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Reconnecting With the Body Politic: Toward Disconnecting Muckrakers and Public Journalists

By Frank E. Fee, Jr.

In the early 1900s, muckrakers unleashed aggressive journalism seeking better government for citizens, and themes inherent in their work and motivation continue to echo in modern journalism. At century's end, public journalists likewise adopted activist roles to remedy political and social malaise. Although public journalists proclaimed theirs a unique approach to journalism, some scholars link muckraking and public journalism. This paper argues that despite commonalities, the two movements differ in fundamental and largely unexplored ways.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the group of magazine journalists who became known as the muckrakers practiced an aggressive form of journalism that attacked unbridled big business and government corruption. Ida M. Tarbell, David Graham Phillips, and Lincoln Steffens helped define and set the early tone of the muckraking decade, and themes inherent in their work and motivation continue to resonate in modern journalism. These three writers also demonstrated some of the range of behaviors and perspectives that separated radical and conservative approaches to the muckraking genre.

At century's end, a number of so-called public or civic journalists likewise adopted activist roles to remedy political and social

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malaise that many observers saw at large in the nation. The public journalists, whose movement is now more than a decade old, claimed theirs was a new approach to journalism.¹ However, while the controversial public journalism movement has yet to generate much historical analysis,² scholars including Michael Schudson have said that there is a connection between public journalism and muckraking.³ This paper examines that claim from the historical perspective and suggests that despite certain commonalities, the two movements differ in fundamental and largely unexplored ways.

“Literature of Exposure”

Most media historians fix the muckraking era at between 1902 and 1912⁴ and situate it in the context of the Progressive reform movement of 1901-1917.⁵ According to historians George Mowry and Judson Grenier, “The ‘era of the muckrakers’ is generally assumed to have begun with the publication by *McClure’s Magazine* of Lincoln Steffens’ ‘Tweed Days in St. Louis’ in October, 1902, and to have ended in the Progressive party’s *Götterdämmerung* with the election of Woodrow Wilson in 1912.”⁶ The muckraking magazines—“*McClure’s*, *Collier’s*, *Everybody’s*, the *American*, and *Cosmopolitan*—achieved circulations in the hundreds of thousands and won unprecedented mass readership across America for the ‘literature of exposure.’”⁷

The muckrakers also laid groundwork for other departures from the mainstream in twentieth-century American journalism. For instance, some media historians, including Schudson and Robert Miraldi, find investigative reporting’s roots in the muckraking era.⁸

Public Journalism’s Aims

In the growing literature of public journalism, two authors have had particular importance: Davis Merritt, former editor of the *Wichita (Kansas) Eagle*, and Jay Rosen, a journalism professor at New York University and director of the former Project on Public Life and the Press.⁹ Perhaps the key point underscored by Rosen, Merritt, and others, is “community connectedness.” And “what distinguishes community connectedness from simple crusading is the emphasis on public discussion and civic improvement.”¹⁰ Rosen adds: “Community connectedness points with alarm to our growing

sense of dislocation from the communities where we live, and from the wider political community we inhabit as citizens of the world's oldest democracy. It also takes what had earlier been a premise of the daily newspaper — the existence of a public attuned to public affairs — and makes that the newspaper's project. Thus, community connectedness is about helping to form as well as inform 'the public.'"¹¹

As Merritt has maintained in stressing philosophy over definition and practices: "Public journalism is not aimed at solving problems; it is aimed at re-engaging citizens in solving problems. It does not seek to join with or substitute itself for government ... it seeks to keep citizens in effective contact with the governing process. Its goal is not to better connect journalists with their communities, but to better connect the people in communities with one another."¹²

MUCKRAKING AND PUBLIC JOURNALISM

Muckraking and public journalism have in common a number of qualities, including (1) journalistic activism, (2) goals of reconnecting citizens and their government, (3) an assumption that journalism could accomplish the reconnection, (4) strongly held philosophies but no set rules for achieving their ends, hence a wide range of behaviors, (5) criticism from contemporaries in mainstream journalism, and (6) criticism from persons in the power structures. They even have in common the suspicion by some that publishers embracing these novel forms have been motivated simply by the profits they are promised from increased readership.¹³ Several authors have made convincing arguments that this was true for the publishers of muckraking publications,¹⁴ and similar concerns are expressed about giant media corporations' sponsorship of public journalism in an era of declining circulation to increase circulation,¹⁵ although here the jury is still out.¹⁶

Two Views of Government and Citizens

This research examines the conceptual framework of three lead-
ing muckraker—Tarbell, Phillips, and Steffens—toward government
and citizen participation between 1902 and 1912 as expressed in part
by their autobiographies and letters. These findings are compared
with the stated motives and objectives of public journalism's lead-

ing promoters, Merritt, Rosen, and Arthur Charity, another member of the Project for Public Life and the Press. The goal here is not to critique either movement or to examine what these muckrakers wrote in their articles but to determine why they wrote what they did during that period and what vision of the relationship of citizens and government informed their rhetoric. Similar inquiry will be directed at the public journalists.

THE ACTIVIST TURN: LINCOLN STEFFENS

Lincoln Steffens' "Shame of the Cities" series in *McClure's Magazine* may have launched the muckraking era¹⁷ but its author claimed a long line of people, even "the prophets of the Old Testament were ahead of me ... finding fault with 'things as they are.'"¹⁸ In fact, he wrote, "I did not intend to be a muckraker; I did not know that I was one till President Roosevelt picked the name out of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and pinned it on us; and even then he said that he did not mean me."¹⁹

But before long the crusading journalist was showing a preference for crusading over journalism. Tarbell said that as early as 1908 she sensed "Steffens' growing dissatisfaction with the restrictions of journalism. He wanted a wider field, one in which he could more directly influence political and social leaders, preach more directly his notions of the Golden Rule, which at that time was his chosen guide."²⁰ His audience, she said, was "political bosses ... (and) the tycoons of Wall Street, the Brahmins of Boston."²¹

In his autobiography and in many of his letters, Steffens evinced continuing interest in bringing corrupt officials to heel. Writing to his father in 1903 of a magazine series he was developing, Steffens remarked, "I think they will make trouble for some damned big rascals who think they are above the danger mark."²²

"Something Can Be Done"

In 1904, Steffens assured his father his muckraking did not reflect pessimism: "I say there is the assumption that something can be done and that men are willing to do it."²³ Part of his optimism was in the basic goodness and responsibility of the private citizen. In a letter to Roosevelt in September 1905, Steffens urged the president to seek campaign funds not from "the insurance and other corpora-

tions seeking national legislation” but from “the people who didn’t want anything out of the Government except general laws and an administration of justice and fair play.”²⁴ He added: “I believe we would not only respond with our dollars but with a tremendous contribution of loyalty to you and to the government. ... [Y]ou would make the millions feel that it was their Government, as it is, and that you and your administration were beholden to the many, not to the few.”²⁵

Four years later, in a letter consoling Cleveland, Ohio, reformer Tom L. Johnson on an election setback, Steffens wrote, “They [Cleveland voters] have not disturbed my confidence that in the long run the people will go right more surely than any individuals or set of individuals.”²⁶

“Democracy a Failure?”

