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**Fixing journalism's credibility problem: lessons from the Lippman-Dewey debate**

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**FIXING JOURNALISM'S CREDIBILITY PROBLEM: LESSONS FROM THE  
LIPPMANN-DEWEY DEBATE**

A thesis submitted to  
the Graduate College of  
Marshall University  
In partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

In  
Journalism

by

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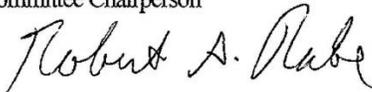
Marshall University  
December 2019

**APPROVAL OF THESIS**

We, the faculty supervising the work of James Hoyle, affirm that the thesis, *Fixing Journalism's Credibility Problems: Lessons from the Lippmann-Dewey Debate*, meets the high academic standards for original scholarship and creative work established by the School of Journalism and Mass Communications and the College of Arts and Media. This work also conforms to the editorial standards of our discipline and the Graduate College of Marshall University. With our signatures, we approve the manuscript for publication.

Dr. Robert Rabe, School of Journalism and Mass Communications  
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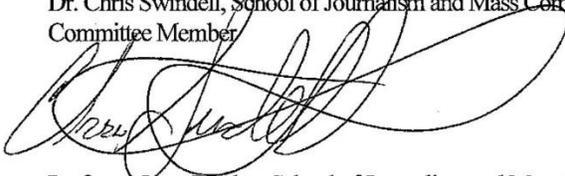
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Professor Janet Dooley, School of Journalism and Mass Communications  
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5-10-19

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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

This was a long, intensive process, so I would like to acknowledge my family, especially my Dad, for helping me through these times. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Rob Rabe, for without his knowledge of the subject and the use of his books, none of this would have been possible.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	vi
Chapter 1 .....	1
Chapter 2.....	8
Chapter 3.....	28
Chapter 4.....	42
Conclusion.....	47
References.....	48
Appendix A: IRB Letter.....	52

## **ABSTRACT**

With advancing technology and social media becoming a more filtered place, many wonder whether or not the news has lost its credibility. However, this is not the first time technology has changed the way the newsroom works. Comparing the times of today and the times of the 1920s, a literature review and an analysis of the arguments between Walter Lippmann and John Dewey shows that not only are there many parallels, but the debate these two men had nearly one hundred years ago provides a blueprint and a game plan that will allow journalism to get its credibility back in the eyes of doubters.

## CHAPTER 1

On January 18, 2019, the annual March for Life occurred in Washington, D.C. The march has been in the nation's capital almost every year since the landmark *Roe v. Wade* case of 1973. What was intended to be a protest against abortion in this country turned into something much greater, when a video was posted on social media of what appeared to be a group of young, white, male high school students from a private Catholic School in Kentucky harassing an elderly Native American named Nathan Phillips.<sup>1</sup> There was a conflict, and, according to Lakota People's Law Project Attorney Chase Iron Eyes, Phillips approached the problem in an attempt "to defuse the situation" when he was "swarmed."<sup>2</sup> An activist from Guam recorded Phillips speaking after the incident, and *Cincinnati Enquirer* reported that he heard chants of "build that wall, build that wall" from the students, after which Phillips said,

This is indigenous lands. We're not supposed to have walls here. We never did for millennia, before anyone else came here, we never had walls, we never had a prison, he said. We always took care of our elders, we took care of our children. We taught them right from wrong.<sup>3</sup>

This incident was widely reported and the actions of the boys were condemned in no uncertain terms by nearly every news media outlet in America. A video subsequently surfaced on Twitter showing what appeared to be a more complete depiction of the affair. When the longer video surfaced, and it became clear that the boys had not instigated anything, the event became a

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<sup>1</sup> Max Londberg and Sarah Brookbank, "NKY Catholic school faces backlash after video of incident at Indigenous Peoples March surfaces," *The Cincinnati Enquirer* (Cincinnati, OH), Jan. 19, 2019, <https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/2019/01/19/video-shows-apparent-incident-indigenous-peoples-march/2623820002/>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

microcosm that highlights several problems with journalism that have existed for at least one hundred years.

This thesis is about the Walter Lippmann and John Dewey debate of the 1920s. It is about how the twenty-first century has exacerbated and brought to light problems in journalistic credibility thought solved in the twentieth. It will try to draw parallels between the time of the Lippmann-Dewey debate and show how those ideas are still relevant, and it will argue that to solve the current problems journalism is facing, a blend of their ideas might be the solution.

In this age of smartphones and the computing cloud, there is a great deal of anxiety about how all of it is going to affect the world at large. Many people have access to a video camera in their pockets, and as a result, everyone is a news reporter in their own minds. For all the new technology however, it is interesting to note that this anxiety over journalistic credibility in the United States has happened in a similar way before. About one hundred years ago, fear of information overload and an extreme distrust in the news media led two of the greatest minds in the country at the time to have a back and forth conversation that was decidedly a one-sided conversation. They both had distinct visions of the future for the American people as well as journalism, and, as will soon become clear, their debate is well worth reexamining because of the usefulness of their ideas in discussions of problems facing journalism today.

As can be seen from what happened at the 2019 March for Life, it has become difficult to discern truth from falsity in the modern world. Between media news sources and political blogs and independent outlets, to even the President of the United States weighing in on what is fair reporting it can be difficult to figure out what is true and what is not. Furthermore, it is difficult to say what the American public's place should be in the age of tweeting, social media, and 24/7

television newscasts. Has technology advanced to where the truth cannot truly be found? Is free speech truly a right that should be given to everyone when there are so many individuals willing to espouse hatred and outright lies for easy money and clicks? Can democracy thrive or even survive in a world being engulfed in this kind of “truth”?

These are the questions on the minds of many observers of journalistic practices, and it is not the first time these questions have been asked. At this time around nearly one hundred years ago, a debate occurred between two of the greatest American thinkers of the twentieth century: intellectual and journalist Walter Lippmann and philosopher and psychologist John Dewey. In the 1920s, they debated the public’s place in politics and journalism’s role in shaping public opinion.

At the time, many people were indifferent to their words. However, as the years passed, this debate has proven practically prophetic. These questions were being raised from both men due to the state of the world after the devastation and chaos of the First World War. Though these men never had a debate in a literal sense, Dewey’s writings were a direct response to Lippmann’s, and their debate continued for years.<sup>4</sup>

That these two men could come to such differing conclusions about the place of journalism and the American public in politics may seem strange. After all, both men were strong believers in the scientific method and its use in solving industrial and social ills.<sup>5</sup> However, these two men, so alike in minds, came to different conclusions about journalism and the American public.

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<sup>4</sup> Carl Bybee, “Can Democracy Survive a Post-Factual Age?: A Return of the Lippmann-Dewey Debate About the Politics of News” *Journalism & Communication Monographs* 28, no. 1(1999): 33.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Walter Lippmann believed that the world had become too large and complex for most people to have the time or inclination to understand all of its aspects and nuances, making traditional democracy impossible. Therefore, he suggested that a council of experts should navigate the unseen environments and present the truth to the decisionmakers of society, who would repackage it for public consumption and understanding. The public, however, were little more than a yes or no vote, and thus needed to be guided.

John Dewey, by contrast, thought Lippmann's approach inherently undemocratic and unrepresentative since a group of experts can and often do miss the big picture for the details. Further, in his opinion, there was no public without the voice and thoughts of the people being heard, and he suggested that they should be heard. Therefore, more independent voices in journalism would have been, in his point of view, an important tool in helping stamp out propaganda.

This debate has had many implications over the years, and with the rise of new media and the political blogosphere, how much ordinary people should be heard is a topic once again subject to debate. Thus, in this era when such words as "fake news" and "identity politics" are in the daily political discussion these ideas deserve another reexamination. After examining the texts and thoughts of both authors, as well as how their debate has shaped modern thoughts on journalism, it can be concluded that both men saw a way forward for the news and democracy in an increasingly complicated world. Though both made excellent points on the American public and its place within its politics, the ideas of neither man are entirely sufficient, and a synthesis of their ideas may be the most equitable solution to the problems journalism currently has with much of the public. Before examining that, it is necessary to first unpack the world as it was in

Lippmann and Dewey's time, and why they might have come to these conclusions. To do that, one must first look, briefly, at what was going on in the broader world of the time.

