

PRESSthink

GHOST OF DEMOCRACY IN THE MEDIA MACHINE

BY JAY ROSEN

ABOUT

Jay Rosen's Bio
Introduction to this weblog
E-mail PressThink
Q & A about PressThink

RECENT ENTRIES

From Meet the Press to *Be the Press*

A Western Civ Course in What's Gone Wrong With the Press

To Liberate From the White House the White House Press

"Digby, if You're Reading This, Send Me an E-mail." A Book Editor On Why He Loves Weblogs

Instead of the White House Press, You Envision What?

De-Certifying the Press, Continued

The Abyss of Observation Alone

In the Press Room of the White House that is Post Press

Two Letters in Reply to "A Little Detail in the Sale of About.com"

A Little Detail in the Sale of About.com to the New York Times

The Local, the Global, and the Journalist In Between: Doug McGill's Local Man Debuts

Closing Thoughts on the Resignation of Eason Jordan

Will Collier E-Mails With a Question

Eason Jordan Resigns

Blog Storm Troopers or Pack Journalism at its Best?

ARCHIVE / SEARCH

March 2005
February 2005
January 2005
December 2004
November 2004
October 2004
September 2004

MARCH 21, 2005

From Meet the Press to *Be the Press*

The Economist just said it: the "the traditional notion that the media play a special role in informing people is breaking down." Rising up: government as a "purely neutral" news provider, credible where a sinking press corps is not.

I see (via samizdata.net) that The Economist is now on the case I have been calling **de-certification** of the press. This, I think, is a significant development.

Video news releases are more of an **issue** today because government-provided news is more of a reality, the article says. (It's subscribers only.) The Economist agrees, and so do I, that TV news directors are the ones primarily responsible if government-issue "news" gets through the filter and on the air. But it then goes on to describe what is happening to the press under Bush, and the new attitude the President has wrought:

So is the Bush administration in the clear? Not really. It is on record as saying that there is nothing special about the press: it is just another interest group. As Andy Card, the White House chief of staff, has put it, the administration does not think that the press has "a check-and-balance function". This is a fundamental change of attitude compared with previous administrations and makes this one's use of fake news different.

I agree: a fundamental change is afoot, and we have to try to understand it. The Economist zeroes in on why the "special interest" charge matters. Listen carefully-- they're catching on:

If there is nothing special about the press, then there is nothing special about what it does. News can be anything--including dressed-up government video footage. And anyone can provide it, including the White House, which, through local networks, can become a news distributor in its own right. Given the proliferation of media outlets and the eroding of boundaries between news, comment and punditry, someone will use government-provided information as news.

"In short," says the magazine, "the traditional notion that the media play a special role in informing people is breaking down." It's true. And that is the development I am calling de-certification, because

FROM THE INTRO

PRESSTHINK: AN INTRODUCTION

We need to keep the press from being absorbed into The Media. This means keeping the word press, which is antiquated. But included under its modern umbrella should be all who do the serious work in journalism, regardless of the technology used. The people who will invent the next press in America--and who are doing it now online--continue an experiment at least 250 years old. It has a powerful social history and political legend attached...

[Continue reading...](#)

HIGHLIGHTS

Journalism Is Itself a Religion:

"We're headed, I think, for schism, tumult and divide as the religion of the American press meets the upheavals in global politics and public media that are well underway. Changing around us are the terms on which authority can be established by journalists. The Net is opening things up, shifting the power to publish around. Consumers are becoming producers, readers can be writers..." [More...](#)

Bush to Press: "You're Assuming That You Represent the Public. I Don't Accept That."

"Bush and his advisors have their own press think, which they are trying out as policy. Reporters do not represent the interests of a broader public. They aren't a pipeline to the people, because people see through the game of Gotcha. The press has forfeited, if it ever had, its quasi-official role in the checks and balances of government." [PressThink's most well-read post so far. More...](#)

What Time is it in Political Journalism?

"The press is still officially attached to, 'We're professionals who have no partisan role-- end of story.' But the costs of denial and of reasoning in a vacuum have built up over the years. There are stresses and fractures that can no longer be

August 2004
 July 2004
 June 2004
 May 2004
 April 2004
 March 2004
 February 2004
 January 2004
 December 2003
 November 2003
 October 2003
 September 2003
 August 2003

Search this site:

LINKS

Like PressThink? More from the same pen:

Read about Jay Rosen's book, *What Are Journalists For?*

Excerpt from Chapter One of *What Are Journalists For?*, "As Democracy Goes, So Goes the Press."

Essay from *Tikkun* magazine, 1999. It describes the public journalism movement as a "breakaway church" within the profession.

Essay in *Columbia Journalism Review* on the changing terms of authority in the press, brought on in part by the weblog's individual--and interactive--style of journalism. It argues that, after Jayson Blair, authority is not the same at the *New York Times*, either.

Audio: Have a Listen

Listen to an audio interview with Jay Rosen conducted by journalist Christopher Lydon, October 2003.

Interview with host Brooke Gladstone on NPR's "On the Media." (Dec. 2003) Listen here.

One hour radio program about objectivity in journalism, its history, nature and consequences, from WBEZ, Chicago Public Radio. Host: Gretchen Helfrich. Guests: Jay Rosen and sociologist Michael Schudson.

Here's a radio segment about blogging on Australia's Radio National with author Rebecca Blood, Jay Rosen and Lee Rainie, of Pew's project on Internet and American Life. (April 15, 2004; requires Real Player.)

One hour Minnesota Public Radio call-in program about the

the traditional idea is not breaking down by itself. It has assistance and intervention from above. The Economist brings it home:

Behind all this lies a shift in the balance of power in the news business. Power is moving away from old-fashioned networks and newspapers; it is swinging towards, on the one hand, smaller news providers (in the case of blogs, towards individuals) and, on the other, to the institutions of government, which have got into the business of providing news more or less directly. Eventually, perhaps, the new world of blogs will provide as much public scrutiny as newspapers and broadcasters once did. But for the moment the shifting balance of power is helping the government behemoth.

And for the moment the government behemoth is helping itself to a status that is increasingly being denied to the press: that of a neutral, disinterested, just-the-facts style information provider. It is quite a switch.

De-certification, as I have called it, has these two faces. One is about putting journalists in a diminished place, as in: Don't answer their questions, it only encourages the askers to think they're legitimate interlocutors, proxies for the public. And they're not, in the White House view. (That's what the briefing room **struggle** is all about. Getting that "not" across.)

But there's the other side of it: what the Bush Administration does to "inform the public" is described as purely factual, a noble service, while the traditional press is dismissed as inherently biased, unrepresentative, unable to serve the general interest Americans have in informing themselves. These rising and falling motions are deeply connected. Discrediting traditional journalism helps in accrediting government as a more reliable news provider.

Dana Milbank of the *Washington Post* explained part of it in a Sunday **column** (March 20). "In the past," he wrote, "the key to winning in politics was to control the information. Now, when information has no controls, the key is making your information credible and casting doubt on other information -- such as that found in the mainstream press."