In his autobiography, Steffens commented, “The leading question raised in my second article on St. Louis was, ‘Is democracy a failure?’ A trick, a political trick! I had no doubt that the people could and would govern themselves.”²⁷

Steffens’ assessment of the reform victories in the 1905 elections was that “we, the American people, carried ourselves at last, and the beginning has been made toward the restoration of representative democracy all over the land.”²⁸ His vision was that good men would provide leadership in bringing government to the people. In a 1906 letter to Brand Whitlock, reform mayor of Toledo, Ohio, Steffens synthesized his view of the relationship between leaders and citizens. “You weren’t elected mayor,” he told Whitlock. “You were chosen leader. You weren’t there to give good government or solve problems, but to let them govern themselves somehow and tackle their problems with them and for them; ignorant, in doubt, with no ‘policy’ and not many definite plans, but—a clear idea, and a willingness to serve, to serve others toward the development of their character at any personal sacrifice except that of the development of your character.”²⁹

Exposure, Not Convictions

In a 1907 letter to Roosevelt, Steffens suggested a view of the value and aims of muckraking, telling the president, “most of the

good done in the last few years has been done by the exposure, not the conviction of the rascals. Harriman [railroad baron E.H. Harriman] talking on the stand is of more use to the country than Harriman behind bars."³⁰ In that letter he made one of his clearest statements about his motives in muckraking:

What I am after is the cause and the purpose and the methods by which our government, city, state and federal, is made to represent not the common, but the special interests; the reason why it is so hard to do right in the United States... Fighting dishonesty as you are, you are doing more than all the rest of us so-called muckrakers put together to show the American people that the cause of graft, and the result of all our corruption, is simply misrepresentation in government and that the cure is to regulate, to control, or, if these fail, to own those businesses which find it necessary to their success to corrupt men and citizens and states and the United States.³¹

Steffens may have believed in the exposé to help restore good government to the people but he backed up his watchdog role with political activism that is echoed by some of the more extreme efforts taken in the name of public journalism. In a lengthy 1908 letter to William C. Bobbs, who was involved in reform efforts in Indianapolis, Steffens combined a pep talk ("Your platform is good as far as it goes"), mild scolding ("my dear Mr. Bobbs, you did not follow my advice"), and plan of attack ("Go to the people with your program.")³² April 1910 found him asking Judge James B. Dill to "send me as big a check as you can by way of a contribution to [Progressive leader Robert M.] La Follette's fight in Wisconsin. The interests are preparing a big organization against him there, and it is our business, all of us."³³

Steffens' activism moved him toward socialism during these years and offered the extreme solution to bringing government to the people: Making the people owners of those organizations that Steffens saw as the corrupting influences on government.³⁴ Regardless whether nationalization was really the answer, however, Steffens was prepared to leave journalism and step directly into the reform efforts, going beyond exposure to planning and leading the fight in city after city.³⁵

THE POWER OF FACT: IDA M. TARBELL

The paradox of Ida M. Tarbell is that although one of the best-known of the genre, she was a reluctant muckraker. Already a well-known journalist when her investigation of Standard Oil and John D. Rockefeller was serialized in *McClure's* magazine in 1902,³⁶ Tarbell continued to think of herself as a journalist, or a historian,³⁷ rather than a muckraker during much of the muckraking period. She began writing for *McClure's* in 1893 as "a stray journalist in Paris"³⁸ and remained with the magazine until she and several colleagues, rejecting a business scheme of publisher S.S. McClure, left to join *The American Magazine* in March 1906.³⁹ Of her days at *McClure's*, Tarbell wrote, "We were neither apologists nor critics, only journalists intent on discovering what had gone into the making of this most perfect of all monopolies (Standard Oil)."⁴⁰ *The American*, too, was devoted to journalism, not muckraking, she said: "As a matter of fact, *The American Magazine* had little genuine muckraking spirit. It did have a large and fighting interest in fair play; it sought to present things as they were, not as somebody thought they ought to be. We were journalists, not propagandists; and as journalists we sought new angles on old subjects."⁴¹

The *American's* reporting, she said, was guided by "our ardent desire to improve things by demonstrating their unsoundness and ... our unwillingness to use any other tools than those which belonged legitimately to our profession."⁴²

"Commercial Machiavellianism and the Christian Code"

Besides publisher S.S. McClure's quest for more readers,⁴³ the motivation for Tarbell's *The History of the Standard Oil Company* was her conviction that "business is important, can be profitable, and is not inherently evil," and that "business has certain obligations to its workers, with regard to their human needs, that in many instances it does not fulfill."⁴⁴ It was, she said, "the struggle... between Commercial Machiavellianism and the Christian Code."⁴⁵ Since the term "muckraker" was applied retroactively in 1906 by a reproving President Theodore Roosevelt,⁴⁶ Tarbell in 1902 did not see herself as a muckraker—"this classification... which I did not like"⁴⁷—when *McClure's* published the history in installments, nor when the collection was published in "two fat volumes with generous appendices of what I considered essential documents"⁴⁸ in fall

1904. "I had hoped that the book might be received as a legitimate historical study," she said, "but to my chagrin I found myself included in a new school, that of the muckrakers."⁴⁹

Although she did not explicitly discuss her dislike of the muckrakers and their methods, Tarbell hinted that objectivity and balance were among the contested practices. She frequently argued for fairness and reporting both sides of an issue,⁵⁰ although the "radical reforming element ... had little interest in balanced findings."⁵¹

Individuals vs. the Masses

Tarbell's concept of the ordinary citizen and his or her role in reform is somewhat problematic because she seldom referred to ordinary people in any meaningful way in her autobiography. Mostly, the people Tarbell talked about were colleagues, leading businessmen, or political leaders. Non-elites were referred to collectively, and the working man and woman tended to be discussed only in terms of political associations (e.g., Socialists),⁵² union members,⁵³ or generic collectives (e.g., women,⁵⁴ the poor⁵⁵). In Tarbell's thinking, their aspirations appeared subsumed by those of the reformist elite. Criticizing the radical reformers' one-sided attacks, she wrote, "Now I was convinced that in the long run *the public they were trying to stir* would weary of vituperation, that if you were to secure permanent results the mind must be convinced."⁵⁶

She talked briefly of organized labor's "body of votes that no political party dared defy,"⁵⁷ and said she found "many workmen were magazine readers"⁵⁸ familiar with her work. However, nowhere in the muckraking period of Tarbell's autobiography is there a clear statement of mobilizing ordinary citizens to take on the abuses of the trusts or of government, or of what the people's agenda might be. Only seldom is there even reference to reform concerns emanating from the working class. Like Steffens, Tarbell said she believed that the solutions would come from ethical business and government administration. She wrote of telling people in Kansas, "Unless you can be as efficient and as patient, as farseeing as your great competitor — laws or no laws, you will not succeed. You must make yourselves as good refiners, as good transporters, as good marketers, as ingenious, as informed, as imaginative in your legitimate undertakings as they are in both their legitimate and illegitimate."⁵⁹ The tasks she enumerated clearly identify her audience as business and political leaders, not ordinary citizens.