The consequences of World War I was the trigger that set off the debate between these two men. This debate may not have happened had World War I not happened. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of June, 1914, in Sarajevo, Gavrilo Princip, member of the Serbian terrorist group The Black Hand, assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir apparent to the Austro-Hungarian throne. This assassination caused the entire house of cards of alliances in Europe to collapse. Millions were killed. The results were devastating to the established global order. By the time the war was over, of all of the major empires that had thrown their hats into the ring, the Austro-Hungarian, the Russian, the Ottoman, the German, the British, and the Japanese, only the British and the Japanese remained standing. From the ashes of the Russian Empire arose a new world power, The United Soviet Socialist Republics. Common-sense pre-war understandings had to be reexamined and reevaluated. Death was heavy on the hearts and minds of everyone. Religious writer Winifred Kirkland, in a book published in 1918 entitled *The New Death*, wrote,

Never before in history has death been so prominent a fact. Always before it has been possible to avoid thinking about it. Today no one can escape the constant presence, before his mind, of dissolution. No one can forget them, no one can get away from them, those boys dead upon the battlefields of Europe. There is not one of us who has not thought more about death within the last four years than in a whole lifetime before.<sup>6</sup>

New forms of art and literature and music began to appear in Europe, each critical of the ideas that many felt had led to the destruction of the old order, while still others, such as poet T.S. Eliot, saw a return to the old ways as the only way to keep a semblance of decency in this new, chaotic world. Journalism in the United States at that time was undergoing many changes. Commercially viable radio and the movie theater created new ways of communication, and

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<sup>6</sup> Winifred Kirkland, *The New Death* (Boston, MA & New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin, 1918), 2.

journalism as it had been known changed practically overnight as a result. While advertising had always played a major part in print journalism, that relationship began to increase in the 1920s, with the rise of the first modern day advertising agencies. Prior to the rise of these advertising agencies, most advertising was simply to spread knowledge of a product. In the 1920s, due to the post-war economic boom in the United States, people often had more disposable income, so simply informing consumers of the existence of a product was not enough. Researchers Mansel Blackwood and K. Austin Kerr noted, “By the 1920s, advertising executives recognized that theirs was a business to make consumers want products, and they deliberately sought to break down popular attitudes of self-denial and to foster the idea of instant gratification through consumption.”<sup>7</sup> The Ford Motor Company started selling essentially cosmetic updates to their cars on an annual basis. The concept of consumer credit began to really take off in the 1920s as people continued to buy things that they wanted rather than what they needed. By giving ad space to these new forms of advertising, journalism played a major part in shaping the consumerist culture that the United States has to this very day.

From a political perspective, propaganda that had been used to prop up what quickly became an unpopular war was abandoned out of the necessities of peace, sowing doubt and mistrust among the people over those that governed. Not long after First World War ended, the experts that created the propaganda began to have second thoughts about what exactly they created. As researchers Garth Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell put it, “Concern about the power of the developing forms of mass media was widespread, for some people believed that the mass

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<sup>7</sup> Mansel Blackford and K. Austin Kerr, *Business Enterprise in American History* (Boston, MA: Houghton-Mifflin, 1990), 278.

media extensive, direct, and powerful effects on attitude and behavior change.”<sup>8</sup> This belief that propaganda could have huge, sweeping effects on the public’s outlook on things and the panic amongst academics over this potential was the groundwork that would eventually become the study of media effects. One of the earliest pioneers of this study was a man named Harold Laswell. Laswell was terrified by propaganda, and his work, entitled *Propaganda Technique in the World War*, argued that people had been “...duped and degraded...” by the propaganda during World War I.<sup>9</sup> Here was the beginning of the theory in the media effects tradition known as “the magic bullet theory” or “the hypodermic needle theory.” The theory states that people will be affected by propaganda quite easily and will be easily influenced by whatever the propagandist says. Lazarsfeld and other researchers would cast doubt on this theory in the coming decades, but at the time when Lippmann and Dewey had their debate, his body of research was still decades away. As a result, academia was quite fearful and suspicious of propaganda, and by extension, so was the rest of society as a whole. This fear was part of the collective state of mind when John Dewey and Walter Lippmann began to write about journalism, democracy, and the public.

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<sup>8</sup> Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion* (SAGE Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA, 2019), 153.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 2

It is important to understand before examining the debate that Walter Lippmann and John Dewey had a great amount of respect for each other as intellectual thinkers. The two men worked with each other during World War I (several years before the United States became involved with that conflict), when Walter Lippmann, in 1914, became the first editor of a politics and art magazine called *The New Republic*. Dewey was invited on as one of the first contributors to the magazine. It was a mutually beneficial relationship, allowing Lippmann to further ascend in the national sphere as well as giving Dewey his first real national platform of his entire career.<sup>10</sup> Lippmann clearly had a great respect for Dewey and his intellect, because in 1916, in a review of Dewey's book entitled *Democracy and Education*, he called it "a book which is the mature wisdom of the finest and most important intellect devoted to the future of American civilization."<sup>11</sup> In addition to this praise, when Lippmann was appointed by President Wilson to help craft the peace plan that would take shape after the war, Lippmann invited Dewey to head a branch of inquiry to be located in Moscow. While this endeavor never did take shape, it still shows a high regard that Lippmann had for Dewey and his ideas.<sup>12</sup> However, as the years passed, their ideas of the American public, journalism, and politics began to grow apart, mostly due to differing responses to the uncertainty and doubt in the war's aftermath.

Walter Lippmann has gone down in history not just as a great American journalist and thinker, but as one of the defining figures of modern journalism. By this point in his career he had already been the editor of Pulitzer's *New York World*, which was considered at the time to be

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<sup>10</sup> Bybee, "Can Democracy Survive?," 34.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

“the greatest newspaper of its day” as well as “the voice of America’s liberal conscience.”<sup>13</sup> Ronald Steel, author of the definitive biography on his life, described Lippmann: “High in a tower above Park Row, protected from clanging telephones and clamoring reporters by a shield of secretaries, for more than nine years he penned biting editorials that made him a national figure.”<sup>14</sup> Lippmann ignored scoops and leaks, which he considered unworthy of any true commentator’s pen, and instead analytically examined current events in a column that was considered required reading “in every chancery, foreign office and editorial room.”<sup>15</sup> After his stint in the *World* that lasted nearly a decade, Lippmann’s column became syndicated and ran in newspapers across the country for forty years. Readers turned to him for so long because he had a remarkable ability to simplify complex situations in the political world so that the average person could understand them. His editorials helped avert a war with Mexico and helped Mexican revolutionaries reach an agreement with the Vatican. He also opposed the Red Scare and vehemently opposed American involvement in Vietnam, going against the popular opinions of American leaders he helped advise. He wrote speeches and counselled politicians such as Woodrow Wilson, Dwight Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon Johnson. He was, as Steel put it “the nation’s greatest journalist.”<sup>16</sup> Despite his reputation for being calculating and detached, he was also a political and moral philosopher. Steel writes, “In effect there were two Walter Lippmanns: the man who put out a weekly magazine, a daily newspaper, and a syndicated column without ever missing a deadline, and the man who retreated to his pool of

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<sup>13</sup> Ronald Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* (Boston, MA, Toronto: Little, Brown, and Company, 1980), xiv.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi.

silence to speculate on a longer past and a longer future.”<sup>17</sup> His desire for a more perfect, objective, detached news media was a driving force for much of his writing on journalism.

By 1920, Walter Lippmann had had enough. He had worked for the federal government during World War I developing propaganda for the war effort and studying its effects on public opinion, an experience that made him wary. Cynicism after the war was at an all-time high, and the results of the 1920 election had reflected that. The Republicans had nominated one of the old guard for president and had won in a landslide against a divided Democratic party that had nominated a candidate because he offended no one in the party. Warren G. Harding became the 29<sup>th</sup> president of the United States. Lippmann wrote to colleague Graham Wallas about the process, saying, “If it is possible to speak of the mind of the people, then it is fair to say that the American mind has temporarily lost all interest in public questions.”<sup>18</sup> When discussing the actual choice between the two candidates with one S.K. Ratcliffe, Lippmann wrote that it was a choice between

two provincial, ignorant politicians entirely surrounded by special interests, operating in a political vacuum. Nobody believes in anything. Nobody wants anything very badly that he thinks he can get out of politics nobody will be enthusiastic about anything until a generation grows up that has forgotten how violent we were and how unreasonable.<sup>19</sup>

In Lippmann’s mind, because of the butchery witnessed in World War I, and all of the other horrible things that happened at that time, the public had become indifferent to the political world. Lippmann had reason to think that. Despite more people having the right to vote than ever before that year, less than half of those eligible to vote in the 1920 elections did so.<sup>20</sup> This

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 169.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> “Voter Turnout in Presidential Elections,” University of California Santa Barbara, Accessed 26 March, 2019. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/data/voter-turnout-in-presidential-elections>

indifference led him to reexamine the idea that the average man could come to conclusions of the world “beyond his immediate knowledge.”<sup>21</sup> These ideas were the catalyst that led to the creation of *Public Opinion*, the opening volley of the debate.

In 1922, Walter Lippmann published what is perhaps his most famous work, *Public Opinion*. This particular book became such a success that in later years communications historian James W. Carey called it the “founding book in American media studies.”<sup>22</sup> Lippmann, after seeing the kind of power that mass communication, particularly propaganda, seemed to have during World War I, balked at it. In a way, he was ahead of his time in that he saw how much the news can and cannot shape the reality in which people find themselves. This concern is plain to see in the first paragraphs of the book, in which he describes an island in 1914 on which British, French, and Germans lived.

Because of a lack of news, the islanders went weeks as friends after World War I had been declared only for the news to reach them that they were in fact enemies.<sup>23</sup> Lippmann wrote, “Looking back we can see how indirectly we know the environment in which nevertheless we live. We can see that the news of it comes to us now fast, now slowly; but that whatever we believe to be a true picture, we treat as if it were the environment itself.”<sup>24</sup> He argued that news media, and the public as well, relied on symbols to help them clearly define the world around them, and that symbols can appear and disappear once they have outlasted their usefulness, all in an effort to have, in his words, a “balancing of interest.”<sup>25</sup> For example, “after the armistice, the precarious and by no means successfully established symbol of Allied Unity disappeared, how it

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<sup>21</sup> Steel, *Walter Lippmann*, 170.

<sup>22</sup> James Carey, *Communication as Culture* (Boston, MA: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 75.