We can observe this happening in the recent action around video news releases. (For background and key documents see **Media Citizen**. Also see Salon's **Eric Boehlert**.) In January, the Government Accounting Office (GAO), the accountability arm of Congress, issued another **opinion** declaring illegal the Administration's use of video news releases "that failed to disclose to the viewing audience that they had been produced and distributed by a government agency." It had been requested by Democrats in the House.

The GAO opinion grew out of the **Karen Ryan** case, in which a fake reporter, hired by the government, read from a script that made it seem like she was engaged in real news-gathering.

ignored. Default reasoning in journalism seems more and more unreasoning about what's going on out there." **More...**

Maybe Media Bias Has Become a Dumb Debate: "This here is a post for practically everyone in the game of seizing on media bias and denouncing it, which is part of our popular culture, and of course a loud part of our politics. And this is especially for the 'we're fair and balanced, you're not' crowd, wherever I may have located you." **More...**

Of Course Ted Koppel Was Making a Political Statement. So What? "Koppel and his producers took a kind of political action Friday night. But the language they have for explaining that action does a pitiful job. And so they are attacked for 'being political,' and hypocritical-- and their replies to the charge only compound the original error. The press in general, and Koppel in a painfully real way this week, have over the years learned to describe themselves as political innocents." **More...**

The Siegal Report: A Triumph of Self Reflection at the New York Times: "The various teams looking at pieces of the puzzle did not back down. They said it several times: today we need different values than the ones that prevailed when Jayson Blair got his chance to ruin us. We need a different culture of control. And in particular, there are calls for truth, justice and democracy in the document." **More...**

Bill O'Reilly and the Paranoid Style in News: "O'Reilly feeds off his own resentments--the establishment sneering at *Inside Edition*--and like Howard Beale, the 'mad prophet of the airwaves,' his resentments are enlarged by the medium into public grievances among a mass of Americans unfairly denied voice." **More...**

Notes on the Creature Called Fox: "As a political consultant Ailes had worked for Nixon, Reagan and the elder Bush. He thought there was a winnable audience there for news in a different political key. And he put his sense of the under-served market together with his knowledge of how winning coalitions are made, plus his familiarity with the mind of mainstream journalism (from having to maneuver around the political press on behalf of his clients) to give birth to the Fox way." **More...**

The Other Bias at Fox News: Volume: "Almost all Murdoch properties identify themselves to

increasing legitimacy of webloggers, as the Democratic Party invites bloggers to cover the July convention. Guest Jay Rosen, host Marianne Combs (scroll down to May 12, 2004; requires Real Player.)

Jay Rosen's Other Weblogs:

Please visit The Revealer: a Daily Review of Religion and the Press. I am the publisher, Jeff Sharlet is the editor, design is by William Drenttel. It's a professional journal, combination weblog and magazine, and we're proud of it. Funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts.

The Blogging of the President, 2004 is subtitled, "Notes on the Transformation." I am a co-editor of this campaign site with Christopher Lydon, Matt Stoller and others. It follows developments in the the new "open style" of presidential politics, happening now because of the Internet.

Recommended by PressThink:

Town square for press critics, industry observers, and participants in the news machine: Romnesko, published by the Poynter Institute.

Town square for weblogs: InstaPundit from Glenn Reynolds, who is an original. Very busy. Very good. To the Right, but not in all things. A good place to find voices in dialogue with each other and the news.

Town square for the online Left. The Daily Kos. Huge traffic. The comments section can be highly informative. Especially useful site during campaign season.

Rants, links, blog news, and crusades from Jeff Jarvis, former editor, magazine launcher, TV critic, now president of Advance.net. Always on top of new media things. Prolific, fast, and frequently dead on. A must.

Eschaton by Atrios (pen name of Duncan B;ack) is one of the most well established political weblogs, with big traffic and very active comment threads. Left-liberal.

Halley's Comment, written by Halley Suitt. Week to week, among the the most original weblogs out there.

Terry Teachout is a cultural critic coming from the Right at his weblog, About Last Night. Elegantly written and designed. Plus he has lots to say about art and culture today. He also features a regular guest commentator, Our Girl in Chicago,

On March 11, the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel issued a counter-memo advising government agencies to ignore the GAO opinion. Justice said the Comptroller General of the U.S. is wrong, and common sense is wrong too, for in fact "it is legal for federal agencies to feed TV stations prepackaged news stories that do not disclose the government's role in producing them," as the Washington Post [story](#) put it.

When I examined the Administration's [counter-memo](#) explaining why it's okay to distribute deliberately deceptive material, purporting to be the results of an independent inquiry by professional journalists, one thing jumped out at me: The memo is at its most aggressive when it refers to "purely informational VNRs."

That phrase, "purely informational," is used to describe the kind of video news releases the Bush Administration makes. These aren't the selective highlighting of facts the client wants to play up (so the client pays up) which is what VNR's are universally understood to be in the industry that makes them. Legitimate advocacy providing legitimate news.

No, a Federal VNR, though produced by the same pros who work in the industry, is a "purer" product, a lot more like what we once thought was straight news. The Office of Legal Counsel boasts of the "purely informational nature" of the government's PR message, different from "undisclosed advocacy," even though the undisclosed part may be true. It includes this remarkable passage:

OLC does not agree with GAO that the "covert propaganda" prohibition applies simply because an agency's role in producing and disseminating information is undisclosed or "covert," regardless of whether the content of the message is "propaganda." Our view is that the prohibition does not apply where there is no advocacy of a particular viewpoint, and therefore it does not apply to the legitimate provision of information concerning the programs administered by an agency.

Read carefully, that says it's okay for the government's hidden hand to operate in the television news Americans see because the Bush Administration, through its Office of Legal Counsel, has determined that the Bush Administration, when it undertakes to provide the public with news, has motives and methods that do not, in any way, include advocacy. There is no "particular viewpoint" in the fake news spots, no message like: Bush Administration on the case.

According to the government, the government's aims are purely informational-- like the reporting in mainstream journalism was ideally supposed to be, back when it was supposed to inform the public, and offer an independent check on government's tendency to tell tales. Back when "meet the press" was part of governing the country. Before "be the press" occurred to anyone in the Executive Branch.

us by means of the oldest marketing strategy there is: shock and awe, hype and miracle, outrage and scam, the language of screaming headlines. It's not just information with more excitement pumped into it (although that is true too) but also excitement as information." [More...](#)

Opinion Bad, Reporting Good and Nothing Else Do You Need to Know: "Dvorkin writes as if fact-based reporting and 'opinion and commentary' are natural opposites. Common sense says no. Can there be fact-based commentary, Mister Ombudsman? Sure, and it's the only kind that's worth having because it comes from people who know what they are talking about. If reporting and opinion were mutually hostile or logically opposite, European journalism would not exist, but of course it does exist." [More...](#)

We Just Don't Think About It: The Strange Press Mind of Leonard Downie: "Back of all the Downie doubletalk about 'information agendas' and 'organic' news decisions is a matter more serious: Leonard Downie's quest for absolute innocence when it comes to having a political thought or two about journalism. He achieves this innocence by receiving all questions about the inherently political nature of the press as crude demands to politicize the press." [More...](#)

Exit, Voice and Loyalty at the Los Angeles Times: "Newspapers need the loyalty of readers, precisely because there are bound to be stresses and strains in the relationship. This is a truism. But how good are newspapers on voice? And when 10,000 people choose exit over a single incident, it may be time to question the reasoning that explains this mass flight as an inevitable consequence of doing a good job, a price the tough and determined must pay and accept." [More...](#)

The View From Nowhere: "Occupy the reasonable middle between two markers for 'vocal critic,' and critics look ridiculous charging you with bias. Their symmetrical existence feels like proof of an underlying hysteria. Their mutually incompatible charges seem to cancel each other out. The minute evidence they marshal even shows a touch of fanaticism." [More...](#)

The President's Secret Flight to Baghdad: "Ask any of the reporters who accompanied Bush to Baghdad what they were doing there and, after allowing for the unusual circumstances (extreme secrecy) they would say they were there to 'cover the president's

which is a nifty thing to do. Girl writes well.