Toward Better Leaders

The key to achieving the reforms Tarbell and Steffens sought was better leaders more than better followers. Their autobiographies recount frequent personal contact and correspondence with presidents, captains of industry, political leaders, and champions of reform, and always on an advisory, sometimes collaborative, level. Theodore Roosevelt received much advice from both Steffens and Tarbell, as did Presidents Cleveland and Wilson, among others. Tarbell even tells of offering to ghost-write articles for Grover Cleveland during her last two years at *McClure's* magazine.⁶⁰ When a series of lectures in Kansas and Oklahoma oil fields upset some who felt she had been co-opted by Standard Oil, "there were hard-headed independent legislators and business men in the state who consoled me."⁶¹ Nowhere are ordinary citizens mentioned.

Researching articles that were in distinct contrast to the radical journalism that other muckrakers revered, Tarbell found a metaphor that illuminates her vision of society and reform. About 1912, while doing a series on industry that she insisted was not muckraking,⁶² Tarbell became fascinated with Frederick Taylor's theories of scientific management.⁶³

Under Taylorism, as Tarbell discovered, "the business of management was not only planning but controlling what it planned. Management laid out ahead the day's work for each man at his machine; to him they went with their instructions, to them he went for explanations and suggestions."⁶⁴ The ideal was cooperation and recognition of interdependence between workers and managers, but Taylorism also prescribed a rigid, hierarchical system in which communication might flow up and down, but decisions could be made only at the top.⁶⁵ Hidden in Tarbell's embrace of Taylor's scientific management principles, then, is an arguable affirmation of strong and able leaders, compassionate, and willing to listen, but unquestionably in charge.

"TRUTH" UNFETTERED BY FACTS: DAVID GRAHAM PHILLIPS

If Tarbell gave support to Cecelia Tichi's claim that "fact was the muckrakers' antidote to rumor and to sensationalist yellow journalism,"⁶⁶ David Graham Phillips did not. Although less well remembered than Tarbell and Steffens, Phillips is a significant figure

whose work helped define muckraking and gained the genre its nickname and notoriety. George Mowry and Judson Grenier held that the 1906 series "The Treason of the Senate" in *Cosmopolitan Magazine* "was, in many respects, the climax of the muckraking movement in American journalism. The bold, outspoken, often intemperate language of an author dedicated to 'the search for truth' captures the essence of both the best and worst aspects of muckraking."⁶⁷

Fueling Phillips' zeal, biographer Louis Filler said, was that in common with other muckrakers Phillips

had seen in his lifetime the breakdown of the old moralities, the old modes of life, that had constituted the bases of a past democracy. If democracy were to be recaptured, new moralities and modes would have to be developed. And not only that: the older ones would have to be broken down completely, discredited and annihilated; they could not be revived, for they were a dead hand on the present, the means by which the trusts and their allies continued to grow toward that logical end of individualism: oligarchy.⁶⁸

Phillips' muckraking began when he left newspaper journalism in 1901 to enter magazine journalism and to write novels,⁶⁹ and his prolific career ended in 1911 when he was shot by a "deranged" reader⁷⁰ on January 23 and died the next day.⁷¹ Phillips has been credited with laying "a significant part of the groundwork" for three amendments to the United States Constitution.⁷² Of the Sixteenth Amendment's income tax and redistribution of national wealth, historian Irving Dillard said, "Phillips notably helped to create the necessary public opinion in support of this amendment through his newspaper and magazine articles that laid open the financial manipulations previously so largely hidden from the eyes of ordinary men and women."⁷³ Filler contended Phillips' Senate exposés "gave form to the popular protest which finally brought about passage of the Seventeenth Amendment to the Constitution providing for direct election of senators."⁷⁴ And Dillard said, "There can be no question that Phillips' persistent writing for a large popular audience on the subject of the political, economic and social mistreatment of women in the United States helped to bring about this major constitutional change,"⁷⁵ the Nineteenth Amendment.

Truth vs. Facts

Phillips belonged to the school of muckrakers for whom ends justified means. To him, the power of literature and rhetoric in giving audiences a true picture of life was a greater goal than the journalistic objectivity espoused by Tarbell. According to historian Robert Miraldi, Phillips “often blended facts and fiction, using composite characters, fictional dialogue and unidentified sources to make his points on social issues.”⁷⁶ Because of this, “The Treason of the Senate” prompted Roosevelt to coin the term muckraker to describe the genre.⁷⁷ Miraldi pointed out, however, that “unlike much of the muckraking efforts, which were well documented exposés, the ‘Treason’ articles left much to be desired as journalism, even though the essence of Phillips’ charges was probably accurate.”⁷⁸ Besides Roosevelt and members of the Senate,⁷⁹ Phillips’ work even drew criticism from other journalists.⁸⁰

“Preoccupation With the Prominent”

Phillips’ letters were destroyed by his first biographer⁸¹ and the lack of primary source material on Phillips’ thoughts and motivation as a muckraker makes direct assertion of his view of the ordinary citizen problematic. However, his several biographers have noted a considerable audience for his novels and for the magazines containing his muckraking articles. Filler mentioned “a half a million” *Cosmopolitan* readers⁸² of “The Treason of the Senate.”

