urban population.

◆ **The rise of the modern newsroom.** The biggest and best newspapers hired and trained reporters to cover news in a professional way.



By the 1830s, steam-powered presses could produce 4,000 pages per hour, printing on both sides of long paper rolls. Such technical advances made newspapers cheaper — and thus, more affordable to the masses.



Number of daily papers in the U.S. in 1800: 20
In 1900: 2,226

Pages in a typical newspaper in 1800: 4
Pages in a typical Sunday issue of the New York Journal in 1896: 64

Percentage of U.S. newspapers in 1850 that were partisan (i.e., organs of one political party): 80

Phrases used by fiercely partisan editors to insult Abraham Lincoln:
"slang-whanging stump speaker"
"half-witted usurper"
"the present turtle at the head of government"
"the head ghoul at Washington"

Number of papers, per hour, the fastest printing press could produce in 1800: 200
In 1850: 18,000
In 1890: 48,000

Average percentage of a newspaper's stories that were written by the paper's own staff, in 1830: 25
In 1860: 45

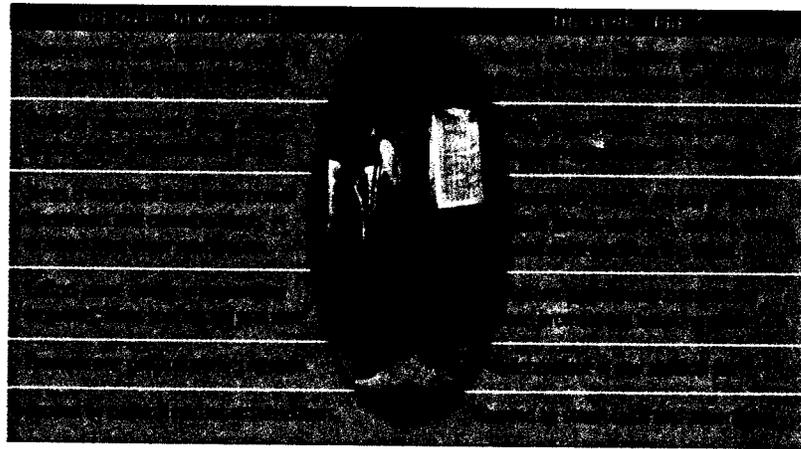
Typical examples of "yellow journalism" headlines from the New York Journal in 1896:

- Why Young Girls Kill Themselves**
- Startling Confession of a Wholesale Murderer Who Begs To Be Hanged**
- Real American Monsters and Dragons**
- One Mad Blow Kills Child**
- Strange Things Women Do for Love**

THE PENNY PRESS: MARKETING MEDIA TO THE MASSES

Most colonial newspapers were printed on small presses in small numbers for educated readers. But when Benjamin Day began selling the New York Sun for a penny a copy in 1833, he pioneered the idea of "mass media." As Day put it, the penny press "lay before the public, at a price well within the means of every-one, all the news of the day."

Within two years, the Sun was the top-selling paper in the U.S. with a circulation of 20,000 — encouraging other editors to imitate and improve the format.

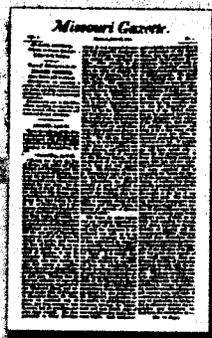


TIMELINE (1800-1900)

1800: 20 dailies and more than 1,000 weeklies publish in the U.S.

1800

1808: The Missouri Gazette becomes the first paper printed west of the Mississippi as printers accompany settlers into the expanding frontier.



1828: The New York Advertiser installs the first "cylinder" press in America, allowing faster printing on bigger sheets of paper.

1820

1827: Reporters from three newspapers become the first Washington correspondents, providing Congressional coverage that continues to this day.

1830: Editors use homing pigeons and the Pony Express to deliver news from distant points.

1830

1833: The New York Sun becomes the first successful penny paper published in the U.S.



1847: Frederick Douglass begins publishing The North Star, an influential paper dedicated to fighting slavery and bringing news to black Americans.

1840

1844: The telegraph is used for the first time to transmit news, making long-distance reporting possible.