<sup>23</sup> Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1922), 4.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

was followed almost immediately by the breakdown of each nation's symbolic picture of the other.”<sup>26</sup> Pretty much as soon as the war was over, the alliances broke down and individual nations almost immediately went back into nationalistic tendencies, each one of them trying to make themselves seem like the true defender of the free. They had become “negotiators and administrators for a disillusioned world.”<sup>27</sup> These symbols, according to Lippmann, play an important part of human communication. Anyone could look at pictures of French or German soldiers, Lippmann argued, but the human mind could not comprehend three million people in one space at any given time, not in any meaningful sense. Therefore, Lippmann said, “The only feeling that anyone can have about an event he does not experience is the feeling aroused by his mental image of that event. That is why until we know what others think they know, we cannot truly understand their acts.”<sup>28</sup> In other words,

In all these instances we must note particularly one common factor. It is the insertion between man and his environment of a pseudo-environment. To that pseudo-environment his behavior is a response. But because it is behavior, the consequences, if they are acts, operate not in the pseudo-environment where the behavior is stimulated, but in the real environment where action eventuates.<sup>29</sup>

This pseudo-environment is important to understanding Lippmann’s ideas about public opinion.

To understand public opinion, according to Lippmann, is to understand the relationship among something happening, how people perceive that something, and how they react to it.<sup>30</sup>

Lippmann clearly was concerned about how the news media affects our perception of reality.

The incident at the 2019 March for Life referenced at the beginning of this paper, where a

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 16.

misinformed report was blown out of proportion, is eerily similar to an incident that Lippmann wrote of in *Public Opinion*. In the opening chapters of the book, Lippmann detailed how a Senator called for investigation after a report came out that foreign entities in the League of Nations would be able to control United States naval forces with or without the consent of the American Naval Department.<sup>31</sup> The League could do no such thing, of course, but because of the way it was presented in the news media, it caused a great deal of controversy within the Senate and the rest of the governing body of the nation for a short period of time. Therefore, Lippmann argued, that it is not from direct knowledge that the majority of people act. Rather, “what each man does is based not on direct and certain knowledge, but on pictures made by himself or given to him.”<sup>32</sup> Essentially, the world has become so complicated and multifaceted that any attempt at understanding the true nature of things is virtually impossible as “the real environment is altogether too big, too complex, and too fleeting for direct acquaintance.”<sup>33</sup> In Lippmann’s point of view “[we] are not equipped to deal with so much subtlety, so much variety, so many permutations and combinations. And although we have to act in that environment, we have to reconstruct it on a simpler model before we can manage with it.”<sup>34</sup> So, people gradually create a world in their head based on what they read and that becomes their idea of how things actually are. Lippmann wrote,

The world that we have to deal with politically is out of reach, out of sight, out of mind. It has to be explored, reported, and imagined. Man is no Aristotelian god contemplating all existence at one glance. He is the creature of an evolution who can just about span a sufficient portion of reality to manage his survival, and snatch what on the scale of time are but a few moments of insight and happiness. Yet this same creature has invented ways of seeing what no naked eye could see, of hearing what no ear could hear, of weighing immense masses and infinitesimal ones, of counting and separating more items

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 17-18.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

than he can individually remember. He is learning to see with his mind vast portions of the world that he could never see, touch, smell, hear, or remember. Gradually he makes for himself a trustworthy picture inside his head of the world beyond his reach.<sup>35</sup>

These pictures in the heads of people are what essentially become, “Public Opinion with capital letters.”<sup>36</sup> For Lippmann, a journalist’s job is to help create these sorts of roadmaps for people to help them understand what is going on in the world, since people cannot reasonably be expected to keep track of every minute piece of information that could potentially help or harm them in their day-to-day lives.

At the same time, however, Lippmann also made it clear that journalists should be aware that they are not writing a perfect version of the truth. Although many reporters go out into the field to report stories, in some cases they are unable to witness events first hand. Since many news reporters do not rely on first-hand accounts, Lippmann posited that what they present to readers is not the truth. Rather, they are presenting with their reporting a version of a story given to them often by second-hand sources. Lippmann wrote, “The hypothesis, which seems to me the most fertile, is that news and truth are not the same thing.”<sup>37</sup> Lippmann elaborated further by adding

There is no defense, no extenuation, no excuse whatever, for stating six times that Lenin is dead, when the only information the paper possesses is a report that he is dead from a source repeatedly shown to be unreliable. The news, in that instance, is not “Lenin Dead” but “Helsingfors Says Lenin is Dead.” And a newspaper can be asked to take the responsibility of not making Lenin more dead than the source of the news is reliable; if there is one subject on which editors are most responsible it is in their judgment of the reliability of the source. But when it comes to dealing, for example, with stories of what the Russian people want, no such test exists.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 358.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 359.

So in that sense, rather than delivering the truth to a reader/listener, what the purpose of the news in actuality is “to signalize an event...to bring to light the hidden facts,” that will get people talking about an issue, and to create a “picture of reality” that will ultimately become the public opinion, though that is not always the case.<sup>39</sup> He also wrote that only when those circumstances happen do the realms of news and the realms of truth coincide. In layman’s terms, journalists do not and cannot force or tell people what to think, but they are very good at getting people talking about one issue or another. It is odd, from an outsider’s perspective, that in order to achieve this kind of acceptance of what needs to be talked about, people must first purchase access to what is being discussed, and how reluctant they are to indulge in it. Lippmann wrote about this irony by saying, “The citizen will pay for his telephone, his railroad rides, his motor car, his entertainment. But he does not pay openly for his news.”<sup>40</sup> Anyone in the news industry or that has had experience in the news industry knows that moving papers on its own does not keep a newspaper afloat. The news is sold so cheaply that there is no way that a newspaper would be able to cover the cost of printing it if it were not for the revenue earned through advertising. This need for advertising is plainly stated when Lippmann wrote that the consumer of news will

pay handsomely for the privilege of having someone read about him. He will pay directly to advertise. And he will pay indirectly for the advertisements of other people, because that payment, being concealed in the price of commodities is part of an invisible environment that he does not effectively comprehend. It would be regarded as an outrage to have to pay openly the price of a good ice cream soda for all the news of the world, though the public will pay that and more when it buys the advertised commodities. The public pays for the press, but only when the payment is concealed.<sup>41</sup>

In other words, because of the ad revenue generated by the circulation of the newspaper (this can also be further extended to the ad revenue generated from online sources), as well as the very

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 358.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 322.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

nature of news reporting, there is no way that the news can ever be fully objective and cannot ever be fully based in fact, if only due to the natural inclination to protect the bottom line by not overly criticizing those that are keeping the business afloat. After all, the financial pressures from advertisers can interfere with a newspaper's attempts to be objective. For all of these reasons, the news is not the truth, but rather the signifier of changing events and times. The news is not good at telling people what to think, but rather telling people what to think about and as a result, journalism is the catalyst that will eventually become public opinion.

When done with what is best for the public interest at heart, this model of journalism has the potential to do great good for society. Because people simply do not have the time or the energy to see and carefully analyze each minute event that may influence their lives, regular people need to have what is going on in the world summed up for them in a succinct manner. This pseudo-environment (a term that Lippmann uses to describe this in *Public Opinion*) is what is often acted upon in public opinion. Lippmann was aware of the problems of this way of thinking and expressed his concern. With these ready-made pictures in our heads presented to readers, there arises the potential for misleading, or even dangerous, stereotypes. A stereotype as defined by Lippmann is pretty much exactly what a stereotype is in the modern English language: it is short-hand for a person, place, or thing, and they are not always mean-spirited or bigoted in nature. On stereotypes, Lippmann wrote,

For the most part we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see. In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 81.

One such example cited by Lippmann is the idea of American Progress. Americans at the time believed in forward progress. It was manifest destiny that the United States would create a glorious nation from sea to sea. However, Americans did not think about the consequences of unchecked, rapid expansion. They cheered the population growth without accounting for “unassimilated immigration,” as well as the progress in factories, environmental pollution and damage to natural resources be damned.<sup>43</sup> Lippmann lamented that because of this forward progress, America entered the world stage in World War I morally and physically unprepared, and left disillusioned and exhausted, with very little in knowledge gained to show for it.<sup>44</sup> Stereotypes are therefore not harmful in and of themselves, but rather can “frustrate effort and waste men’s energy” by “blinding them” as has often been the case in the past.<sup>45</sup>

To avoid the dangers of these stereotypes, careful measures would have to be set up so people would not bring their stereotypes to bear in reporting. In a book written earlier in his career titled *Liberty and the News*, Lippmann bemoaned that, at the time of the writing of that book, there was little in the way of education or true academic study in the field of journalism, and that, in his point of view, was hurting the industry as a whole. Lippmann wrote, “Sometime in the future, when men have thoroughly grasped the role of public opinion in society, scholars will not hesitate to write treatises on evidence for the use of news-gathering services. No such treatise exists today.”<sup>46</sup> He believed that journalism would be improved if there were more rigorous training programs and screening processes and that such things would improve both the quality and accuracy of reporting. Indeed, Lippmann believed that objectivity in news reporting

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 110.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 112.