According to Filler, Phillips’ circle of friends and colleagues was drawn from the elites of New York society.⁸³ Moreover, biographer Abe Ravitz said that in much of his writing, “Phillips showed his preoccupation with the prominent and fashionable ... his involvement with the materials of his fiction did not extend to a passionate concern for an individual.”⁸⁴ Thus, especially in the “Treason” series, Phillips’ targets and his target audiences appear to have been the upper strata of wealth and power. This may have skewed his conceptualization of the ordinary citizen. As Filler said: “Phillips idealized a middle class which earned its bread if not quite by the sweat of its face, in Lincoln’s phrase, at least by steady, productive labor. Phillips did not have to cope with the perplexities of mass production, the assembly line, ‘service’ industries which too often provided little service.”⁸⁵

PUBLIC JOURNALISM: THEORY INTO PRACTICE

Like muckraking, public journalism has proven to be an umbrella term for a wide range of journalistic activities and results. Public journalism has been used to describe or sanction journalistic behaviors ranging from simply seeking out readers to ask them their concerns,⁸⁶ to reorienting political coverage to focus on policy issues over candidate personalities and sound bite approaches,⁸⁷ to identifying and soliciting specific needs to help high-crime neighborhoods,⁸⁸ to redesigning layout and graphics to enhance their value to readers.⁸⁹ Public journalism also has led to coverage in which journalists adopt the role of expert in specifying solutions⁹⁰ and efforts to actively organize and lead community groups in the solution of problems placed on the agenda by press and citizens acting together.⁹¹ In several examples of public journalism, traditional inter-media competition has been eschewed for joint, coordinated activities involving one or more newspapers and one or more broadcast stations.⁹² Technology has even allowed citizens to understand legislative redistricting through interactive gaming,⁹³ help plan municipal projects⁹⁴ and determine how different local-policy options would affect their taxes.⁹⁵

Arguing that what is important in public journalism is its philosophy, not a definition, movement co-founder Davis “Buzz” Merritt initially warned against seeing public journalism merely as a set of behaviors. “The yearning for a facile definition ... invited journalists to regard it as a set of practices rather than as a philosophy. Public journalism became ‘focus groups’ and ‘polling’ and ‘holding forums’ and ‘setting agendas’ and ‘getting involved in the news’ and ‘asking readers’ ... The tools have become identified as the thing itself.”⁹⁶

If definition has been a dependent variable, some of public journalism’s primary attributes nevertheless have helped shape what it might mean to citizens and to journalists. After years of declining to define public journalism, Rosen more recently has said “it might go something like this: An approach to the daily business of the craft that calls on journalists to (1) address people as citizens, potential participants in public affairs, rather than victims or spectators; (2) help the political community act upon, rather than just learn about, its problems; (3) improve the climate of public discussion, rather than simply watch it deteriorate; and (4) help make public life go well, so that it earns its claim on our attention.”⁹⁷

Among hundreds of print, broadcast, joint media and multime-

dia public journalism projects,⁹⁸ two at Charlotte, North Carolina, illustrate key concepts of public journalism in newswork. As its first foray into public journalism, the *Charlotte Observer* in 1992 decided to forgo covering elections by the traditional, so-called “horse-race” approach that focuses on who is leading whom in the race. Instead, by first seeking ideas from the community, the newspaper created a citizen’s agenda of what issues were important that the staff used as the basis for questioning and evaluating candidates. “When candidates gave an important speech during the campaign, the contents were ‘mapped’ against the citizen’s agenda, so that it was easy to tell what was said about those concerns that ranked highest with citizens.”⁹⁹ The *Observer*’s 1992 coverage began with issues polling of citizens to determine what was important to them, followed by in-depth coverage “to help them understand these complex issues and the potential solutions.”¹⁰⁰ The next step was to involve citizens at every stage. According to *Observer* editor Rick Thames:

Our issues poll was the first step toward returning citizens to their proper place in our coverage of the political process. Now we worked to keep them there throughout the campaign. We peppered our issues stories and campaign trail reports with citizen perspectives. We collected readers’ questions in advance of candidates’ visits and asked those questions along with our own. When Pat Buchanan visited our newsroom, we put him before a group of voters instead of our editorial board. We sponsored a debate among candidates for governor and invited citizens to ask some of the questions. We regularly published readers’ telephoned comments about campaign developments.¹⁰¹

While candidates could talk about anything they wanted to bring up, *Observer* journalists insisted that they also speak to the issues on the citizens agenda. If a candidate refused, he or she might be identified as declining to answer the citizens’ questions, or by blank spaces in grids where others’ answers to the questions appeared.

According to Thames, the campaign could claim success by such measures as voter response to the newspaper’s appeals for dialogue, voter turnout, and voter calls to government officials for information. “Compared to readers of other area newspapers,” Thames says, Charlotte readers evinced “a disproportionate increase in interest in politics during the campaign, were more positive about the newspaper’s helpfulness in making them feel a part of the politi-

cal process,” and “felt more of a connection between coverage of the candidates and the issues affecting them personally.”¹⁰²

In a more ambitious, non-election project, the *Observer* in 1994 teamed with television and radio journalists in “Take Back Our Neighborhoods/Carolina Crime Solutions,” a project to reclaim crime-ridden, impoverished neighborhoods through citizen action.¹⁰³ Besides extensive use of traditional reporting methods, computer-assisted reporting and cross-media coverage, the project included conducting town meetings, bringing officials to listen to people of the neighborhoods, and sustained coverage – over several years – of the efforts. The newspaper also served as a clearing house for people with ideas, goods and muscle to contribute toward solving problems covered in news stories and even took the radical step of hiring, with Pew money, a community coordinator “who was instrumental in organizing town meetings and focus groups and coordinating reader response.”¹⁰⁴

ANALYSIS

Tarbell, Phillips, and Steffens represent three themes of the muckraking movement. Tarbell stood for the journalistic goals of objectivity, amassing copious facts and letting the facts tell the story. Phillips, on the other hand, believed that to tell the truth might require eschewing mere objective facts, a notion echoed by public journalism’s co-founder Jay Rosen in the early 1990s.¹⁰⁵ Steffens’ muckraking led him away from the battles of facts and objectivity, and from journalism itself, as he attempted to become an active partner in reform movements around the country.

This research suggests that the muckrakers, like the public journalists, sought to use the media to reconnect citizens with their government. However, they approached the task from different ends of the spectrum and with different conceptions of the terms of that reconnection.

Indeed, certain underlying assumptions and beliefs appear to link the two movements. Each is grounded in faith that an engaged and committed public can and does make good choices.¹⁰⁶ According to historian Patrick Palermo, “Steffens believed that man had a natural, emotional disposition to do good. When ‘intelligence’ swept away the ignorance of personal and social evil, this generous impulse then moved these leaders to embrace their fellow man and reform.”¹⁰⁷

The public journalists, too, rest their movement on an implicit belief that citizens, if brought into community discourse, will be enthusiastic for action. Merritt, for instance, said:

Americans' general disgust with and withdrawal from public life nevertheless includes some early signs of maturing into a determination to change the way things presently work. The emerging communitarian movement, changes in corporate processes to empower workers, experimentation in new ways to operate public schools, growing discussion of new ways of organizing living spaces and communities, increased pressure for community policing, and the founding of support groups are all signs of an awakening, although it seems ever so slight, of America's civic ethic.¹⁰⁸