BENNETT CRAFTS A NEW STYLE OF JOURNALISM



BENNETT

James Gordon Bennett was a terrific writer and a brilliant publisher. He launched the New York Herald in 1835 with little money and no staff — but

by midcentury, the Herald was the biggest newspaper in the world thanks to enterprising reporting, sensational stories and innovative new ideas: interviews, reviews, letters to the editor, money pages, society columns, sports stories, special “extra” editions.

In Bennett’s words: “It is my passion, my delight, my thought by day and my dream by night, to conduct The Herald, and to show the world and posterity that a newspaper can be made the greatest, most fascinating, most powerful organ of civilization that genius ever dreamed of.”

EXCERPT from The Herald, April 11, 1856:

When a prostitute known as Helen Jewett was murdered, Bennett visited the crime scene. On the front page of the Herald, he provided a description that enthralled readers and helped usher in a new era of sensational reporting:

“Here,” said the Police Officer, “here is the poor creature.” He half uncovered the ghastly corpse. I could scarcely look at it for a second or two. Slowly I began to discover the lineaments of the corpse as one would the beauties of a statue of marble. It was the most remarkable sight I ever beheld — I never have, and never expect to see such another. “My God,” exclaimed I, “how like a statue! I can scarcely conceive that form to be a corpse.” The perfect figure — the exquisite limbs — the fine face — the full arms — the beautiful bust — all surpassed in every respect the Venus de Medici, according to the casts generally given of her.... For a few moments I was lost in admiration at this extraordinary sight — a beautiful female corpse that surpassed the finest statue of antiquity. I was recalled to her horrid destiny by seeing the dreadful bloody gashes on the right temple, which must have caused instantaneous dissolution.

THE GOLDEN AGE OF YELLOW JOURNALISM

As New York’s population exploded, the city became the nation’s media center. It was an age of publishing legends such as Horace Greeley, the liberal, crusading social reformer, and Henry Raymond, who strove



to make his New York Times the most objective and well-written paper of its era.

But two editors rose above the rest in a fascinating struggle for power and influence: Joseph Pulitzer (The World) and William Randolph Hearst (the New York Journal).

Both men reshaped American journalism in the late 1800s with a style of newspapering known as “yellow journalism,” taking its name from the Yellow Kid, the first color comic, which ran in both the Journal and the World.

What characterized yellow journalism? Loud headlines. Sensational stories on sin and sex. Lavish use of pictures, often faked. Sunday supplements full of crowd-pleasing comics and features. Crusades. Publicity stunts. And rumors disguised as news — such as those that led to war with Spain.

\$50,000 REWARD.—WHO DESTROYED THE MAINE?—\$50,000 REWARD.

NEW YORK JOURNAL

DESTRUCTION OF THE WAR SHIP MAINE WAS THE WORK OF AN ENEMY.

\$50,000 REWARD For the Detection of the Perpetrator of the Maine Disaster!

Assistant Secretary Roosevelt Convinced the Explosion of the War Ship Was Not an Accident.

\$50,000 REWARD For the Detection of the Perpetrator of the Maine Disaster!

The Journal Offers Rewards for the Conviction of the Criminals Who Sent 25th American Sailors to Their Death. Naval Officers Unanimous That the Ship Was Destroyed on Purpose.

NAVAL OFFICERS THINK THE MAINE WAS DESTROYED BY A SPANISH SUB.

Naval officers here believe that the explosion which destroyed the Maine was caused by a Spanish submarine. The officers are convinced that the explosion was not an accident, but the result of a deliberate attempt to destroy the ship. The officers are of the opinion that the explosion was caused by a Spanish submarine which was in the harbor at the time of the explosion. The officers are of the opinion that the explosion was caused by a Spanish submarine which was in the harbor at the time of the explosion.

THE WORLD **Colorid. 355,956**

MAINE EXPLOSION CAUSED BY BOMB OR TORPEDO?

Capt. Sigbee and Consul-General Lee Are in Doubt—The World Has Sent a Special Tug, With Submarine Divers, to Havana to Find Out—Lee Asks for an Immediate Court of Inquiry—250 Men Dead.

IS A SUPPRESSED REVELATION IN THE STATE DEPARTMENT. THE CAPTAIN SAYS THE ACCIDENT WAS MADE POSSIBLE BY AN ENEMY.