<sup>46</sup> Walter Lippmann, *Liberty and the News* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1920), 84.

was absolutely paramount. Lippmann wrote, “With this increase in prestige must go a professional training in journalism in which the ideal of objective testimony is cardinal.”<sup>47</sup> Despite the extra training and education that journalists would receive, Lippmann did not believe that would be enough to prevent stereotypes and damaging pictures from arising in the heads of readers. To that end, Lippmann proposed the formation of a group of experts whose job it would be to organize and analyze data as it came in in order to better create a public opinion, which he felt was becoming a new organ in government.<sup>48</sup> This group of men (and women), would be a “specialized class” whose interests would extend beyond “the locality” and serve the government on a federal level.<sup>49</sup> Lippmann feared local interests and factions getting in the way of the function and the greater good of the nation. What he asked for amounted to a centralized intelligence agency that would receive funding through a trust fund that would be nearly untouchable by congress.<sup>50</sup> As Lippmann himself states, “the more you are able to analyze administration and work out elements that can be compared, the more you invent quantitative measures for the qualities you wish to promote.”<sup>51</sup>

One may rightly wonder where the voting public itself comes in when shaping its own opinion. Lippmann was so concerned about bias and stereotypes within the public that he did not want them to contribute to a large degree in policy making at all. In a later book titled *The Phantom Public* (originally published in 1925), Lippmann reduced citizens’ role in managing public affairs to a simple yes or no on decisions made by policymakers. Lippmann saw the relative indifference that the American public showed in the democratic process and concluded

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>48</sup> Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 248.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 310.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 387.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 390.

that they were not as interested in the process as democratic theory assumes them to be. He wrote, “Of the eligible voters In the United States less than half go to the polls even in a presidential year. During the campaign of 1924 a special effort was made to bring out more voters. They did not come.”<sup>52</sup> Due to traditionally low voter turnouts, even in contentious election years with the apparent life and death of the republic at stake, Lippmann stated that many thinkers, especially in Europe, had quite abandoned the idea of “the collective mass of the people direct[ing] the course of public affairs.”<sup>53</sup> Because the public did not seem to really care or even understand what was being asked of them in terms of governing, Lippmann believed that it would be best to involve them as little as possible. Between the time of writing *Public Opinion* and *The Phantom Public*, something changed within Lippmann on a fundamental level. While *Public Opinion* was critical of the masses, it still held out hope that the democratic process was the right and correct way to govern a people. In *The Phantom Public*, no such optimism exists. Lippmann went from being cautiously optimistic to downright cynical and dismissive of democracy. He wrote, “These various remedies, eugenic, educational, ethical, populist and socialist, all assume that either the voters are inherently competent to direct the course of affairs or that they are making progress toward such an ideal. I think it is a false ideal.”<sup>54</sup> Lippmann is quick to add that it is not an undesirable ideal, rather, that it is “an unattainable ideal, bad only in the sense that it is bad for a fat man to try to be a ballet dancer.”<sup>55</sup> Because the public is varied and in possession of differing opinions on everything, the ideal of a universal public will is nothing but a mere abstraction and a phantom built on the “mystical fallacy of democracy, that

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<sup>52</sup> Walter Lippmann, *The Phantom Public* (New Brunswick, NJ, and London: Transaction Publishers, 1993), 6.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 28-29.

<sup>55</sup>. *Ibid*, 29.

the people, all of them, are competent.”<sup>56</sup> Lippmann divides the public into two distinct groups: agents and bystanders. Agents (also referenced throughout the book as insiders) are the people that have training, possess expert knowledge, or are well-versed in a subject in order to properly act on a problem or a circumstance that might occur. Bystanders (also known as outsiders) merely observe affairs as a spectator. Not everyone is always an insider and not everyone is always an outsider. Lippmann wrote, “It changes with the issue: the actors in one affair are the spectators of another, and men are continually passing back and forth between the field where they are executives and the field where they are members of a public.”<sup>57</sup> While many people can be experts and therefore can act in certain situations, since not everyone can at any one time, law of averages dictates that, in Lippmann’s point of view, the public is “a deaf spectator in the back row, who ought to keep his mind on the mystery off there, but cannot quite manage to keep awake” because people are more often than not more interested in private affairs and their own day-to-day lives than what goes on the public sphere.<sup>58</sup> This is not to say that Lippmann did not think that the regular rank and file public had no role to play in politics. Far from it, in fact. He still believed in voting, albeit in quite a different way from what is traditionally thought of as voting. The public still has a role in the political world in his worldview. That political role is to basically act as a switch or failsafe in times of crisis to help those in charge to decide what is the best course of action to take. Lippmann wrote that “during a crisis of maladjustment,” the people’s vote is to not “deal with the substance of the problem but to neutralize the arbitrary force which prevents adjustment.”<sup>59</sup> Public opinion should not lead anything, as public opinion is

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 100

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 189.

“partisan, spasmodic, simple-minded and external.”<sup>60</sup> The insiders, in his point of view, are to lead the outsiders to that vote and not the other way. This opinion is why Lippmann advocated for the creation of a new branch in government to observe events and render their decisions to lawmakers and decisionmakers, and journalists as well as policy makers would manufacture consent to ignite what public opinion ought to be. In a way, *The Phantom Public* is not too far from what he originally envisioned in *Public Opinion* and does complement it, but it can nonetheless be perceived as elitist.

It is that elitism that John Dewey objected and responded to. Dewey, a man already in his 60s by the time that *Public Opinion* was written, had already established himself as one of America’s premier educators and philosophers. He had been President of the American Psychological Association and was one of the first board of editors of the *Psychological Review*.<sup>61</sup> Dewey is not only known as one of the most influential educational reformers in American history, he is also one of the founders of functional psychology. According to a survey published by the journal *Review of General Psychology* in 2002, Dewey was one of the top one hundred most cited psychologists of the twentieth century.<sup>62</sup> In addition to his contributions to psychology, Dewey is also known for his contribution to educational reform. A professor at several universities across the world, many of Dewey’s ideas on education can be found in his book *Democracy and Education*. Partially through his long career in teaching and partially through his own research into Plato and others who wrote about education, Dewey came to believe that the key to learning is the process of how the subject is taught and not rote

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 141.

<sup>61</sup> W.B Pillsbury, *John Dewey 1859-1952: A Biographical Memoir* (Washington D.C: National Academy of Sciences, 1957), 105.

<sup>62</sup> Steven J Haggblom et al., “Eminent psychologists of the 20th century,” *The Review of General Psychology* 6: 2(2002): 139-152.

memorization. On this belief, he wrote, “Were all instructors to realize that the quality of mental process, not the production of correct answers, is the measure of educative growth something hardly less than a revolution in teaching would be worked.”<sup>63</sup> More importantly, he saw the process of intellectual learning, and therefore the individual, as a communal affair, and thus linked to society, and society is meaningless unless realized by the individual. In that sense, they are linked, and one cannot exist without the other. Dewey wrote,

there is no opposition between the individual and the social. The intellectual variations of the individual in observation, imagination, judgment, and invention are simply the agencies of social progress, just as conformity to habit is the agency of social conservation. But when knowledge is regarded as originating and developing within an individual, the ties which bind the mental life of one to that of his fellows are ignored and denied.<sup>64</sup>

From these ideas arose the idea of learning by doing, not only teaching students facts about the world, but also giving them tools they needed to keep society progressing. Essentially, Dewey’s ideas on education helped give rise to the idea of teaching students how to think critically for the betterment of society rather than merely mastering a collection of prescribed facts.

Dewey wrote about many different topics, and though he is mostly remembered for his contributions to education, psychology, and philosophy, he also occasionally wrote about politics and journalism. Dewey had read *Public Opinion* and *The Phantom Public*, and had a favorable opinion of them. Toward the end of his review of *The Phantom Public* in 1925, he called for “a scientific organization for discovering, recording and interpreting all conduct having a public bearing,” and that he hoped to return to the subjects Lippmann presented in his work at a later time.<sup>65</sup> Dewey would do just that.

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<sup>63</sup> John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1922), 207.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 347.

<sup>65</sup> Jay Martin, *The Education of John Dewey: A Biography* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002): 388.

In order to fully understand *The Public and its Problems*, biographer Jay Martin argues that the work needs to be analyzed from what Dewey's philosophies were at the time. Dewey was a reconstructionist, meaning that he saw the role of a contemporary philosopher to be "reconstructing the ideas bequeathed to him by Western thought."<sup>66</sup> Doing so was essential on contextualizing these Old World ideas and concepts into an American school of thought, "because the fulfillment of democracy demanded a new conception of the idea of a 'public' suitable for the conditions of democracy."<sup>67</sup> Taking a page from William James, Dewey saw humans, by nature, associative and that social interactions have consequences. Since some interactions affect only one person, they are called private. However, in the modern democratic world, the majority of an individual's interactions and actions have consequences for others. Because of that, individuals are not only *the* public, they *create* the public.<sup>68</sup> These ideas were still developing as he wrote *Education and Democracy*, and they became fleshed out with *The Public and its Problems*.