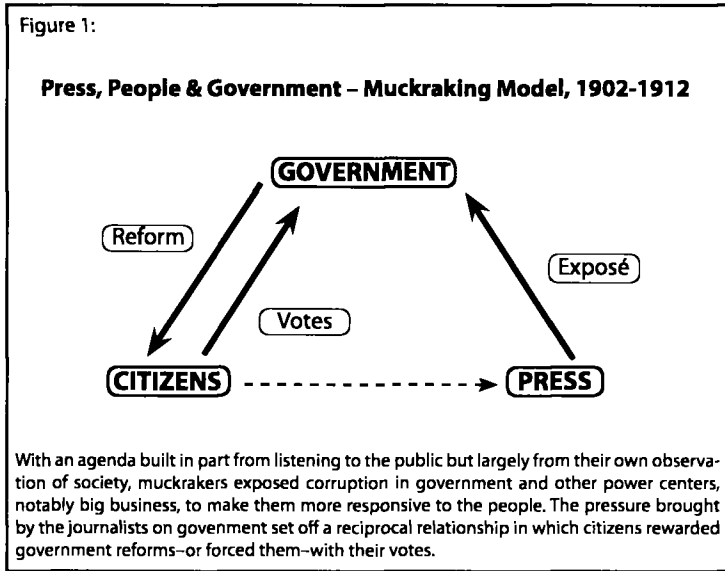
As Charity put it, "Public journalism doesn't only aim to treat readers as citizens, it assumes that readers want to *be* citizens."¹⁰⁹

It is at this point, however, that a natural delineation of the movements emerges. The muckrakers, as exemplified by Steffens, Tarbell, and Phillips but demonstrated as well in the work of Ray Stannard Baker, Upton Sinclair, and Charles Edward Russell, were the ones to select the problems of society on which they would write. The choices, however natural, were not hierarchically ordered from most severe to next severe, and as historian James W. Carey has pointed out, muckraking early on "directed its attack against the 'plutocracy' and the business class."¹¹⁰ The muckrakers alone put the ills they perceived in society on their media agenda. Theirs were dictated diagnoses and prescriptions, and while circulation explosions on the muckraking magazines attest to the accuracy of their judgment about what the public wanted, it is worth noting that the muckrakers' virtually universal theme of bringing power to heel may have blinded them to other societal problems. For instance, despite Tarbell's concerns for equal working rights for women and with Phillips a singular exception, scant attention was paid in the muckraking journals to the women's suffrage issue that was boiling toward culmination with the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920.

Public journalism's proponents, on the other hand, have argued that the appropriate agenda begins with citizens. According to Charity: "Citizens are frustrated by the slates of 'important issues' that editors and political leaders pass down to them by fiat; they're looking for an agenda that corresponds to the problems they themselves see. So while newspapers can go on trying to persuade people

that this or that unpopular issue warrants attention, they'll engage citizens more if they learn to respect the priorities those citizens set for themselves, and focus news coverage tightly around them."¹¹¹

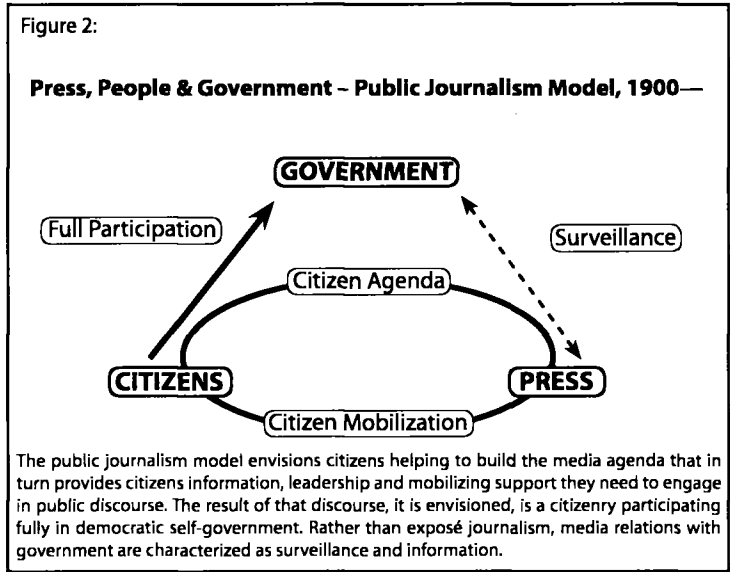
The research suggests the hypothesis that despite similarities in the motives and methods of the muckrakers and public journalists, the two perspectives differ in their fundamental conceptualization of the relationship of press, public and government.



Leader-Centered Muckrakers

To Tarbell, Phillips, and Steffens, the task was exposing corruption and malfeasance in public life, and the goal was enlisting able, uncorrupted individuals to be leaders of government. According to Kaplan, the muckrakers “recognized that democracy was slow to purge or reverse itself, and consequently they often looked with favor on strong men who set themselves above the law.”¹¹² These leaders’ tasks would be to offer programs and a vision responsive to the citizenry in a top-down communication flow. Sloan’s analysis is that the Progressive movement was brought on by fear of big business and its control of government and was “aimed primarily at attempting to take control from business and return it to the middle class.”¹¹³ For the public journalists, however, the goal is a bottom-up

reconnection in which the citizens are re-energized and re-engaged in government and civic life through journalists' guidance and empowerment.



Citizen-Based Public Journalism

Although at the outset the reform sought by the muckrakers is more easily recognized in the tradition of achieving honest, responsive government, the reform sought by the public journalism movement goes beyond that to one of better balance between citizens and the institutions of their political and civic life. Where the muckrakers envisioned real corruption and real enemies in public life, the public journalists seldom claim that the government leaders are corrupt or that their policies are repressive. Their claim, instead, is that the government is rendered unrepresentative and unresponsive when citizens lose faith in their institutions and withdraw from participation.¹¹⁴

Implicit in the literature of public journalism, too, has been that government cannot or will not address problems of citizen concern unless citizens are heard and are active in promoting solutions, and here lies another conceptual departure. The two movements' relation to citizens and government can be likened to a lever and ful-

crum. In the Progressive model, the voters were the fulcrum and the journalists were at the lever, while in the public journalism model journalists are the fulcrum and it is the citizens' hands on the lever. Both might move government to act, but the conceptual dynamics are very different, in part because of the differing status of the press at the beginning and end of the twentieth century.