Someone said Eric Alterman of the Nation was "born to blog." This may be true. Very popular weblog at MSNBC and for good reason.

Dave Winer is the software wiz who wrote the program that created the modern weblog. He's also one of the best practitioners of the form. Scripting News is said to be the oldest living weblog. Read it over time and find out why it's one of the best.

If someone were to ask me, "what's the right way to do a weblog?" I would point them to Doc Searls, a tech writer and sage who has been doing it right for a long time.

Ed Cone writes one of the most useful weblogs by a journalist. He keeps track of the Internet's influence on politics, as well developments in his native North Carolina. Always on top of things.

CJR Daily is Columbia Journalism Review's weblog about the press and its problems, edited by Steve Lovelady, formerly of the Philadelphia Inquirer.

Rebecca's Pocket by Rebecca Blood is a weblog by an exemplary practitioner of the form, who has also written some critically important essays on its history and development, and a handbook on how to blog.

Of the many weblogs that comment on the state of journalism today, Tim Porter's First Draft is one of the most thoughtful.

Dan Gillmor used to be the tech columnist and blogger for the San Jose Mercury News. But he quit to start his own citizen-journalism company. This is his blog about it.

A former senior editor at Pantheon, Tom Englehardt solicits and edits commentary pieces that he publishes in blog form at TomDispatches. High-quality political writing and cultural analysis.

Chris Nolan's Politics from Left to Right finds a political writer blogging at a high level. Her notion of blogger as a "stand alone journalist" is a key concept; and Nolan is an exemplar of it. California focus but not exclusively.

The National Debate, written by Robert Cox, once took on the New York Times... and won. Its "where politics, policy and the media meet," he says. Cox breaks stories, and fills his blog with

The Administration says that it is *easily capable* of the kind of strict separation of advocacy and information that the press, renamed the Liberal Media, is mostly incapable of today, according to some in the Administration, according to many who are allies, according to all who are involved on that front in the Culture War where the "MSM" is seen as a discredited force (yet still in need of toppling.)

Journalists have an agenda. Government information officers just deal in facts. The same argument was heard during Attorney General John Ashcroft's early bird de-certification **special** in 2003. Ashcroft, as you'll recall, banned print reporters from questioning him during his speaking tour on behalf of the Patriot Act. (Todd Gitlin and I **wrote** about it.)

Justice Department spokeswoman Barbara Comstock says her boss, with few exceptions, is only granting short interviews to local TV stations as a way of "explaining key facts directly to the American people and not having as much of a filter from people who are already invested in having a different view of it."

The journalists have a slanted view of it. The Attorney General is just trying to explain key facts. His purposes are informational. Who's the better journalist, Ashcroft or the press?

While today ninety-nine percent of the clients who pay for the production of a video news release about their work want it to highlight the great work being done, in Bushland there is, we're told, none of that stuff. No spin allowed, guys and gals. Just the facts, Uncle Sam.

Now according to the Public Relations Society of America, voice of the industry that makes VNR's (and that created the need for Karen Ryan) members **should not** impersonate journalists. "PRSA recommends that organizations that prepare VNRs should not use the word 'reporting' if the narrator is not a reporter."

Thus the Justice Department recommends a *lower* standard of transparency for the government than the PR industry recommends for itself. The message to government departments is "keep impersonating the press on camera, it's legal and it's fine." In the public relations industry, the standard is now mention in the script who produced this "news." The Bush Administration says: not needed.

Why is this happening?

The Economist glimpsed it: the "the traditional notion that the media play a special role in informing people is breaking down." Getting built up are the credentials of the Federal government as a credible and substitute news provider. Informing the public is what the government does quite well on its own, without interference from Congress and from special interests like the press.

"Purely informational." To me it has a menacing sound. I suppose it applies also to the doubling of the PR budget under George W. Bush.

surprise trip to Baghdad.' Which sounds reasonable enough until you realize that the president's trip did not exist as a workable idea outside the anticipated news coverage of it. This realization takes under three seconds." **More...**

Thoughts on the Killing of a Young Correspondent: "Among foreign correspondents, there is a phrase: 'parachuting in.' That's when a reporter drops into foreign territory during an emergency, without much preparation, staying only as long as the story remains big. The high profile people who might parachute in are called Bigfoots in the jargon of network news. The problem with being a Bigfoot, of course, is that it's hard to walk in other people's shoes." **More...**

The News From Iraq is Not Too Negative. But it is Too Narrow: "The bias charges are getting more serious lately as the stakes rise in Iraq and the election. But there is something lacking in press coverage, and it may be time for wise journalists to assess it. The re-building story has gone missing. And without it, how can we judge the job Bush is doing?." **More...**

There's Signal in That Noise: The White House, the Reality Principle and the Press. "Not engaging with opponents' arguments, not permitting discordant voices a hearing, not giving facts on the ground their proper weight, not admitting mistakes-- all are of a piece with not letting the "liberal media" cloud your thinking. This is the Bush way. And disengaging from the press has been a striking innovation of this White House. It's time to connect these dots." **More...**

"The Crowd's Reaction Made Some Unity Delegates Uncomfortable." "Last week's convention of minority journalists was the largest ever-- 7,000 strong. Kerry spoke: standing ovation. Bush spoke: no ovation. Traditionalists in the press said: unprofessional! Critics on the right cried foul. Unity, coalition of minority voices, didn't know what to say. And group think appealed to all." **More...**

Rather's Satisfaction: Mystifying Troubles at CBS: "Dan Rather and CBS took the risky course, impugning the motives of critics, rather than a more confident and honorable one: Let's look at our sources and methods. What can explain such a blind reaction? Here is my

useful information for the heavy news consumer. Center-right perspective.

Barista of Bloomfield Avenue is journalist Debbie Galant's nifty experiment in hyper-local blogging in several New Jersey towns. Hers is one to watch if there's to be a future for the weblog as news medium.

TV Newser, authored by college student Brian Stelter, is a must-read for those who follow network news and its crew of highly-competitive people. Always has the latest ratings too.

PJ Net Today is written by Leonard Witt and colleagues. It's the weblog of the Public Journalism Network (I am a founding member of that group) and it follows developments in citizen-centered journalism.

Napsterization is a weblog from the Berkeley J-School, edited by Mary Hodder. It's officially about the current and future influence of file-sharing and peer-to-peer networks, but Hodder also comments on the digital media scene.