Dr. E. C. Pennington, Just Returned from Havana, Says He Doubtless Will Prove to a Plot to Blow Up the Ship—Capt. Sigbee, the Dynamite Expert, and Other Experts Report to the World That the Work Was Not Accidental—Washington Official Ready for Vigorous Action if Spanish Responsibility Can Be Shown—Clues to Be Sent Down to Make Careful Examination.

HEARST, PULITZER AND THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR

The excesses of yellow journalism reached a climax as Hearst’s Journal battled Pulitzer’s World for supremacy in New York. Hearst spent millions in family fortune to hire away Pulitzer’s top staffers, and he used his genius for sensationalism to concoct bigger, bolder stories. When The World sent correspondents to Cuba in 1896 to dramatize the rebels’ fight for freedom (“Blood in the fields, blood on the doorsteps, blood, blood, blood!” one wrote), Hearst dispatched staffers of his own, famously messaging one artist: “You furnish the pictures and I’ll furnish the war.”

Hearst and Pulitzer inflamed readers, pressured politicians — and the day after a Navy battleship exploded in 1898, they published the two competing pages shown above. War was declared, and circulation skyrocketed. On Page One, Hearst’s paper asked, “How do you like the Journal’s war?”

In the words of E.L. Godkin, editor of the more restrained, more responsible Evening Post: “It is a crying shame that men should work such mischief simply in order to sell more papers.”

1851: Henry J. Raymond founds The New York Times, which becomes one of America’s most responsible and respected newspapers.

1867: Emily Verderer Betty becomes the first woman reporter on a New York paper.

1867: First practical typewriter patented.



1876: Alexander Graham Bell invents the telephone; within seven years, telephone lines will connect New York and Chicago.

1886: Reporters start earning bylines in daily newspapers on the East Coast.

1898: Yellow journalism reaches its heights (or rather, depths) as Hearst and Pulitzer trump up war with Spain.

1860

1870

1880

1890

1857: Harper’s Weekly, the first illustrated paper in America, makes its debut.

1861-1865: For the first time, hundreds of reporters cover a big event: the Civil War. Filing bulletins and stories via telegraph forces reporters to use a tighter writing style that becomes known as “the inverted pyramid.”

1878: E.W. Scripps begins building the first newspaper chain; he eventually owns 18 papers.

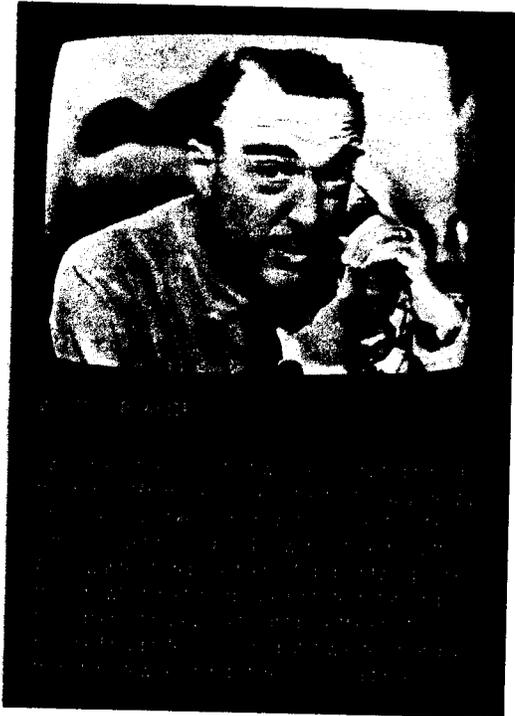
1880: First photograph printed in a newspaper (of rocks and buildings, right) in the New York Daily Graphic.



1897: The term “public relations” is used, for the first time, by a railroad company.

News in the modern age

Radio and television brought an end to newspapers' media monopoly.



Why? Ask yourself: Which did you look at first — this gray column of text or that dramatic image of Walter Cronkite to the left?

That's basically why, as the century progressed, newspapers surrendered their supremacy: The competition was just too appealing. First came radio, wooing listeners with sound and music. Then movie newsreels added faces to the voices in the news. By 1950, television mesmerized viewers (and advertisers) with sights, sounds and unbeatable immediacy. As the century ended, a new rival emerged: online news via the Internet.

So how did newspapers respond?

◆ **Tighter writing.** Flowery, long-winded prose gave way to a briefer, newsier writing style.