The muckrakers worked from a powerful-media model. "The power of the press is greater than ever before," wrote Will Irwin in 1911 at the beginning of a *Colliers* series muckraking the American press.¹¹⁵ Publishing "the raw material for public opinion,"¹¹⁶ he declared, "the American press has more influence than it ever had in any other time, in any other country. No other extrajudicial force, except religion, is half so powerful."¹¹⁷ Fear of bad press and an aroused and informed citizenry was a powerful incentive for reform, and muckrakers achieved considerable success in improving society. Viewed in those terms, the muckrakers, whose "formula was simple: Diagnose, prescribe, then watch solutions unfold,"¹¹⁸ could rely on the literature of exposure to achieve their ends.¹¹⁹

At century's end, however, there was considerable doubt about the power of the press even to save itself amid critical losses in media credibility among readers,¹²⁰ declining circulation,¹²¹ and a continual reduction in the number of newspapers. Public journalism was born, Rosen says, "at a time of grave doubts about the future of the press."¹²² The power of the press, contested even in Irwin's day,¹²³ might be seen better in some effort to reconnect citizens, promote civic dialog, and facilitate citizen solutions to societal problems than in a Quixotic attempt to muckrake in the tradition of Steffens or Phillips.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The histories of the muckrakers and public journalists indeed support that public journalism is "reminiscent of progressive ideas about the need for change in an effort to improve the conditions for democracy."¹²⁴ Upon initial inspection, they seem similarly motivated and similarly situated as activist journalists seeking to reconnect citizens to their government for the betterment of democracy. Where differences seem to appear, such as in zeal for exposés and investigative journalism, it can even be argued that some of these are largely matters of degree.¹²⁵ However, the way each movement conceptualized the relationships among citizens, government, and the press reveals a significant, unappreciated difference between them.

Examining the personal statements of founders of muckraking and public journalism shows that the two movements differ philosophically in how they saw the role of the average citizen, indeed, how they saw the citizen. It is a fundamental and significant difference. Where each sought to mobilize large numbers of citizens to resolve public issues, the muckrakers, as evidenced by the leaders studied here, seem largely to have seen the public as critical mass by which to leverage elites into behaving in the public's best interests. The muckrakers' citizen, as they saw him, had to be informed by the press—told what needed doing, in other words—so that he could “vote the rascals out.” That having been done, the elites could take it from there and the citizen could go back to being an ordinary producer. The public agendas were not the public's, and there is little sense in their personal statements that the muckrakers saw citizens as contributing ideas or leadership in bringing about change in public affairs.

The public journalists, on the other hand, sought to mobilize citizens through information, guidance, encouragement, and, at times, logistical support. Journalism's role was to provide citizens the means to identify their own needs and solutions, and to use government as one of their problem-solving tools. In this vision, the citizen is much more thoroughly engaged in civic affairs. It is a more empathic and empowering vision than the muckraker's conception of “the people,” and represents a bottom-up model in contrast to the muckrakers' top-down model.

This research contributes to a better understanding of each of these movements that share one other feature: each lasted as a formal movement for ten to twelve years. As noted above, the muckraking period was generally seen as 1902 to 1912. Putting a precise timeline on the public journalism movement is problematic in that many journalists still practice it. However, the Pew Center for Civic Journalism, created in 1993 as an “incubator of civic journalism projects,” closed in 2002, and many of the movement's early figures have pursued other projects. In 2002, Rosen, while claiming success and denying that the movement was over, gave his idea of what scholars would see as the “history of public journalism.”¹²⁶

By examining the personal statements of founders of muckraking and public journalism, scholars also have a jumping off point for examining whether either departure from mainstream, traditional journalism, if freed of the economic realities that in both cases seemed to bring their runs to an end, could have fulfilled the ambitions of their principal sponsors.

Endnotes

¹ See, for instance, Arthur Charity, *Doing Public Journalism* (New York: Guilford Press, 1995), 1; Davis Merritt, *Public Journalism and Public Life: Why Telling the News Is Not Enough* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1995), 6; Jay Rosen, *Getting the Connections Right: Public Journalism and the Troubles in the Press* (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1996), 1; Jay Rosen and Paul Taylor, *The New News v. The Old News* (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1992).

² Davis Merritt describes some of the history of his movement in *Public Journalism and Public Life: Why Telling the News Is Not Enough* 2nd ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1998). For a contemporaneous history of public journalism, see Carol Reese Dykers, "Assessing Davis Merritt's 'Public Journalism' Through His Language," in ed. Edmund Lambeth, Philip Meyer, and Esther Thorson, *Assessing Public Journalism* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998), 57-82. Also, Dykers, *Making Journalism Public: A Case Study of Change at the Wichita Eagle*, (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1995).

³ Michael Schudson, "What Public Journalism Knows about Journalism but Doesn't Know about 'Public,'" in ed. Theodore L. Glasser, *The Idea of Public Journalism* (New York: Guilford Press, 1999), 118-133. See also, Anthony J. Eksterowicz, "The History and Development of Public Journalism" in ed. and Robert N. Roberts, *Public Journalism and Political Knowledge* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 3-20; Robert Miraldi, *The Muckrakers: Evangelical Crusaders* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), xvi-xvii; Barbie Zelizer, "Making the Neighborhood Work: The Improbabilities of Public Journalism," in Glasser, 152-172.

⁴ See, for instance, Robert C. Kochersberger, Jr., ed., *More Than a Muckraker: Ida Tarbell's Lifetime in Journalism* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994); Robert Miraldi, "The Journalism of David Graham Phillips," *Journalism Quarterly* 63 (Spring 1986): 83. However, some others find muckraking going on at least a decade earlier. John M. Harrison and Harry H. Stein, ed. *Muckraking: Past, Present and Future* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1970), 2. Lincoln Steffens, *The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1931), 357.

⁵ William David Sloan, *Perspectives on Mass Communication History* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1991), 272.

⁶ George E. Mowry and Judson A. Grenier in David Graham Phillips, *The Treason of the Senate*, George E. Mowry and Judson A. Grenier, ed. (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1964), 9.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 10. For a discussion of the muckraking journalists preference for magazines over newspapers for their work, and why they believed magazines sustained the movement where newspapers could not, see Cecelia Tichi, *Exposés and Excess: Muckraking in America, 1900-2000* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). While it has been argued that newspapers, too, engaged in muckraking – under the name of

investigative reporting or New Journalism (circa 1880) – the fact remains that the term “muckraking” is associated almost exclusively with magazine journalism in the literature.

⁸ See, for instance, Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), 188; Miraldi, *Muckrakers*, xii; Maria B. Marron, “The Founding of Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc. and the Arizona Project: The Most Significant Post-Watergate Development in U.S. Investigative Journalism,” *American Journalism* 14, Winter 1997, 56-57. For a discussion of investigative reporting as a significant change in twentieth-century journalism, see Bill Kovach and Tom Rosensteel, *The Elements of Journalism* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2001), 112-114. See also, Lee Sigelman, “There You Go Again: The Media and the Development of American Politics,” *Communication Monographs* 50, December 1992, 407-410; Barbie Zelizer, “Journalists as Interpretive Communities,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 10, September 1993, 219-237; David Weaver and LeAnne Daniels, “Public Opinion on Investigative Reporting in the 1980s,” *Journalism Quarterly* 69, Spring 1992, 146-155.

⁹ Merritt and Rosen are considered the founders of the public journalism movement. Davis Merritt and Jay Rosen, *Imagining Public Journalism: An Editor and Scholar Reflect on the Birth of an Idea*. Roy Howard Clark Public Lecture in Journalism and Mass Communication Research (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University School of Journalism, 1995), 21.