Lost Remote is a very newsy weblog about television and its future, founded by Cory Bergman, executive producer at KING-TV in Seattle. Truly on top of things, with many short posts a day that take an inside look at the industry.

Siva Vaidhyanathan's Sivacracy. He's on the intellectual property beat, but with the soul of a democrat. And he's a journalist with a PhD, well tuned to the Internet. Rare.

Here's Simon Waldman's blog. He's the Director of Digital Publishing for The Guardian in the UK, the world's most Web-savvy newspaper. What he says counts.

Ruminare This... features news, views, activism (Left) and some stylish, engaged-with-the-world writing that tries to persuade you. Lisa English, the author, can be very persuasive.

National Review's The Corner is a bunch of fast, witty, and combative conservative writers who blog well and speak their minds. Always interesting and very newsy.

Betsy Nemark's weblog she describes as "comments and Links from a history and civics teacher in Raleigh, NC." An intelligent and newsy guide to blogs on the Right side of the sphere. I go there to get links and comment, like the teacher said.

(According to this [House report](#).) Twice as much neutral information was needed, apparently.

As Frank Rich [wrote](#) in his column for this week, "The brakes are off, and before long, the government could have a larger budget for fake news than actual television news divisions have for real news." (For more, see this [report](#) from the activist group [freepress](#).)

In its front-page investigation of video news releases--a very welcome sight, published March 13--the New York Times [noted](#) that Federal agencies are careful to tell distributors of its news releases that the government is the producer of the simulated news therein. (Which is the entire legitimization method making it "okay" to make believe you're a journalist.) The production itself is then free to "hide" the Federal hand, because under the rules of the game it's disclosed-- once.

The reports themselves, though, are designed to fit seamlessly into the typical local news broadcast. In most cases, the "reporters" are careful not to state in the segment that they work for the government. Their reports generally avoid overt ideological appeals. Instead, the government's news-making apparatus has produced a quiet drumbeat of broadcasts describing a vigilant and compassionate administration.

The Times resists the Bush Administration's description of its methods as "purely informational." By such means a resistance movement may yet emerge. I would call [this moment](#) in the press room another sign of resistance. (Bush is asked: "Does it raise ethical questions about the use of government money to produce stories about the government that wind up being aired with no disclosure that they were produced by the government?")

The Comptroller General, David Walker, is fighting back. Even if it's legal to hide the government's hand in news reporting, he [says](#), is that the ethical standard Americans want from their government?

Walker represents opposition from Congress, which might be expected to resist an expansion of Executive power by acquisition of assets surrendered by the Fourth Estate when it ceased credibly to exist, according to the White House. Ultimately that's what the clash of opinions--GAO vs. Justice--is about: not the Administration's right to "manage" the news (old think), but to substitute itself for the increasingly discredited news media (new).

With the press being ground down, we don't know who is the presidency's legitimate interlocutor. The role seems to have gone missing. Within the Bush Bubble--and the "town meetings" on Social Security are a sad, infuriating example of this--it is understood that only safely screened supporters may rise to request a public explanation from the President. (Learn how extreme [this](#) is from the Post's Jim VandeHei and Peter Baker.)

Dan Fromkin, who writes the White House Briefing column for the

attempt. [More...](#)

What if Everything Changed for American Journalists on September 11th? "On the whole the American press has not seen fit to start its own story over after the attacks of 2001, just to see if 'journalism' comes out in the same place, if 'ethics' are the ones that were adequate before, if duty to nation looks the same, if observer-hood still fits." [More...](#)

CAMPAIGN POLITICS AND THE PRESS, 2004, HIGHLIGHTS:

Politics in a Different Key: "It is the politics of the savvy class. Its members are the insiders. They are the pros. They are the pundits, handlers and funders, vultures and parrots who run and staff the campaign story, which is above all the inside story of how you get elected in this country. Its outstanding feature, Joan Didion wrote, is "remoteness from the actual life of the country." They are the people of this remoteness." [More...](#)

A Politics That is Dumber than Spam: "I remember the moment when presidential campaigns turned from just maddening and absurd to completely empty for me. It might have happened years before, but I am a believer in politics. So it took until the fall of 2000. Bush and Gore were then fighting it out, not by opposing one another in any kind of argument, but by running virtually the same campaign, on the same issues, pandering to the same groups, advancing a rhetoric that sounded the same but for a few catch phrases." [More...](#)

Private Life, Public Happiness and the Dean Connection: "Somehow it had all gotten away from them. Presidential campaigns had drifted out of alignment with most Americans. The ritual no longer seemed like something the country did for itself every four years, but what a professional cadre did, and sold back to the country as 'politics.' But it wasn't, really. At least it wasn't democratic politics at anything like capacity." [More...](#)

The Master Narrative in Journalism: "Were 'winning' to somehow be removed or retired as the operating system for news, campaign reporting would immediately become harder to do, not because there would be no news, but rather no common, repeatable instructions for deciding what is a key development in the story, a turning point, a surprise, a trend. Master narratives are thus harder to alter than they are to apprehend. For how do you keep the story running while a switch is

Rhetoric is language working to persuade. Professor Andrew Cline's Rhetorica shows what a good lens this is on politics and the press.

Davos Newbies is a "year-round Davos of the mind," written from London by Lance Knobel. He has a cosmopolitan sensibility and a sharp eye for things on the Web that are just... interesting. This is the hardest kind of weblog to do well. Knobel does it well.

Susan Crawford, a law professor, writes about democracy, technology, intellectual property and the law. She has an elegant weblog about those themes.

Kevin Roderick's LA Observed is everything a weblog about the local scene should be. And there's a lot to observe in Los Angeles.

Joe Gandelman's The Moderate Voice is by a political independent with an irrevant style and great journalistic instincts. Link-filled and consistently interesting.

Former AP reporter Chris Allbritton's experiment in independent war reporting, online and reader-supported. Allbritton is in Iraq now, sending back reports. In 2003-4 he taught digital journalism at NYU.

JD Lassica's New Media Musings keeps the regular visitor informed about the frontiers of web journalism and publishing. He does not like to miss anything in his area. Such people are valuable.

Rebecca MacKinnon, former correspondent for CNN, has immersed herself in the world of new media and she's seen the light (great linker too.)

Micro Persuasion is Steve Rubel's weblog. It's about how blogs and participatory journalism are changing the business of persuasion. Rubel always has the latest study or article.

Susan Mernit's blog is "writing and news about digital media, ecommerce, social networks, blogs, search, online classifieds, publishing and pop culture from a consultant, writer, and sometime entrepreneur." Connected.

If you're looking for a way to keep tabs on the best of the blogs, The Daou Report is a snapshot of the latest online news and buzz from across the political spectrum.

On del.icio.us, the social bookmarks site, a useful list of current links about citizen+ participatory+ media+journalism, kept current by author Shayne Bowman.

Washington Post, **says** "the White House would appear to have established these bubble trips as standard operating procedure whenever the president wants to make his case to the American people." Wow.

And that's the standard that may replace "meet the press." When *Be the Press* is fully established the new interlocutor of the Executive Branch will be the Executive Branch itself.