◆ **Better formatting.** Papers became sectioned by topic (sports, features, business), with more columnists, features, calendars and listings.

◆ **Improved design.** Papers ran stronger headlines, bigger photos, more color and graphics.

◆ **Corporate consolidation.** To survive, most big-city newspapers were sold to national chains.



Germany's great silver Hindenburg, the world's largest dirigible, was ripped apart by an explosion tonight that sent her crumpling to the naval landing field a flaming wreck, with horrible death to about a third of those aboard her.

Exactly how many died was still in dispute as the flames licked clean the twisted, telescoped skeleton of the airship that put out from Germany seventy-six hours before on its opening trip of the 1937 passenger season.

The Associated Press, May 7, 1937



America's outpost of the Pacific, mighty Pearl Harbor naval base was under enemy attack today.

A number of attacking planes with red insignia were sighted shortly after 8 a.m.

(In Washington, Presidential Secretary Early identified the attacking planes as Japanese.)

Antiaircraft guns opened fire when the planes dived low over the base and released repeated sticks of bombs.

Two warships lying in the harbor were sunk.

The planes later returned to the attack.

International News Service, Dec. 11, 1941

PULITZER SPREADS HIS CRUSADING INFLUENCE



PULITZER

In the years after 1900, Joseph Pulitzer transcended yellow journalism to create a more lasting legacy: He became the model of a passionate, public-spirited modern publisher. His paper, *The World*, launched courageous crusades against corruption in government and business. Before he died in 1911, he funded one of the first schools of journalism, at Columbia University. And to encourage journalistic excellence, he established the Pulitzer Prizes.

JOSEPH PULITZER's journalistic credo:

Our Republic and its press will rise or fall together. An able, disinterested, public-spirited press, with trained intelligence to know the right and courage to do it, can preserve that public virtue without which popular government is a sham and a mockery. A cynical, mercenary, demagogic press will produce in time a people as base as itself. The power to mould the future of the Republic will be in the hands of the journalists of future generations.

When the Pulitzer Prizes were first awarded in 1917, the journalism categories included only reporting, editorial writing and public service. Today, prizes are awarded in 21 different categories.

TIMELINE (1900-2000)

1900: Satirical political cartoons become a popular way for newspapers to comment on current events.

1920: KDKA-Pittsburgh begins broadcasting the first regular radio schedule.

1928: As radio enjoys growing popularity, the NBC radio network is formed; CBS will begin broadcasting a year later.

1934: The Associated Press begins transmitting wire photos.

1941: FDR declares war on Japan as the largest radio audience in history listens in.

1901: Marconi sends the first radio signal across the Atlantic Ocean.

Early 1900s: The era of "muckrakers" — social reform-minded journalists and magazine writers who expose injustice, fraud and political corruption in government and big business.



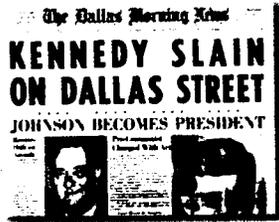
1923: Henry R. Luce launches *Time* magazine, the nation's first newsweekly.

1938: "CBS World News Roundup" debuts; its influential news coverage will make it America's longest-running radio news show.

1939: NBC and CBS begin commercial television broadcasts.



CLASSIC CLIPS



A sniper shot and killed President John F. Kennedy on the streets of Dallas Friday. A 24-year-old pro-Communist who once tried to defect to Russia was charged with the murder shortly before midnight.

Kennedy was shot about 12:30 p.m. Friday at the foot of Elm Street as the Presidential car entered the approach to the Triple Underpass. The President died in a sixth-floor surgery room at Parkland Hospital about 1 p.m., though doctors say there was no chance for him to live after he reached the hospital.

The Dallas Morning News,
Nov. 23, 1963



Man stepped out onto the moon tonight for the first time in his two-million-year history.

"That's one small step for man," declared pioneer astronaut Neil Armstrong at 10:56 p.m. EDT, "one giant leap for mankind."

Just after that historic moment in man's quest for his origins, Armstrong walked on the dead satellite and found the surface very powdery, littered with fine grains of black dust.