The idea that the public creates itself rather than being a group of people who need to be instructed, nearly outside itself, is quite a contrast from what Lippmann laid out in his work. Almost immediately, Dewey contrasted himself from Lippmann's perceived elitist individualism early with his definition of what private and public life is. While Lippmann argued that people do not care as much about the public life because they are busy with their private lives, Dewey said there is very little distinction between private and public actions, especially since private actions can most certainly affect the public. For Dewey, "Many private acts are social; their

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 387.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 388.

consequences contribute to the welfare of the community or affect its status and prospects.”<sup>69</sup> Dewey added, almost reminding those that have read *Public Opinion* five years prior to the release of his own *The Public and its Problems*, that the government is not the state, as it also includes the public as well as the rulers who are put there to represent them. Therefore, the government, in Dewey’s eyes, “is organized in and through those officers who act in behalf of its interests.”<sup>70</sup> In fact, the only way a public can truly exist, according to Dewey, is when “Indirect, extensive, enduring and serious consequences of conjoint and interacting behavior call a public into existence having a common interest in controlling these consequences.”<sup>71</sup> Essentially, a public cannot exist unless there is a chance of severe consequences of an action and enough people want to change what that consequence will be. That group becomes known as a public, and the way that a public is arranged and organized is through those that the public chooses to represent it. These people are the guardians of the public: men and women such as judges, executives, legislators, and so on. This “association adds to itself political organization, and something which may be government comes into being: the public is a political state.”<sup>72</sup>

Because America is a republic and our leaders and representatives are democratically elected, the very idea of a group of the kind Lippmann proposed to keep track of trends and report them to lawmakers, with little input from the people, would naturally be problematic, according to Dewey. Such an arrangement would be inherently undemocratic and unrepresentative of what it means to be a republic. However, Dewey himself acknowledged that the public does have a great many hurdles to overcome in order to be fully invested in current

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<sup>69</sup> John Dewey, *The Public and its Problems* (Chicago, IL: Gateway Books, 1946), 13.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 126.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

affairs enough to be properly educated about them to make informed decisions. Dewey devoted an entire chapter, entitled “The Eclipse of the Public,” to discussing these difficulties in *The Public and its Problems*.<sup>73</sup> The problems that Dewey saw in the public interacting in political life were many, such as mindless entertainment, the influx of new immigrants changing the demographic makeup of the United States, corporate capital interfering with the electoral process, and even the advancing modern times. It is the advance of technology that received special attention from Dewey.

Dewey stated that the modern political structure that the United States has began from community life where the main industry was agriculture and people worked with their hands. Needless to say, a great deal had changed from 1776 to the twentieth century. Dewey stated that

We have inherited, in short, local town-meeting practices and ideas. But we live and act and have our being in a continental national state. We are held together by non-political bonds, and the political forms are stretched and legal institutions patched in an ad hoc and improvised manner to do the work they have to do.<sup>74</sup>

The industrial revolution changed the way Americans interacted with each other. In Dewey’s time, the transcontinental railroad allowed for travel across the nation in a few days where before it would have taken weeks or even months. Needless to say, because of the rapid expansion, that tight-knit rural community that fostered the beginnings of the democracy and what Thomas Jefferson fought to protect no longer existed. The legal and political framework of the country had failed to keep up with changing tides. Dewey wrote, “Political and legal forms have only piece-meal and haltingly, with great lag, accommodated themselves to the industrial transformation.”<sup>75</sup> This advancing technology, coupled with all of the other factors mentioned,

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 110.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 113-114.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

lead to an increasingly indifferent voting base. Dewey lamented in his writing there was widespread awareness of the ineffectiveness of voting, not just from the uneducated, but also from the educated and intellectually inclined of the country. Dewey also wrote that many people at the time started to think the entire body of political activity is nothing more than a “protective coloration to conceal the fact that big business rules the governmental roost.”<sup>76</sup> Even after women received the right to vote it seemed that voters remained more apathetic despite the voting population effectively doubling.

Dewey saw the problems that the public faced at the end of the First World War, with all the pessimism and cynicism for the future, and responded. Unlike Lippmann, however, who thought the public was too irrational for its own good and needed experts to lead them, Dewey insisted on public involvement and thought that they just needed to be energized in order to make them care about politics again. After all, there is nothing sacred in suffrage, and abandoning the old order of tradition and loyalty to a monarch in favor of publicly held elections did not come from divine providence. Contrary to what Americans like to believe, Manifest Destiny is not real. A nation from sea to shining sea had to be created, fought for, and funded by a public that had strong opinions as to where they should go and what they wanted to do. That cannot be done, Dewey argued, if the public did not have what he called a “responsible share” of decision making in the groups that make up the public as well as the ability to participate actively in those groups.<sup>77</sup> Liberty “is that secure release and fulfillment of personal potentialities which take place only in rich and manifold association with others: the power to be an individualized self-making a distinctive contribution and enjoying in its own way the fruits of association.”<sup>78</sup> In

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 118.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 147.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 150.

other words, without the ability to freely associate and act within the political climate, American society as we know it would cease to exist. Lippmann argued that the public is not knowledgeable enough to be sufficiently informed to make decisions in the political sphere and that they need guidance. However, Dewey argued that Lippmann had forgotten that “knowledge is a function of association and communication; it depends upon tradition, upon tools and methods socially transmitted, developed and sanctioned.”<sup>79</sup> In other words, humans make society, not society makes humans. Thus, in order to enfranchise people to make them more involved, they need to have a greater presence in the public sphere, not less. In other words, in order to cure what ails democracy, the solution for Dewey was more democracy.<sup>80</sup> Dewey concluded by saying, “We lie, as Emerson said, in the lap of an immense intelligence. But that intelligence is dormant and its communications are broken, inarticulate and faint until it possesses the local community as its medium.”<sup>81</sup> If Lippmann’s ideas were to reach their entire fruition, that voice of the local community would never be heard. For journalists and journalism, that would mean that the more voices that are heard in the public sphere (not less like the way Lippmann seemed to imply), the better off our democracy will be in the long term.

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 158.

<sup>80</sup> Martin, *The Education of John Dewey*, 389.

<sup>81</sup> Dewey, *The Public and its Problems*, 219.

### CHAPTER 3

The debate that Dewey and Lippmann had over the public in the political world and its relevance for journalism resonates now just as much as it did when it first raged almost one hundred years ago. The anxieties and societal pressures of the 1920s are very similar to what the United States is currently facing as it moves into the 2020s. Those anxieties include new forms of technology changing the way men and women communicate with each other, shifting demographics in the country's population, pessimism about the electoral and political process, cynicism for the future, conspiracy theories and propaganda running rampant, and an increase in over-eager reporting, misinformation, and inaccurate information passing as news.

The spread of misinformation, both accidental and deliberate, is a good place to begin. New technology and social media have played a huge factor in the spread of it. The Covington kids' story was placed at the beginning of this thesis to give a taste of the problems facing journalism today, and now it is time to get into the specifics of the event.

Shortly after the short video became public and began circulating through national news media outlets, the Diocese of Covington and Covington Catholic High School released a joint statement saying,

We condemn the actions of the Covington Catholic High School students toward Nathan Phillips specifically, and Native Americans in general. We extend our deepest apologies to Mr. Phillips. This behavior is opposed to the Church's teachings on the dignity and respect of the human person.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Londberg and Brookbank, "NKY Catholic school faces backlash"

Darren Thompson, an organizer of the Indigenous People’s movement, said that this incident was “emblematic of the state of our discourse in Trump’s America.” The Mayor of Covington, called what happened “disturbing, discouraging, and - frankly - appalling.”<sup>83</sup>

The response from the content of that video began in earnest. On January 23, news organizations reported that a mysterious package had been delivered to the Diocese of Covington’s building, forcing staff to vacate for their own protection.<sup>84</sup> The video of the incident became a talking point for days on social media, with several people on social media demanding that the boys’ personal information be leaked onto social media.

With all of that controversy surrounding the video, it initially appeared as if these ignorant teenagers were rightly put in their place by justly angry men and women. The only problem with this story is that the video in question showed only a partial version of what exactly happened. Soon after the original video made the rounds on social media, another, longer video surfaced on Twitter showing that Nathan Phillips, once thought to be the victim in this incident, in fact, “put himself in that position” and that the boys from Covington were “provoked.”<sup>85</sup> Further, it would seem that the students were themselves being harassed by a group called The Black Israelites. Nathan Phillips himself said, “some of the members of the Black Hebrew Israelites group were also acting up, ‘saying some harsh things’ and that one member spit in the direction of the Catholic students.”<sup>86</sup> The report goes on to say, “The man in

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Max Londberg, “Diocese of Covington cleared of threats after report of suspicious package,” *Cincinnati Enquirer* (Cincinnati, OH), Jan. 23, 2019, <https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/2019/01/23/investigation-underway-after-suspicious-packages-found-diocese-covington/2661412002/>

<sup>85</sup> Sarah Brookbank, “Covington Catholic: Longer video shows start of the incident at Indigenous Peoples March,” *Cincinnati Enquirer* (Cincinnati, OH), Jan. 20, 2019, <https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/2019/01/20/covington-catholic-incident-indigenous-peoples-march-longer-video/2630930002/>

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

the video says ‘get out’ and uses a racial slur, to which the crowd of students responds with surprise. One student yells, ‘Why are you being mean?’”<sup>87</sup> Further, it was discovered that harassed Nathan Phillips, originally reported to be a Vietnam combat veteran, had never actually seen any combat action, although he was in the military during the Vietnam war, another fact that had been misreported.<sup>88</sup> With the new video, the Diocese of Covington issued an apology to the boys.<sup>89</sup> One of the boys, Nick Sandmann, has since sued many media outlets for defamation for their handling of the story, with NBC in particular facing a lawsuit of \$275 million.<sup>90</sup>

This event was a debacle for just about every party involved. Nathan Phillips wound up looking like a liar in the eyes of some, even if he did feel legitimately threatened by the goings on at the march. Covington Catholic, and by extension, the Diocese of Covington, looked bad for having apparent racists in their midst. Even if it was not true, they still received mysterious packages that could have been deadly. The Covington kids suffered due to the hatred that was poured out toward them. However, perhaps the group that looked the worst in this incident were certain over-eager portions of the news media. Had they waited until they had received the full story, or waited for further developments, the entire affair could have been avoided, or at least handled in a way that did not spark so much outrage. Instead, they went after the “scoop,” which is something that Walter Lippmann would have never done. While the story initially was controversial and thus hot and ideal for a story, objectivity in reporting was paramount to