It was nice of The Economist to hope that **individual actors** in "the new world of blogs will provide as much public scrutiny as newspapers and broadcasters once did." I don't think that's realistic right now, do you? Yet neither is the current course on which the White House press is set. There's a routine, but there is no realism in that routine.

I see the Bush Team and Bush himself, acting through his counselor Karl Rove, as political *innovators*, first and last. (Not conservatives.) They are big picture people. They attempt what previous regimes would not. What all experience hath shewn does not impress or depress them. They have new wisdom to offer the world. They will gamble and go for the long gainer. They tend to change the game on you.

And, as journalists have told us, they're disciplined, loyal, relentlessly on the same page-- a true cadre. The Bush press policy, dumping the Fourth Estate and "news management" imagery, is a political innovation and shows the acumen of this Administration.

The innovation is in the coherence and totality of the approach, from the special interest argument, and the grinding newslessness of the briefings, to the fake news forms encouraged at the Department level, and how it all fits with the Bush Bubble, plus other simulations of the very things being lost-- or being destroyed.

Here's how I tried to **describe** it on the day after the '04 election:

The Bush White House has the national press in a box. (A "hammerlock," says **this** account.) As with so many other situations, they have changed the world and allowed the language of the old world to keep running while exploring unchallenged the fact of the new. The old world was the Fourth Estate, and the watchdog role of the press, the magic of the White House press conference. It was a feeling that, though locked in struggle much of the time, journalists and presidents needed each other. Although it was never put this way, they glamorized Washington politics together, and this helped both.

We're in the twilight of that world. During its days of influence the citizens of the United States were represented twice when the President met the press for questions and answers. The President represented the *people*, the press represented the *public*.

Why two reps, why these two words? Because the same Americans

made?" **More...**

Raze Spin Alley, That Strange Creation of the Press: "Spin Alley, an invention of the American press and politicians, shows that the system we have in certain ways a partnership between the press and insiders in politics. They come together to mount the ritual. An intelligent nation is entitled to ask if the partners are engaged in public service when they bring to life their invention... Alternative thesis: they are in a pact of mutual convenience that serves no intelligible public good." **More...**

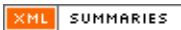
Horse Race Now! Horse Race Tomorrow! Horse Race Forever!: "How is it you know you're the press? Because you have a pass that says PRESS, and people open the gate. The locker room doors admit you. *The story must be inside that gate; that's why they give us credentials. We get closer. We tell the fans what's going on.* And if this was your logic, Bill James tried to bust it. Fellahs, said he to the baseball press, you have to realize that you are the gate." **More...**

Psst... The Press is a Player: "The answer, I think, involves an open secret in political journalism that has been recognized for at least 20 years. But it is never dealt with, probably because the costs of facing it head on seem larger than the light tax on honesty any open secret demands. The secret is this: psst... the press is a player in the campaign. And even though it knows this, as everyone knows it, the professional code of the journalist contains no instructions in what the press could or should be playing for?" **More...**

Die, Strategy News: "I think it's a bankrupt form. It serves no clear purpose, has no sensible rationale. The journalists who offer us strategy news do not know what public service they are providing, why they are providing it, for whom it is intended, or how we are supposed to use this strange variety of news." **More...**

He Said, She Said, We Said: "When journalists avoid drawing open conclusions, they are more vulnerable to charges of covert bias, of having a concealed agenda, of not being up front about their perspective, of unfairly building a case (for, against) while pretending only to report 'what happened.'" **More...**

If Religion Writers Rode the Campaign Bus: "Maybe irony, backstage peaking and "de-mystify the process" only get you so far, and past that point they

Syndicate this site:

Blogarama



My Ecosystem Details

who believe in popular sovereignty (election to office) believe too in public opinion (government by discussion.) The people elect the President. It's the public's job to continue the discussion, and keep the light of public scrutiny on. The press does not represent the people-- at all. It *can* represent the public's stake in reliable information and vigorous debate.

During Bush's first term he took a memorable **swipe** at reporters: "You're assuming that you represent the public. I don't accept that." He might have been simply reminding journalists: you were not elected, and I was. Or he might have been saying something bolder and new: The American people don't need to be twice represented anymore. Once is enough, and we are going to show you that.

Maybe it's all coincidence, maybe not, but according to a **report** in the Washington Times, plans are underway to renovate the White House briefing room and press area, which would temporarily displace reporters to the Old Executive Office Building.

"It's going to be like a house renovation," said White House Correspondents Association President Ron Hutcherson. "The bottom line is this is necessary and could be a real benefit to the press corps. But my main concern is I want to make sure it's not part of an effort to reduce our space or push us out of the West Wing."

My main concern is a little different. This summer, the White House correspondents--in dialogue with colleagues, bosses, the public, and with history itself--need to renovate their ideas while the official press quarters are re-built. For them I have a hard question: why go back there at all? There may be good answers to that, but they can't be the same answers, given what The Economist called a "fundamental change of attitude compared with previous administrations."

The show is still running, but we're no longer in the world of *Meet the Press*. Beat the press is more accurate. And be the press is an idea on the way.

After Matter: *Notes, reaction & links...*

Dan Froomkin at **White House Briefing** on how the emptiness of Bush's Social Security road show is coming through in the local press coverage:

Ever since his State of the Union address, Bush has been riding Air Force One to and fro, holding campaign-style "conversations" on Social Security during which he typically says nothing new and provides no details of his proposal.

Up until now, not just local reporters but even the national ones as well have typically bent over backward to treat what Bush says at these events like news.

explain nothing. Puzzling through the convention story, because I'm heading right into it myself, made me to realize that journalism's contempt for ritual was deeply involved here. Ritual is newsless; therefore it must be meaningless. But is that really true? **More...**

Convention Coverage is a Failed Regime and Bloggers Have Their Credentials:

"No one knows what a political convention actually is, anymore, or why it takes 15,000 people to report on it. Two successive regimes for making sense of the event have collapsed; a third has not emerged. That's a good starting point for the webloggers credentialed in Boston. No investment in the old regime and its ironizing." **More...**

Down at the Tick Tock Diner, I Caught Up With CNN:

"Nobody had ever asked to anchor convention coverage from the floor,' Feist said as we shared a booth-- like real diners. CNN got the new gear, tested it out, and made the request to the Democrats. The Democrats said yes. And right there the sky box era at conventions came to an end." **More...**

Stark Message for the Legacy Media:

"Journalists find before them, with 50 days left, a campaign overtaken by Vietnam, by character issues, attacks, and fights about the basic legitimacy of various actors-- including the press itself, including Dan Rather. It's been a dark week. And the big arrow is pointing backwards." **More...**

Every Four Years Journalism

"The Every Four Years headset is like outdated software still running because it's an expensive decision and major disruption to replace a piece of press think so big, with so many parts. There is no agreement on a new 'think' system. And there is every incentive to keep the old program going for another election cycle, even though the world has moved on." **More...**

Philip Gourevitch: Campaign Reporting as Foreign Beat:

"A presidential election is a like a gigantic moving television show,' he said. It is the extreme opposite of an overlooked event. The show takes place inside a bubble, which is a security perimeter overseen by the Secret Service. If you go outside the bubble for any reason, you become a security risk until you are screened again by hand." **More...**

THE WEBLOG, THE WEB and JOURNALISM TODAY

But today's stories capture not so much what Bush says but what is most remarkable about these events: the stagecraft that goes into them and the exclusion of the general public in favor of screened supporters.