¹⁰ Jay Rosen, *Community Connectedness: Passwords for Public Journalism* (St. Petersburg, FL: The Poynter Institute, 1993), 9.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹² Davis Merritt, “Missing the Point,” *American Journalism Review* (July/August 1996), 30.

¹³ See, for instance, Rosen, *Connections*.

¹⁴ See, for instance, Sloan, 272.

¹⁵ The economic plight of the modern press is well-documented. See, for instance, Rosen, *Connections*, 19.

¹⁶ When the giant Gannett Co. Inc. claimed to be practicing public journalism at its more than 90 daily newspapers, some journalists and academicians rejected the idea, seeing corporate self-interest as polluting public journalism’s higher aims.

¹⁷ Mowry and Grenier, 9.

¹⁸ Steffens, *Autobiography*, 357.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 357.

²⁰ Ida M. Tarbell, *All in the Day’s Work: An Autobiography* (New York: Macmillan, 1939), 297.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 297-98.

²² Lincoln Steffens, *The Letters of Lincoln Steffens*, Vol. 1, ed. Ella Winter and Granville Hicks (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1938), 162.

²³ *Ibid.*, 165.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 170.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 171.

- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 223.
- ²⁷ Steffens, *Autobiography*, 385.
- ²⁸ Steffens, *Letters*, 171.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 180.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 182-83.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 183.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 209.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 241.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 222.
- ³⁵ A major focus for Steffens was Boston, where he spent a year trying to accomplish reform. *Autobiography*, 612.
- ³⁶ Louis Filler, *The Muckrakers* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 105.
- ³⁷ Tarbell, 239.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 141.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 256-259.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 206.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 281.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 260.
- ⁴³ Filler, *Muckrakers*, 102.
- ⁴⁴ Kochersberger, 65.
- ⁴⁵ Tarbell, 240.
- ⁴⁶ Justin Kaplan, *Lincoln Steffens: A Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 60, 148-53; Tarbell, 241-42.
- ⁴⁷ Tarbell, 242.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 239.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 241.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 280.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 242.
- ⁵² See, for instance, Tarbell, 307.
- ⁵³ See, for instance, Tarbell, 278.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 35, 279.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 273; 280.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 242. Emphasis added.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 278.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 282.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 250.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 269.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 250. Tarbell sounds almost naïve in accepting these reassurances. One might wonder at the true “independence” of these counselors and the likelihood of businessmen and legislators suggesting anything else when it came to affirming the prerogatives of big business.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, 296.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, 292.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 294.
- ⁶⁵ Eric M. Eisenberg and H.L. Goodall, Jr. *Organizational Communication: Balancing Creativity and Constraint*

⁶⁵ Eisenberg and Goodall claim that Taylor's scientific principles rested on the assumption of "a fundamental distinction between managers and employees: managers think, workers work."

⁶⁶ Tichi, 69.

⁶⁷ Mowry and Grenier, 9.

⁶⁸ Filler, 248.

⁶⁹ Miraldi, "Phillips," 83.

⁷⁰ Harrison and Stein, 9.

⁷¹ Mowry and Grenier (45) identify the gunman as "a member of an old Washington family, Fitzhugh C. Goldsborough, who mistakenly believed that Phillips had been persecuting Goldsborough's sister in his novels."

⁷² In Harrison and Stein, 8.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Louis Filler, *Voice of the Democracy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978), 6.

⁷⁵ Harrison and Stein, 8.

⁷⁶ Miraldi, "Phillips," 87.

⁷⁷ Filler, *The Muckrakers*, 253; Kaplan, 60, 148-153; Mowry and Grenier, 216-225.

⁷⁸ Kaplan, 88.

⁷⁹ See, for instance, Mowry and Grenier, 36.

⁸⁰ Filler, *Muckrakers*, 253; Mowry and Grenier, 38. Sloan (272) claims that muckrakers brought their own downfall because "many poorly researched articles had made readers question the credibility of the muckrakers." Thornton also finds evidence of "an intensification of the differences in journalistic standards between journalists and non-journalists" in the muckraking decade. Brian Thornton, "Muckraking Journalists and Their Readers: Perceptions of Professionalism," *Journalism History* 21 (Spring 1995): 38.

⁸¹ Miraldi, "Phillips," 84.

⁸² Filler, *Voice*, 6.

⁸³ Ibid., 127.

⁸⁴ Abe C. Ravitz, *David Graham Phillips* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1966), 53.

⁸⁵ Filler, *Voice*, 186.

⁸⁶ Tom Field, "In Praise of Public Journalism," *Editor & Publisher*, 18 March 1995, 56.

⁸⁷ Neil Peirce, "Civic Journalism: A New Genre," *National Journal*, 2 July 1994, 1585.

⁸⁸ Ed Fouhy and Jan Schaffer, "Civic Journalism — Growing and Evolving," *Nieman Reports* 49 (Spring 1995): 16-18.

⁸⁹ Philip E. Meyer, "The Media Reformation: Giving the Agenda Back to the People." *The Elections of 1992*, ed. M. Nelson (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1993): 106-108, 96.

⁹⁰ Lou Ureneck, "Expert Journalism. Portland, Maine, Newspaper Reframes the Idea of Objectivity to Bring Readers More Forceful Interpretive Reporting," *Nieman Reports* 49 (Spring 1995): 6-11.

⁹¹ See, for instance, Edward D. Miller, *The Charlotte Project: Helping Citizens Take Back Democracy* (St. Petersburg, FL: The Poynter Institute, 1994). In North Carolina in 1996, a consortium of newspapers and broadcast stations was formed under Poynter Institute guidance to elicit citizens' concerns and give them primacy in campaign coverage. Steve Riley, "Political Coverage to Focus on Voters. N&O Joins Team Effort for '96 Races," *News & Observer*, Raleigh, NC, 27 December 1995, p. 1(A); James Bennett, "North Carolina Media Try to Lead Politics to Issues," *New York Times*, 24 September 1996, p. 1(A).

⁹² See, for instance, Frank Denton and Esther Thorson, *Civic Journalism: Does It Work?* (Washington, DC: Pew Center for Civic Journalism, 1995); Miller, *Charlotte Project*.

⁹³ Pew Projects, "Redistricting Game, Rochester, NY 2001," <http://www.pewcenter.org/project/getProject.php?year=2002>. Accessed on 14 July 2004.

⁹⁴ Glenn Thomas, "What Can Computer Games Teach Journalists?" (Lecture, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication annual convention, Miami, FL, August 8, 2002), http://www.pewcenter.org/doingcj/speeches/s_aejmglennthomas.html. Accessed on 14 July 2004.