The Washington Post,
July 21, 1969

RADIO RULES THE AIRWAVES

In 1920, only a handful of hobbyists heard the first radio broadcasts. But by 1927, 30 million Americans tuned in to celebrate aviator Charles Lindbergh's homecoming. Radio was entering its golden age.

Though powerful publishers at first prevented stations from broadcasting news, radio soon became the first medium to provide a 24-hour stream of news coverage. During World War II, dramatic reporting by legendary newsmen like Edward R. Murrow helped hone the modern newswriting style: concise wording, short sentences, dramatic delivery.

EDWARD R. MURROW reporting live during the Battle of Britain, Sept. 22, 1940:

There's an ominous silence hanging over London. Out of one window there waves something that looks like a white bedsheet, a window curtain swinging free in this night breeze. It looks as if it were being shaken by a ghost. There are a great many ghosts around these buildings in London. The searchlights straightaway, miles in front of me, are still scratching that sky. There's a three-quarter moon riding high. There was one burst of shellfire almost straight in the Little Dipper. There are hundreds and hundreds of men . . . standing on rooftops in London tonight, waiting to see what comes out of this steel-blue sky.



MURROW

AMERICA TURNS ON AND TUNES IN TO TELEVISION

After World War II ended, Americans began buying televisions — 1,000 sets a day. But in those early years of network TV, programming was primarily devoted to entertainment (Milton Berle and "I Love Lucy"). Ratings for newscasts were disappointingly low.

Television journalism came of age in the 1960s. In 1963, America sat spellbound for four days watching nonstop coverage of the Kennedy assassination. To many critics, it was television's finest hour. And ever since, viewers worldwide have become dependent on television to cover big breaking stories.

LEON HARRIS, CNN anchor, reporting live, Sept. 11, 2001:

You are looking at this picture — it is the twin towers of the World Trade Center, both of them being damaged by impacts from planes. We saw one happen at about maybe nine minutes before the top of the hour, and just a moment ago, so maybe 18 minutes after the first impact, the second tower was impacted with a — by another — what appeared to be, another passenger plane. In fact, we've got some tape replay of that. Do we have the tape available right now?

Here is the tape. . . . Incredible pictures. These happened just moments ago.



MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE NEWSPAPER . . .

As the century progressed, newswriting became more focused on facts and less on sensationalism. Shorter sentences and tight writing replaced the flowery prose of the past. Reporters were trained to use the inverted pyramid, a story structure that stacks the big facts first, the lesser facts later.

As the century progressed, newspapers became more readable, more colorful, more objective and more timely than ever before. But their power and prominence gradually faded (along with the attention spans of most Americans.) As you can see in the chart at right, newspapers are no longer Americans' first, or favorite, source of news.

In the 1990s, as computers invaded American homes, a new medium emerged: the Internet. And with each passing day, more and more users now turn

SURVEY: WHERE AMERICANS GET THEIR NEWS

Minutes Americans spend per day:	1994	2004
Watching TV news	38	32
Reading a newspaper	19	17
Listening to radio news	17	17

Where Americans say they got news yesterday:	1994	2004
Watched TV news	72	68
Read a newspaper	45	42
Listened to radio news	47	48
Went online for news	-	24

Source: The Pew Research Center, 2004

to the World Wide Web for news — reading text, viewing video, participating interactively — leaving newspapers to wonder: How do we keep readers interested in ink on paper? Or are we doomed to become dinosaurs?

1952: CBS News coins the word "anchorman." NBC launches the first magazine-format TV program, the "Today" show.

1960: Only 2,000 people owned television sets in 1945; now 90% of American homes have a TV.



1974: President Nixon resigns following dogged investigation of the Watergate scandal by The Washington Post's Woodward and Bernstein.

1982: USA Today makes its debut, shocking the news establishment with shorter stories and bold colors.



1960

1970

1980

1990

1963: TV news comes of age with its coverage of the Kennedy assassination; 96% of homes with televisions watch an average of 32 hours of coverage.

Late 1960s: Anti-war and anti-establishment underground newspapers spring up in U.S. cities and on college campuses.

1976: The Apple II becomes a popular home computer; Nintendo starts to sell computer games.

1980: Media mogul Ted Turner launches the Cable News Network (CNN), the planet's first 24-hour news channel.

1990s: The Internet wires the planet; laptop computers, digital cameras and modems allow reporters to file stories and photos from anywhere in the world.