Hey, political reporters: How long before there is unrest in the Republican coalition over the Bush Bubble? **Jacob Weisberg** of Slate explains why the President's supporters should be alarmed. The bubble, which appears to be the safe way, actually increases the risks to Bush:

The self-enclosed world of conservative spin increases the risk to the president by insulating him from the truth about how his plan is going over. Meeting only with handpicked audiences in rehearsed "town hall" meetings, Bush not only encounters little substantive challenge to his views but also avoids getting any realistic sense of how little traction his plan has gotten. In this way, the propaganda president risks becoming the real victim of his administration's own fake news.

Special thanks and blogger's hat tip to **Ron Brynaert** for information he kindly dug up and sent me. And also to **Jeff Jarvis** and several people who helped me with the Economist article.

Blogger, newspaper publisher and PressThink reader Stephen Waters has an idea: the White House should **turn the briefing into a blog**:

Looking back, the gaggle wasn't our idea, it came from the major media. It gave you a daily feed to highlight network news and serve as a springboard for you to launch your own message, anyway. You'll still be able to do that. Nothing much will change. On our website we will release video clips chosen to represent the news we feel the public needs to know. You can work those clips into your stand-ups. Bullet points of what we want to communicate are also on the website, not that you have to use them. Absence of news clips hasn't stopped you in the past from filling up dead air with projection and conjecture from your stable of talking heads.

"Create our own discourse." **Digby** suggests a fateful choice:

There is no partisan left wing media that can pound away at the stories that are damaging to Republicans thereby keeping the mainstream media focused and aware of the drumbeat. Indeed that is why many of us are advocating that we create such a thing. It's been clear for more than a decade that the mainstream media responds almost unthinkingly to the deafening sounds of the right wing noise machine and now seems paralyzed by the power the Republican establishment exerts over it. They simply are incapable of speaking truth to power and employing the kind of skepticism that is required if this body politic

Top Ten List: What's Radical About the Weblog Form in Journalism? "The weblog comes out of the gift economy, whereas most of today's journalism comes out of the market economy." **PressThink's** most linked-to post. **More...**

A Second Top Ten List: What's Conservative About the Weblog Form in Journalism? "The quality of any weblog in journalism depends greatly on its fidelity to age old newsroom commandments like check facts, check links, spell things correctly, be accurate, be timely, quote fairly." **More...**

Blogging is About Making and Changing Minds: "Sure, weblogs are good for making statements, big and small. But they also force re-statement. Yes, they're opinion forming. But they are equally good at unforming opinion, breaking it down, stretching it out." **More...**

Editors Rock Who Let Weblogs Roll: "When you're sitting at your desk and there are things strange, wonderful and new on your screen, you may have to re-decide what journalism 'is' and is finally about, in order to cover the new class of cases that arise when you're doing it live online." **More...**

The Weblog: An Extremely Democratic Form in Journalism "It's pirate radio, legalized; it's public access coming closer to life. Inside the borders of Blogistan (a real place with all the problems of a real place) we're closer to a vision of 'producer democracy' than we are to any of the consumerist views that long ago took hold in the mass media, including much of the journalism presented on that platform." **More...**

Adopt a Campaign Journalist in 2004: **The Drift of a Suggestion** "Over the holidays, an idea gained some Net traction: webloggers 'adopting' a campaign reporter. That means you monitor and collect all the reporter's work, and then... And then what? Follow the turns as the suggestion is taken up and debated." **More...**

Why I Love the Adopt-a-Reporter Scheme. Why I Dread It: "I am curious why we don't see hatred of the press as taking some toll on the hater. (We do when it's racism.) In this sense I dread the adopt-a-journalist scheme, even though I support the idea, because I think dread is a fit response when people who are in some quarters hated--perhaps symbolically so--are being carefully "watched" in those

is to be healthy.

...It's a risky and frightening thing to do and I honestly don't know where it will lead. But I think we have no choice but to enter this fray and just hope that we can keep things straight in our own minds.

I missed this the first time. **Command Post** on Fishbowl DC's **Garrett Graff** being called the "first blogger" to be credentialed to the White House (via the day press he obtained.) Fishbowl DC is part of the **Media Bistro** empire.

Calling this Graff person a blogger is like calling the pimply kid who brings Brit Hume doughnuts a broadcaster.

A blogger pays his own bills. A blogger has comments, if at all possible. A blogger does his own writing or chooses a few friends to help. A blogger has trackbacks. A blogger links to other REAL bloggers, not the mainstream dorks Graff links to.

A blogger is not an "editor." A blogger does not receive a salary, unless it's from a corporation he himself formed as a result of making money from a genuine blog. A blogger does not have interns. A blogger--most importantly--has NO ONE to answer to.

Let's see what happens to little Garrett if he ever goes against the people who pay his bills. Same thing that would happen to Wankette. A quick elevator ride to the sidewalk, and a hastily-chosen successor; probably a receptionist or a janitor with an English degree. New "blogger," same "blog." If you're not essential to your blog's identity, you are not a blogger. You are what is known in the trade as "a copywriter."

By Command Post's standards, **BTC News** (brainchild of PressThink reader and contributor **Weldon Berger**) was the "first" blogger in the White House press room.

Here's an interesting advance in citizens journalism and the personal media revolution. Here's **another** with great potential.

Favorite Filters: You should, in these times, be reading **Cursor**, even if it's just to keep up with what the other guy is snorting and steaming about. It's one of the best media & politics filters out there. Also check in with the more idiosyncratic **Metafilter**, another fine net, letting good stuff through. **Real Clear Politics** is also indispensable, if you don't use it now. And I am getting more and more impressed with the **Daou Report** for sampling blogdom.

John Podhoretz in the Weekly Standard, October 2004, during the Dan Rather, Air National Guard mess:

This is a moment that's been a very long time coming.

quarters" **More...**

When it Goes Both Ways: A Blogger for the Liberal Media Thesis Meets Contrary Evidence at the LA Times

"There is more to this 'watchblog' thing than greets the eye. It may be one way the press is adjusting--or being adjusted--to a two-way public: readers who are also writers. But the two-way weblogger has to adjust too, especially when there is new information, or a theory that fails to predict." **More...**

Sudden Meaning for the

Political Verb: to Link "Events had played their hand. The Kerry people decided they will be held responsible for comments by bloggers they link to. By this policy--a second theory of to link, the strong view--they can be forced into comment on any offending remark. The upshot is that any blogger in the heat of exchange, a pissy mood, or an incautious moment can get you killed in the news, which feeds off matters the campaign will comment on." **More...**

No One Owns Journalism:

(Background essay for BloggerCon) "And Big Media doesn't entirely own the press, because if it did then the First Amendment, which mentions the press, would belong to Big Media. And it doesn't. These things were always true. The weblog doesn't change them. It just opens up an outlet to the sea. Which in turn extends 'the press' to the desk in the bedroom of the suburban mom, where she blogs at night." **More...**

Brain Food for BloggerCon: Journalism and Weblogging in Their Corrected Fullness

"Blogging is one universe. Its standard unit is the post, its strengths are the link and the low costs of entry, which means lots of voices. Journalism is another universe. Its standard unit is "the story." Its strengths are in reporting, verification and access--as in getting your calls returned." **More...**

Dispatches From the Un-

Journalists: "Journalists think good information leads to opinion and argument. It's a logical sequence. Bloggers think that good argument and strong opinion cause people to seek information, an equally logical sequence. What do the bloggers bring to this? My short answer to the press is: everything you have removed." **More...**

Political Jihad and the American Blog: Chris Satullo

For four decades now, conservatives have been convinced, with supreme justification, that the institutional, ideological, and cultural biases of the mainstream media represented a danger to the causes in which they believe and the ideas they hold dear. What has happened over the past weeks isn't the beginning of a transformation. It's the culmination of a 40-year-long indictment that has, at long last, led to a slam-dunk conviction.