⁹⁵ James K. Batten Awards, "New Hampshire Public Radio 'Tax Challenge,'" <http://www.pewcenter.org/batten/NHPR.html>. Accessed on 14 July 2004.

⁹⁶ Davis Merritt, "Missing the Point," *American Journalism Review*, July-August 1996, 30.

⁹⁷ Jay Rosen, "The Action of the Idea: Public Journalism In Built Form," in Glasser, 21-48, 21.

⁹⁸ Jan Schaffer, "Civic Journalism: A Decade of Civic Journalism," (Lecture, Society of Professional Journalists National Convention, Forth Worth, TX, September 13, 2002), http://www.pewcenter.org/doingcj/speeches/s_spjheadline.html. Accessed 14 July 2004.

⁹⁹ Jay Rosen, in Davis Merritt and Jay Rosen, "Imagining Public Journalism," in Lambeth, Meyer, and Thorson, 36-56, 46.

¹⁰⁰ Rick Thames, "Public Journalism and the 1992 Elections," in Lambeth, Meyer, and Thorson, 111-22

¹⁰¹ Thames, 116.

¹⁰² Thames, 121.

¹⁰³ Pew Projects, "Take Back Our Neighborhoods/Carolina Crime Solutions," Pew Center for Civic Journalism, <http://www.pewcenter.org/project/getProject.php?state=NC> Accessed on 13 July 13, 2004.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Jay Rosen, "Beyond Objectivity," *Nieman Reports*, 47, Winter 1993, 48-53.

¹⁰⁶ James W. Carey, "In Defense of Public Journalism," in Glasser, 55.

¹⁰⁷ Patrick F. Palermo, *Lincoln Steffens* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978), 74.

¹⁰⁸ Merritt, *Public Journalism*, 6.

¹⁰⁹ Charity, 19. Emphasis in original.

¹¹⁰ Carey, 55.

¹¹¹ Charity, 5.

¹¹² Kaplan, 119.

¹¹³ Sloan, 271.

¹¹⁴ Ironically, it has been suggested that the muckrakers' hard-hitting exposure of societal ills promoted citizen disillusion and disengagement from the political process. See Thomas Leonard, "Did the Muckrakers Muck Up Progress?," in Miraldi, *Muckrakers*, 131-55. Public journalists have leveled a similar charge at traditional journalists of the twentieth century.

¹¹⁵ Will Irwin, "The American Newspaper," reprinted in *The American Newspaper* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1969), 7.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Miraldi, *Muckrakers*, xiii.

¹¹⁹ For an opposing view, see Robert W. McChesney and Ben Scott, introduction to *The Brass Check: A Study of American Journalism*, by Upton Sinclair (Long Beach, CA: Sinclair, 1927, 9th ed.; Urbana: University of Illinois Press). Calling the turn-of-the-century period "the Golden Age of press criticism," they argue that "never before and never since has press criticism been such a significant plank in the platform of the entire left wing of the political spectrum. ... Between 1900 and 1920, hundreds upon hundreds of critical articles were printed in the popular press, from socialist newspapers to mass circulation magazines," xx.

¹²⁰ In 1997, the American Society of Newspaper Editors began a continuing examination of the low state of newspaper credibility and how newspapers could increase their standing among readers. See Christine Durban, *Examining Our Credibility: Perspectives of the Public and the Press* (Reston, VA: American Society of Newspaper Editors, 1999). Despite much effort since 1997, newspaper credibility remains decidedly low. See Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, "News Media's Improved Image Proves Short-Lived," <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=159> Accessed on 12 July 2004.

¹²¹ National data show the average weekday readership of daily newspapers declined from 58.6 percent of the United States population in 1998 to 55.4 percent in 2002. National Newspaper Association "Daily Newspaper Readership Trends," <http://www.naa.org/artpage.cfm?AID=1614&SID=75> accessed on 12 July 2004. This decline continues a trend that has existed "for at least two generations." Project for Excellence in Journalism, "The State of the News Media 2004," http://www.stateofthemedialia.org/narrative_newspapers_intro.asp?media=2 accessed on 12 July 2004.

¹²² Rosen, *Connections*, 1.

¹²³ Even as circulation seemed to be booming but an exuberant era of corporate growth, there was growing pressure on small, community papers, and journalists' memoirs of the day sometimes mentioned this and the decline in the total number of newspapers. Several articles in the *Atlantic Monthly* in the first two decades of the twentieth century pointed to concerns of declining press influence. Francis E. Leupp, "The Waning Power of the

Press,” in Willard Grosvenor Bleyer, ed., *The Profession of Journalism* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1918), 30-51. In his article, published in the magazine in February 1910, Leupp noted a loss of press influence because of the impersonal nature of newspapers that sought large audiences in large markets and journalism that sacrificed local detail for coverage of so-called larger, general issues. In another *Atlantic* article, Oswald Garrison Villard noted in January 1918 a decline in the number of newspapers because of the economics of publishing or starting one, particularly in urban areas, and because of the beginning of press consolidation under large newspaper corporations. Villard, “Press Tendencies and Dangers,” (ibid., 20-29). The American Newspaper Publishers Association, formed in 1887, found its members under pressure from more-powerful government under the administrations of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson “and needed a voice which could speak in competition with other voices in political and economic contests.” Edwin Emery, *History of the American Newspaper Publishers Association* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1950; Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1970), 54. Citation is to the Greenwood edition. Historian Douglas Birkhead notes that “the press entered the twentieth century on the verge of corporate oligopoly, maligned as much as any other industry in the country. Competition for newspaper circulation spawned the sensationalistic ‘yellow journalism’ of the 1890s, evoking virulent public criticism. ... Progressive legislation regulating business practices was directed at the press itself in 1912, prohibiting hidden ownership, disguised advertising, and falsified circulation claims.” Birkhead “The Progressive Reform of Journalism: The Rise of Professionalism in the Press,” in ed. J. Michael Hogan, *Rhetoric and Reform in the Progressive Era*, vol. 6 of *A Rhetorical History of the United States: Significant Moments in American Public Discourse* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2003), 113. Bleyer also points to “a great increase” in content that was “publicity and propaganda in the guise of news” supplied by the embryonic public relations industry and the dilution of a neutral editorial voice. Bleyer, *Main Currents in the History of American Journalism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1927), 420, 421.

¹²⁴ Hanno Hardt, “Reinventing the Press for the Age of Commercial Appeals: Writings on and about Public Journalism,” in Glasser, 202.

¹²⁵ When asked, Merritt and Rosen have insisted that public journalism is not an alternative to investigative journalism and that both forms of coverage can be undertaken at the same newspaper. Public journalism’s focus, however, to bring people together in rational discourse to exchange ideas and reach informed decisions and work together on civic issues.

¹²⁶ Rosen spoke at the Pew Center’s James K. Batten Awards and Symposium for Excellence in Civic Journalism at the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 22 April 2002.