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Michelle Boorstein, “Kentucky bishop apologizes to Covington Catholic students, says he expects their exoneration,” *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C), Jan. 25, 2019, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2019/01/24/third-kentucky-bishop-apologizes-covington-catholic-high-school-students/?utm\\_term=.2fb48a7bc8a1](https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2019/01/24/third-kentucky-bishop-apologizes-covington-catholic-high-school-students/?utm_term=.2fb48a7bc8a1)

<sup>90</sup> Aris Folley, “Covington teenager sues NBC for \$275M, lawyer says,” *The Hill* (Washington, D.C), May 1, 2019, <https://thehill.com/homenews/media/441736-covington-teenager-planning-to-sue-cnn-for-275m-lawyer-says>

Lippmann's vision for journalism, and if these reporters had followed his suggestions, these news outlets might not be facing a lawsuit. The coverage of the March for Life in 2019 is an example of accidental misinformation taken way out of proportion, in no small part due to the buzz of social media, and delivered in a way that seems to show a predetermined spin that does not speak to the objectivity journalists should have. In this age, where the majority of Americans distrust news media, taking time to be extra careful in reporting is essential.<sup>91</sup>

Despite the over-eager reporting, it is not necessarily entirely journalism's fault. After all, the nature of social media is indeed a significant element of the credibility problem that journalism currently faces. Social media has a tendency to make everyone susceptible to error. The way social media operates, people often just share things without reading them. According to a study done by the Association for Computer Machinery Special Interest Group in 2016, about fifty-nine percent of all links shared on Twitter are never clicked on.<sup>92</sup> This study implies that the vast majority of what gets shared on Twitter is never read by those who circulate it. If what this study says is true, then it is safe to assume that people often share whatever suits their own personal bias on social media and what they share becomes taken as fact, even if what they share is clearly labelled as an opinion piece on the actual site the link follows to.

Because what gets shared on Twitter often is not read, then the ability to discern what is fact and fiction can be blurry on social media for a great many users even at the best of times. The effects of the blurring between fact and fiction on social media can be seen in recent studies. According to the American Press Institute, a full half of the American public do not know what

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<sup>91</sup> Matthew Ingram. "Most Americans say they have lost trust in the media," *Columbia Journalism Review*, Sept. 12, 2018, [https://www.cjr.org/the\\_media\\_today/trust-in-media-down.php](https://www.cjr.org/the_media_today/trust-in-media-down.php)

<sup>92</sup> Maksym Gabielkov, et al. "Social Clicks: What and Who Gets Read on Twitter?" *ACM Sigmetrics*. Jun., 2016, <https://hal.inria.fr/hal-01281190>

the term “op-ed” means, or has a limited understanding of the term, while only twenty-six percent of people know what the term means very well.<sup>93</sup> The way sites like Facebook and Twitter work, it is quite easy for users to filter out whatever they do not want to see, until the news on social media is nothing but an echo chamber, filled with biased news stories shared by those with an agenda that do little other than preach to a crowd that has already been converted, one way or another, to a cause. Another study by the same group found that forty-three percent of those surveyed “could easily sort news from opinion on these news websites or social platforms, which are likely where the most frequent mixing of different kinds of content occurs.”<sup>94</sup> These data match up with what the Pew Research Center found at around the same time. The Pew Research Center asked 5,035 adults to see if they could recognize a news story as factual or as an opinion. Only twenty-six percent of all adults were able to successfully label all five factual stories as factual, and just thirty-five percent of all adults surveyed were able to correctly label all opinion pieces as such.<sup>95</sup> In addition, the Pew Research Center discovered that party identification among readers affects how they identify factual news stories and opinion pieces. The study showed “Republicans and Democrats are more likely to think news statements are factual when they appeal to their side – even if they are opinions,” and that “Overall, Republicans and Democrats were more likely to classify both factual and opinion statements as

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<sup>93</sup> The Media Insight Project, “What Americans know, and don’t, about how journalism works,” The American Press Institute, last modified Jun. 11, 2018, <https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/publications/reports/survey-research/what-americans-know-about-journalism/>

<sup>94</sup> Kevin Loker, “Confusion about what’s news and what’s opinion is a big problem, but journalists can help solve it,” The American Press Institute, last modified Sept. 19, 2018, <https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/publications/confusion-about-whats-news-and-whats-opinion-is-a-big-problem-but-journalists-can-help-solve-it/#footnote-11604-1>

<sup>95</sup> Amy Mitchell, et al., “Distinguishing Between Factual and Opinion Statements in the News,” Pew Research Center, last modified Jun. 18, 2018, <https://www.journalism.org/2018/06/18/distinguishing-between-factual-and-opinion-statements-in-the-news/>

factual when they appealed most to their side.”<sup>96</sup> Given that Americans are also becoming more partisan in recent times, while opinion pieces are on paper just that, in practice, for a great many people, they are often interpreted as fact.<sup>97</sup>

Because of links shared on social media not being read, along with the inability for many to tell the difference between factual news stories and opinion pieces, there has been much concern among some researchers that social media is creating an echo chamber where no one has room to grow their outlook on life. The American public becoming more partisan as time goes on has only increased the anxiety. One study likened this spread of misinformation to a viral disease. Researcher Petter Törnberg concluded in his study that, “echo chambers may be linked to the spread of misinformation through an emergent network effect. When misinformation resonates with the views of an echo chamber, the chamber can function as an initial platform from which the diffusion can occur globally through weak ties.”<sup>98</sup> Törnberg further added that, “The model furthermore suggested that the combination between opinion and network polarization, quintessential of echo chambers, results in a synergetic effect that increases the virality of narratives that resonate with the echo chamber,” and that “the simple clustering together of users with a deviant world-view is enough to affect the virality of information items that resonate with their perspective.”<sup>99</sup> Because of social media’s tendency to create an echo chamber effect, public discourse is arguably threatened by these blocks of people, dragging down the conversation as a whole.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> The Pew Research Center, “Political Polarization in the American Public,” Pew Research Center, last modified Jun. 12, 2014, <https://www.people-press.org/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/>

<sup>98</sup> Petter Törnberg, “Echo chambers and viral misinformation: Modeling fake news as complex contagion,” *PLoS One* 13, no. 9 (2018): 16, <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0203958>

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 16-17.

This echo chamber effect is not unlike a similar issue that occurred with new technology in the 1920s, when in the fallout of World War I, consumer culture grew substantially in the United States in the form of radio, jazz music, and the movie theater. The new technology (being mostly entertainment) made it quite easy to filter out whatever someone did not want to hear at the time, as well as creating distractions away from legitimate political conversation, which Lippmann and Dewey both believed led to the apathy in politics they witnessed in the 1920 presidential election. Voter apathy is a problem today, much as it was back then. Voter turnout was lower in 2016 compared to 2008, though it was marginally better than in 2012. Regardless, it was still below sixty percent.<sup>100</sup> With the constant coverage of the 2016 election resulting in barely an uptick from the 2012 election, then it can be assumed that people are becoming indifferent or numb to the political process. If all one hears perpetually is one side of anything (or nothing at all) then naturally the average person is going to care less and less until something awful happens in the political world and it is too late for them to care. These parallel anxieties of new technology creating propaganda and apathy in the 1920s and now show that the Lippmann-Dewey debate is still worth examining.

Some news outlets are also cognizant of these echo chambers on social media, and many on the fringe of the political spectrum seem to play toward the partisanship of the age. For instance, some news reporters have been known to deliberately misinform the public to suit an agenda. A good example of this misinforming the public is the false flag conspiracy theory that developed in 2018 when mysterious packages were delivered to the houses of several prominent Democrats. Social media played a part in the formation of this theory. While the incident with

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<sup>100</sup> “Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2016,” United States Census Bureau, Accessed Apr. 28, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/p20-580.html>

the Covington kids is an example of a news media taking information given to them via social media and accidentally misinforming the public, this incident shows that some newscasters spread false stories deliberately. This event occurred in 2018 when suspicious packages were delivered to Hillary Clinton, former President Obama, and CNN. It turned out that they contained explosive devices, and the very next day, more bombs were found delivered to the office of Congresswoman Maxine Waters. Many reactionary conservative groups called the planting of the packages false flags in order to garner sympathy for a Democratic party that had been battered in the national election two years prior and looked to retake the legislative branch of the government in the midterm elections that were going to be held the very next month. In essence, the argument from these people was that the Democrats planted these bombs themselves in order to gain a sympathy vote in the 2018 midterm elections.<sup>101</sup>

These packages delivered to top Democrats were discovered a few days after the Secret Service intercepted a suspicious letter for President Donald Trump as well as suspicious packages sent to two upper level Pentagon officials. These packages contained ricin, a deadly substance.<sup>102</sup>

The way the two lined up was seen as too convenient in the eyes of many right-wing reactionaries, and thus a conspiracy theory took root overnight. Right-wing extremist and popular radio host Alex Jones, known for consistent false stories, said that the delivery of the packages were false flags the day they were discovered, and many other such fringe news groups

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<sup>101</sup> Kevin Roose, "False Flag Theory on Pipe Bombs Zooms From Right-Wing Fringe to Mainstream," *New York Times* (New York, NY), Oct. 25, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/25/business/false-flag-theory-bombs-conservative-media.html>

<sup>102</sup> Barbara Starr et al. "Suspected ricin detected in mail sent to Trump, Pentagon," Oct. 3, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/10/02/politics/pentagon-ricin-mail/index.html>

expressed the same opinion.<sup>103</sup> Writing for the *New York Times*, writer Kevin Roose stated that “cable news networks and pliant social media networks allow hastily assembled theories to spread to millions in an instant.”<sup>104</sup> Roose was speaking of certain groups, who, having an agenda, manipulated the story to make it appear to their readers that the packages sent to these top Democrats was a false flag. This form of reporting is the sort of blind bias that Lippmann warned of, and why he spoke of objectivity to avoid news media from becoming propaganda. While Jones by any reasonable standard can be considered an opinion commentator at best, when so many people cannot tell the difference between an opinion piece and a legitimate news story, that distinction matters little.