Posted by Jay Rosen at **08:05 PM** | [Comments \(87\)](#) | [TrackBack \(3\)](#) | [Link](#) 

Raises the Stakes "Journalists, you can stop worrying about bloggers 'replacing' the traditional news media. We're grist for their mill, says Satullo, a mill that doesn't run without us. Bloggers consume and extend the shelf life of our reporting, and they scrutinize it at a new level of intensity.." **More...**

Questions and Answers About PressThink "The Web is good for many opposite things. For quick hitting information. For clicking across a field. For talk and interaction. It's also a depth finder, a memory device, a library, an editor. Not to use a weblog for extended analysis (because most users won't pick that option) is Web dumb but media smart. What's strange is that I try to write short, snappy things, but they turn into long ones." **More...**

MARCH 14, 2005

A Western Civ Course in What's Gone Wrong With the Press

For ideas that illuminate the rage out there journalists have to go outside their comfort zones, including the "liberal" zones in press thought. They have to find other sources of insight, and listen to explanations that may at first sound alien. Here are a few from the New Criterion...

"At a public meeting in Jackson, Miss., last week, a listener to NPR programs on Mississippi Public Broadcasting asked me if I had detected a sense of outrage growing in the country," **wrote** Jeffrey Dvorkin, ombudsman for NPR (March 8). "If my inbox is anything to go by, I certainly have."

Not just Dvorkin, but probably every ombudsman (male and female) could give the same report: a rising hostility pours in through the inbox. "The reasons for this cyber-outrage might be worth pondering," he said.

Yes, the reasons. Who really knows how to *explain* the kind of rage and discontent--primarily about "bias"--that visits the ombudsman's inbox anywhere there is such a box in the American news media today? If it's deserved, how did journalists come to deserve it? If it's not, how did so many Americans come to believe it?

Continue reading "A Western Civ Course in What's Gone Wrong With the Press"

Posted by Jay Rosen at **12:59 AM** | [Comments \(127\)](#) | [TrackBack \(5\)](#) | [Link](#) 

MARCH 10, 2005

To Liberate From the White House

the White House Press

Dan Weintraub, who covers politics at the Sacramento Bee, wants "an aggressive, curious and analytical press corps, based anywhere (including cyberspace), fact-checking the snot out of the White House and writing critically about the president's statements, proposals and actions."

Watching it on television doesn't quite do justice to the uselessness of many of the exchanges back and forth, nor the intensity of Scott McClellan's withering gaze nor the frustration boiling up in the reporters' voices as they butt their heads up against a rhetoric wall. – **Garrett Graff**, first blogger at the White House briefing.

Howard Kurtz of the Washington Post responded to me Tuesday in his Media Notes **column**, following my criticisms of him in **De-Certifying the Press**, posted March 4. This was his best moment:

Continue reading "To Liberate From the White House the White House Press"

Posted by Jay Rosen at **12:39 AM** | **Comments (71)** | **TrackBack (2)** | **Link** 

MARCH 08, 2005

"Digby, if You're Reading This, Send Me an E-mail." A Book Editor On Why He Loves Weblogs

Eric Nelson is a Senior Editor at John Wiley and Sons, specializing in current affairs and history. Here he explains why he reads blogs obsessively, and why you don't do a book deal with the big name columnist to whom no one links.

Special to PressThink

"Digby, if you're reading this, send me an email."

by Eric Nelson

In the publishing industry, we often talk about the mythic "handsell" book. These are those very few books that find astonishing success without a six-figure marketing campaign, Daily Show appearance, established author following, or can't-miss topic. If you look at any best-seller list, it's typically occupied by people who have already written bestsellers, or celebrities of some other sort. Most bestsellers typically hit their sales peak the first week out. Think Jose Canseco,

Jon Stewart, and Malcom Gladwell.

Some books, however, beat the odds and win readers over one at a time. Editors, marketing, sales, the chains, TV bookers, and review editors--the experts--all decide a book won't find a huge audience, but that audience begs to differ. One enthusiastic reader after another recommends it to a friend until it climbs onto the bestseller list.

[Continue reading "'Digby, if You're Reading This, Send Me an E-mail.' A Book Editor On Why He Loves Weblogs"](#)

Posted by Jay Rosen at **12:04 AM** | **Comments (61)** | **TrackBack (2)** | **Link** 

MARCH 06, 2005

[Instead of the White House Press, You Envision What?](#)

Play the discredited and de-certified themes out. If we fired the White House press and told them to seek other employment, what then?

The previous comment thread grew to well over 100, so it's time to close that one and start anew. It might be worthwhile to back away from the rights and wrongs of Bush and the press circa 2004-5, about which there is such **hot dispute**, and ask another question, a weekender:

- What do we want from the White House as a "press" strategy or policy?
- And what does the public have a right to expect?
- The present press corps does not work, according to many who regularly write in to PressThink. (See also Fishbowl DC, **Inside the Briefing**.) But play the discredited and de-certified themes out. If we fired the White House press and told them all to seek other employment, what would we have then, and what do you think would happen?
- Reader: what's your imaginary on this? Specifically on reporting from the White House.

[Continue reading "Instead of the White House Press, You Envision What?"](#)

Posted by Jay Rosen at **12:45 AM** | **Comments (109)**
| **TrackBack (4)** | **Link** 

MARCH 04, 2005

De-Certifying the Press, Continued

The whole idea of the White House press corps is that the reporters in it represent the public's common interest in seeing executive power questioned, monitored, examined, explained. The President needs an interlocutor, it was once thought. No more.

When PressThink undergoes its first re-design, I plan to install on the right rail a "live" list of my top ten press puzzles of the day, which would change with the events that present those puzzles. Or not change, if the puzzle persisted.

Right now, tops on my list would be: "de-certifying the press," which I have written about since September of 2003. Last week's installment was **In the Press Room of the White House that is Post Press** (Feb. 25). It was about putting "Jeff Gannon" into a larger context, the "post-press" philosophy of the Bush Administration.

Howard Kurtz of the Washington Post wouldn't think much of my rankings, if I had them up. Yesterday he **said** that my Number One story--which is not really "a" story but a situation made of many stories--is mostly bunk.

Continue reading "De-Certifying the Press, Continued"

Posted by Jay Rosen at **06:01 AM** | **Comments (118)**

| **TrackBack (11)** | **Link** 

MARCH 01, 2005

The Abyss of Observation Alone

"You should have answered," the sniper says to the correspondent. "You could have saved one."