The accidental and deliberate spread of misinformation for profit and for attention has caused many people to wonder whether or not cable news sources as well as other news outlets have become dens of propaganda. With the echo chambers on social media acting the way they do now, some news media people are beginning to wonder if these legitimate sources are hurting rather than helping the problem. A good example of self-analysis is with the *New York Times* and all of the negative opinion pieces written about Donald Trump and alleged collusion with Russia.

*The New York Times*’ news reporting of James Comey’s (and later Robert Mueller’s) investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election was excellent. Their coverage won a Pulitzer Prize for a reason. However, when about half of the population online do not know what an opinion piece is and only just over a quarter of adults surveyed can correctly identify factual stories, it is difficult to say how that coverage really helped objectively portray the story to the American public. One need only look at the opinion pieces published by

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<sup>103</sup> Alex Jones Show, “Hoax Bombs; An Antifa False Flag?” Infowars, last modified Oct. 24, 2018, <https://www.infowars.com/hoax-bombs-antifa-false-flag/>

<sup>104</sup> Roose, “False Flag Theory on Pipe Bombs Zooms From Right-Wing Fringe to Mainstream.”

*The New York Times* during this time. The majority of opinion pieces published by the paper on the subject were decidedly one-sided. Browsing *The New York Times*' archive, and ignoring letters to the editor, between November 16, 2016, and March 31, 2019, the paper ran sixty-two negative pieces about Trump and the Trump campaign, with many of them implying, if not outright stating, that he colluded with Russia to win the 2016 election. By comparison, during this same period, they ran seven stories that can be seen as positive toward the president.<sup>105</sup> The writers of these pieces did not wait until the investigation was over to say that Trump was in league with Vladimir Putin. For example, in a piece written for *The New York Times*, after Trump met with Putin in 2018, opinion columnist Michelle Goldberg wrote, "Trump's collusion with Russia has always been out in the open, daring us to recognize what's in front of our faces."<sup>106</sup> This piece echoed her sentiments earlier in the year when, while the Mueller investigation was still ongoing, she wrote that there was "overwhelming evidence of the Trump campaign's collusion with Russia."<sup>107</sup> While the Russians did try to interfere with the presidential election in 2016 through a campaign of disinformation through social media (again showing the importance the internet plays in both politics and journalism now), the Mueller investigation "did not find that the Trump campaign, or anyone associated with it, conspired or coordinated with the Russian government in these efforts, despite multiple offers from Russian-

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<sup>105</sup> These totals were calculated using a simple number tally. Using the archive search feature in *The New York Times* archive, I researched all the articles written about the Russian investigation and Donald Trump from November 2016 and March 2019, and from there calculated them based on their negative tone vs their positive tone. From there, I simply tallied them up.

<sup>106</sup> Michelle Goldberg, "Trump Shows the World He's Putin's Lackey," *New York Times* (New York, NY), Jul. 16, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/16/opinion/trump-putin-summit-russia-collusion.html>

<sup>107</sup> Michelle Goldberg, "Truth Has Stopped Mattering in the Russia Investigation," *New York Times* (New York, NY) Apr. 30, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/30/opinion/truth-russia-investigation.html>

affiliated individuals to assist the Trump campaign.”<sup>108</sup> When the full Mueller report came out, it stated that because collusion is not a term used in federal law, the nearest thing that the Trump campaign could be charged with was conspiracy. As Mueller wrote, “The investigation did not establish any agreement among Campaign official or between such officials and Russia-linked individuals-to interfere with or obstruct a lawful function of a government agency during the campaign or transition period.”<sup>109</sup> Further, “the investigation did not identify evidence that any Campaign official or associate knowingly and intentionally participated in the conspiracy to defraud that the Office.”<sup>110</sup> For years, *The New York Times* ran dozens of negative opinion pieces that were probably misconstrued as truth by a partisan population who have difficulty distinguishing between factual news stories and opinion articles. Many of these opinion pieces were, no doubt, shared on social media and fed echo chambers pushing different narratives. Those who are anti-Trump could use these opinion pieces as ammunition against a president they dislike, and, now that the Mueller report has been completed, those who are pro-Trump can use them to discredit the news media as a whole by arguing that they have no credibility. *The New York Times* itself seems to be cognizant of this fact, as well. To its credit, many opinion writers within *The New York Times* realize they may have made a mistake feeding into this cycle, even if it was not intentional. One day after the investigation finished, *New York Times* opinion columnist Farhad Manjoo said, “Mr. Mueller’s no-collusion conclusion should leave a mark. It lands like a rotten egg on a political and media establishment that had gone all-in on its own self-

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<sup>108</sup> The New York Times staff, “Read Attorney General William Barr’s Summary of the Mueller Report,” *New York Times* (New York, NY), Mar. 24, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/03/24/us/politics/barr-letter-mueller-report.html?module=inline>

<sup>109</sup> Robert S. Mueller, III, “Report On The Investigation Into Russian Interference in the 2016 Presidential Election,” U.S Department of Justice. Date Accessed Apr. 30, 2019, pg. 189.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

serving — and wrong — theory of the case.”<sup>111</sup> David Brooks, another *Times* columnist wrote, “Maybe it’s time to declare a national sabbath. Maybe it’s time to step back from the scandalmongering and assess who we (meaning the American public, *Times* journalists included) are right now.”<sup>112</sup> This column spoke of a poison that has gone back to Watergate. In the wake of Watergate and Nixon’s resignation, the government has become more transparent and the public distrust of government has increased. Brooks writes, “The nation’s underlying divides are still ideological, but we rarely fight them honestly as philosophical differences. We just accuse the other side of corruption. Politics is no longer a debate; it’s an attempt to destroy lives through accusation.”<sup>113</sup> People have a picture in their head (the pseudo-environment Lippmann wrote of) of what politics should be and how the game is played. Journalists, who put the legwork in to find good stories worth reading, are naturally attracted to anything that raises suspicions of corruption and scandal. New technology such as social media, deliberate and accidental handling of misinformation, and feeding into echo chambers show that the Lippmann-Dewey debate on public journalism is still relevant.

Another anxiety that both time periods share is the anxiety of shifting racial demographics in the United States. In the 1920s, worries over immigrants destroying the culture of the United States, coupled with the newfound conviction African Americans had to gain true equality after World War I, led to the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, pushing its numbers to the biggest they have ever been. Today’s shifting demographics have also led to uneasiness about immigration and ethnic minorities, albeit in a less violent form than in the 1920s, with people

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<sup>111</sup> Farhad Manjoo, “Collusion Was a Seductive Delusion,” *New York Times*, Mar. 25, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/25/opinion/collusion-mueller-trump.html>

<sup>112</sup> David Brooks, “We’ve All Just Made Fools of Ourselves — Again,” *New York Times* (New York, NY), Mar. 25, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/25/opinion/mueller-trump-no-collusion.html>

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

instead wanting a border wall to keep foreigners out. This distrust of minorities has persisted in one form or another, and has given rise to many conspiracy theories that often pose a serious threat to the legitimacy of political discourse.

One prominent conspiracy theory relates to former President Obama's status as a citizen. While many conspiracy theories began with Obama's election and continued through until his terms were over, this one continues to persist to this day. For years, the story circulated that he was born in Kenya, not the United States, and therefore ineligible to be President. Some scholars have argued that the conspiracy theories surrounding Barack Obama were the herald that predicted the current debate about fake news. One such critic wrote,

Whether or not statements of the facts as delineated by the President would have truly satisfied his critics may not be the point. By letting the negative musings go largely unchecked and unrebuked, both Obama's advisors and the journalists who covered his presidency missed opportunities to definitively clarify the record.<sup>114</sup>

Obama's cabinet and those around him did not address the problem at first, probably hoping it would go away, but it never did. As a result, the rumors of Obama's citizenship continue to circulate to this day. Journalists failed to address these rumor mills about Obama effectively, which is quite similar to how social movements were largely ignored in the 1920s and their messages failed to resonate and the rumors of the evils of minorities continued to persist. The reasons those messages failed to resonate are many, and include background factors such as segregation in the south and eugenic ideas on race becoming popular, even in mainstream science. For the 21<sup>st</sup> century news media dealing with the birther conspiracy however, the problem is twofold. First, the news media did not sense that new technology such as social media

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<sup>114</sup> Patricia A. Turner, "Respecting the Smears: Anti-Obama Folklore Anticipates Fake news," *Journal of American Folklore*, 131, no.522 (2018): 425.

had decreased their gatekeeping ability to control who has and does not have a platform. The media as a whole underestimated the power of confirmation bias and the public's unwillingness to believe truths that go against their ideology, which is exactly the kind of stereotyped pseudo-environment Lippmann wrote of.

In the twentieth century, mainstream news organizations held considerable power to define what was news and what should be understood as the truth. The advent of the radio and television did little to change this. If an ordinary person wanted to report news or offer commentary that would be heard on a large scale, he or she first had to pass through the gates of professional journalism to be broadcasted or published. With today's access to the power of cellphones, cameras that fit in one's pocket, and social media, anyone can be a journalist, and the news media no longer exerts such power over what becomes news. The Covington incident is again an instructive example. News media in that instance, more or less, reacted to a video that was shared around social media and not shared with them. Had this incident occurred even fifteen years ago, that video would have in all likelihood filtered through news media outlets first and not shared on social media. The news media would have acted to determine the newsworthiness of the information and provide the initial framing of the story to the public. Social media has allowed for the creation of rumor mills and as such, conspiracy theories can take root faster than anyone can keep track of. Thus, the Lippmann-Dewey debate again has relevance, as journalists can and should have a stake in combating false reporting whenever possible, to have a more perfect understanding of public opinion. Doing so will increase their credibility and allow them to be seen to be doing good.

## CHAPTER 4

After thoroughly reading Dewey and Lippmann's work and considering characteristics of the times those works were written in, it becomes clear that journalism now faces problems similar to those it faced during the 1920s. As this thesis argues, these two thinkers' ideas remain relevant and can contribute useful ideas to today's discourse.

Both Lippmann and Dewey made excellent points about the public in their debate and the issues it faces and what journalism could do to help with it. However, neither of them offered what can be considered be-all, end-all, solutions that would solve the problems of journalism overnight. They did not need to, however, because journalism moving forward does not need to take just from one side or the other. It can take from both, and indeed, a synthesis of both their ideas might be a more perfect solution.

First, Lippmann is correct when it comes to problems facing journalism. The problems journalism faces now are the same as they were back then. Technology continues to advance and new ways of getting information out into the world has only complicated matters of communication. If one were to side solely with Lippmann on where journalism is to go, then social media and the rise of independent news would be considered unconstructive at best, and outright destructive at worst. If one were to side with Dewey alone, then one might think that the rise of independent media free from advertising would be something to applaud. After all, in a democratic society, freedom of speech is usually seen as a net positive, and more voices at the table should be welcomed, as they will bolster the conversation and help the public decide what course of action they should take. The internet has indeed given everyone a voice in a larger public forum, and that might not necessarily be a good thing for society. Hate sites and extremist

viewpoints are easy to find, and despite corporations' best efforts to silence them, it has thus far done little to stop their poison from seeping into the public conversation.

By that logic, perhaps Lippmann was right in thinking the public should be taken out of public policy as much as possible, and the presentation of journalism and the news should be handled only by select well-educated elite. If one were to do that though, then there would be little point to even having something in the Constitution resembling freedom of speech. To say that a person's voice should not count for anything outside of a yes or a no in the voting booth is not only counter-intuitive to what the Founding Fathers envisioned for the country, it is also dangerous for the rights that citizens of the United States have come to enjoy.

The impasse that the debate presents in the modern age is this: how much freedom should regular people with little experience be allowed to have? What are the positives a platform can bring when said platform could also be used to spread hatred amongst the population? What part can journalists have in guiding people in forming their own personal opinions on matters?

To start, it is clear, given the various examples that have been used in this thesis, that journalists of today should take a page out of Walter Lippmann's playbook and try to develop a steely detachment on what they are reporting and to also take their time in their reporting to make certain they have all of their facts straight before they release a story in such a way that might make the entire press look less credible than it already does. Having members of the press personally getting involved in scandal culture on their own social media accounts (such as telling people to leak personal information of underage high school students to the public) is grossly unprofessional and makes the organizations these reporters work for look biased, which is not what news media needs right at this moment. The very nature of a twenty-four hour news cycle makes it very tempting to take shortcuts in reporting by not waiting for the full story, as it is

usually first-come, first-serve, and whoever breaks the story reaches the most people. However, Lippmann's own career showed that a more measured approach can prove dividends, as his column was read in America for forty years. And yes, while his column was his opinion on current events and full of personal bias, because he was so measured in his responses to events (usually), he was allowed to have a bias. There is only one chance to report things the first time correctly, so if a news media outlet does not wish to wind up dealing with the fallout of faulty reporting, then making sure to have all of one's ducks in a row before pulling the trigger is essential to avoid giving the public accidental misinformation. A little extra training never hurt anyone after all, and such training would fall into both Lippmann and Dewey's ideas of an educated press.

Next, news should learn how to responsibly and effectively use social media to improve their staff and outreach. Staff members not using their social media platforms to launch ad hominem attacks is a good start, but it goes even further than that. Much of what becomes leading stories these days comes from social media. That Covington case for instance began on social media, and the full story was later shown on social media, as well. The news media (for the most part) merely reacted to what was being posted on social media by other independent users. It is these independent users that journalists should reach out to. To be sure, news organizations get tips on possible stories all the time, both in real life and online, but what of independent bloggers and independent journalists? If someone is reporting consistently and accurately on their blog, whose background is not that from which news media normally recruits, then perhaps established news media should consider offering these freelancers contracts to work for them. Granted, they would still need the right sort of qualifications. Not just anyone can write about the news accurately and fairly. Journalism as an industry has worked long and hard since

the days of Lippmann and Dewey to be taken seriously in the eyes of academia. These new creators would continue what they are doing with little interruption, and the news media get to reap the rewards of having a new audience with which to engage. Anyone can be a journalist if they have a phone camera and a word processor. Journalism outfits would do well to reach out to these up-and-comers to make them official. There is evidence of this at work already. For instance, *The Huffington Post* began as a blog in 2005, and has since gone on to become a Pulitzer Prize winning website. One can only imagine the regret some news outfits must feel for not purchasing them while they were newer. Provided they have the proper qualifications and maintain the detachment and objectivity previously mentioned, news media companies should not fear these new bloggers and should try to recruit them, as they have ways of engaging audiences that cable news and newspaper outlets currently do not. This idea falls in line with what Dewey had to say about having more voices at the table being good for democracy, while also maintaining the journalistic standards that Lippmann fought so hard for.

Thirdly, the public should become educated on how to use social media effectively. While it can lead to echo chambers for those with political ideals that are unbecoming of democracy, social media can be used for good. Social media can be a platform for hate, but it can also be used as a platform for the disenfranchised and minorities and can be used to bolster a population against tyranny. A good example of this would be the Arab Spring at the turn of the 2010s, which social media played a part in organizing. In that sense, social media, as a community tool, can be a great help in fostering civil disobedience, which is a very important right in democratic societies. More voices such as these would without question fall into John Dewey's idea of more voices being heard being good for democracy. If the public knows how to

use social media correctly, then they will be less likely to fall for misinformation, which leads into a final, important step that journalists and the public at large can take.

News media, to ensure credibility, should take care to discredit any conspiracy theories and other sorts of deliberate misinformation social media, internet hate groups, or even other news sources put out. Since journalism has a credibility problem, it falls to journalists who wish to be credible to take journalists that deliberately misinform or misinterpret events to task. In addition, since social media is not going to go away, the government can get involved with educating people on how to detect misinformation in news media. Learning how to figure out when something is fake online can be integrated into the computer and web safety courses that are already taught in public schools, so it is not like the entire curriculum of these courses need to be interrupted. Since the internet is so integrated into our lives, learning what is real and what is not real on there is a life skill that everyone should learn now. In addition, social media could figure out a way to better distinguish news stories from opinion pieces. It could be as simple as having the links being different colors depending on whether or not something is an opinion piece. This way, people are more likely to be cautious of what they read online and not fall for disinformation.

## CONCLUSION

The Lippmann-Dewey debate may have taken place nearly one hundred years ago, but its topics of debate still rage to this day. This country is still wary of shifting cultural demographics, new technology changing information processing, and disinformation. Analyzing the parallels between then and now, it is clear that the debate offers some solutions to the problem journalism has with credibility in the eyes of its readers and viewers now. Thanks to the Lippmann-Dewey debate all those years ago, however, the points they made provide a potential roadmap that might be able to help journalism earn its credibility back with audiences. While the suggestions outlined above may not be the be-all, end-all solutions, the Lippmann-Dewey debate could potentially offer more solutions than the ones mentioned. Therefore, further study of this debate may help provide more solutions and keep journalism growing strong in the twenty-first century and beyond.

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## APPENDIX A: IRB LETTER



Office of Research Integrity

July 26, 2019

James Hoyle  
School of Journalism and Mass Communication  
Marshall University

Dear Mr. Hoyle:

This letter is in response to the submitted thesis abstract entitled "*Fixing Journalism's Credibility Problem: Lessons from the Lippmann-Dewey Debate.*" After assessing the abstract, it has been deemed not to be human subject research and therefore exempt from oversight of the Marshall University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The Code of Federal Regulations (45CFR46) has set forth the criteria utilized in making this determination. Since the information in this study does not involve human subjects as defined in the above referenced instruction, it is not considered human subject research. If there are any changes to the abstract you provided then you would need to resubmit that information to the Office of Research Integrity for review and a determination.

I appreciate your willingness to submit the abstract for determination. Please feel free to contact the Office of Research Integrity if you have any questions regarding future protocols that may require IRB review.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bruce F. Day'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping 'B' and 'D'.

Bruce F. Day, ThD, CIP  
Director