There is a story I heard once about the press in Bosnia. I tried to verify it numerous times with people who might know, but I never succeeded. (Possibly I will with this post.) My informants always told me they knew of things like it that had happened in the former Yugoslavia.

Let's say then that it is *not* a true story, but a fiction about a journalist set in Sarajevo sometime between April 2, 1992, when the **Siege of Sarajevo** began, and February 29, 1996, when it was declared over.

During the siege a correspondent from a Western news agency is contacted by an intermediary, someone he knows, who has an offer: to go out one night with Bosnian

Serb snipers and see for yourself what they do.

A deal is struck, and he accompanies the men to one of their perches in the hills above the city, where they train their rifles on civilians, who might be trying to cross the street. This is where the siege "happens," in a sense. This is the action itself.

Continue reading "The Abyss of Observation Alone"

Posted by Jay Rosen at **12:24 AM** | **Comments (123)**
| **TrackBack (3)** | **Link** 

FEBRUARY 25, 2005

In the Press Room of the White House that is Post Press

Before the certification of "Jeff Gannon" as a White House reporter there was the Bush Administration's de-certification move against the Washington press. These two things are deeply related.

The little Secret Service agent at the National Constitution Center seems more interested in John Ashcroft's tight USA Patriot Act spin-tour schedule than any constitutional rights when he stops me from following a flock of television reporters heading for a brief presser with the man who could not even beat a corpse.

That's Howard Altman of Philadelphia's City Paper (Aug. 28, 2003) **describing** the experience of trying to cover Attorney General John Ashcroft during his speaking tour on behalf of the Patriot Act.

As the flock disappears down a hall in a hurried scurry, the bespectacled woman in the black dress who could have been Ainsley, the perky Republican from The West Wing, looks at me and waxes apologetic. "I am sorry," she says as the last of the camera crews whiz by. "But he is not talking to print. Only talking to television."

That was when I first **became aware** that the Bush Administration was putting an end to business-as-usual between the executive and the press. Ashcroft had Secret Service agents, or others in his employ, bar newspaper reporters--including of course those at the big national dailies--from press opportunities as he traveled the country arguing for the Patriot Act.

Continue reading "In the Press Room of the White House that is Post Press"

Posted by Jay Rosen at **12:45 AM** | [Comments \(92\)](#) | [TrackBack \(11\)](#) | [Link](#) 

FEBRUARY 23, 2005

Two Letters in Reply to "A Little Detail in the Sale of About.com"

Mike Phillips, editorial development director at Scripps-Howard: "Many of our own newsrooms are in the early stages of the transformation. And at the New York Times? It's never gonna happen. They know it, too." Plus: Daily Peg Doubts About's Worth.

My recent post about the New York Times acquisition of About.com brought these two replies. One is from the offices of a traditional news provider, the Scripps-Howard chain. The second is from an upstart born on the Web, The Daily Peg: "I'm a Google junkie and I almost never land on an About site."

Background: [A Little Detail in the Sale of About.com to the New York Times](#).

Letter One from Mike Phillips, editorial development director for [Scripps-Howard Newspapers](#), a division of the [E.W. Scripps Company](#). Phillips oversees 21 newsrooms in the chain, which includes the Cincinnati Post, the Rocky Mountain News in Denver, the Memphis Commercial-Appeal.

Scripps also owns the [Ventura Country Star](#) in California, where podcasting and blogging are just part of normal practice. See Mark on Media, [Ventura Does It](#), for a good introduction to what they do already in "Webcentric" delivery. Phillips writes:

Continue reading "Two Letters in Reply to "A Little Detail in the Sale of About.com""

Posted by Jay Rosen at **12:13 PM** | [Comments \(7\)](#) | [TrackBack \(2\)](#) | [Link](#) 

FEBRUARY 20, 2005

A Little Detail in the Sale of About.com to the New York Times

I couldn't tell you if this page has the proper meta-data-- or any. My method of search engine optimization is to get a lot of links by writing

something original and useful that people will elect to recommend at their own sites. It works. But only because links to PressThink don't expire.


"Frankly, they bring a lot of competencies to us. They're the leaders in search-engine optimization."

That's from an **interview** with Martin Nisenholtz, Senior Vice President for Digital Operations at the New York Times, who spoke with Staci Kramer of Paid

Content about his company's recent **acquisition** of About.com for \$410 million. In a **conference call** with stock analysts, Nisenholtz again mentioned search. He talked about "some very useful synergies such as cross marketing and search optimization expertise."

Why is the New York Times Company interested in acquiring this expertise with search engines that About.com is said to have? Ordinarily, I leave the analysis of deals to those who know the market, but the logic of this portion of the transaction intrigued me. *They know how to show up in search; we don't. Let's buy them. Then we'll know too.* "We own you now. Tell us what you know."

Continue reading "A Little Detail in the Sale of About.com to the New York Times"

Posted by Jay Rosen at **10:20 AM** | **Comments (22)** | **TrackBack (20)** | **Link** 

FEBRUARY 18, 2005

The Local, the Global, and the Journalist In Between: Doug McGill's Local Man Debuts


"We have freedom of speech and freedom of the press in this country," he says. "Much more easily, cheaply, and safely than ever before, we have the ability to export and share these precious freedoms via web-based journalism." It works. McGill uncovered a genocide this way.

Doug McGill--the former New York Times reporter, now a blogger and journalism thinker--**wrote** "The Fading Mystique of an Objective Press" for PressThink back in October. Now he has a new weblog, **Local Man: Global Journalism**, named for an idea he has been developing. I'll explain more about it in a moment.

But first, the news. McGill's Feb. 15 **post** on Eason Jordan has a cultural explanation for how Jordan got into trouble at Davos. It should be added to the mix.

McGill observes that an executive hopping time zones and traveling the world for CNN jumps in and out of truth frames. "Because things that are accepted as inoffensive and obvious truisms in one part of the world, can be considered outrages in another," he writes. "Such as the assertion that the U.S. military targets journalists from time to time in its operations. That's a truism in much of the Middle East. And it's an almost treasonous claim in today's U.S."

Continue reading "The Local, the Global, and the Journalist In Between: Doug McGill's Local Man Debuts"

Posted by Jay Rosen at **01:12 AM** | **Comments (27)** | **TrackBack (3)** | **Link** 

FEBRUARY 14, 2005

Closing Thoughts on the Resignation of Eason Jordan

"Bloggers, journalists, news executives and everyone else: For any of this--blogging, journalism, citizens media, a free press, transparency--to work, the solution when you mis-communicate has to be *more* communication, not ex-communication."

I don't think he should have **resigned**. I don't know why he did. Neither the public overlooking this sad event, nor the participants in it know why Eason Jordan quit. No reasons have been given, beyond saving CNN the trouble of a controversy.

That's not a reason. If CNN is a real news network, why shouldn't it have the trouble of a controversy now and then? I think anyone interested in serious journalism would agree that what are called news values come out during times when the network is criticized, called to defend itself, attacked by political interests, or otherwise under pressure. No executive can succeed in news who is not nimble in public controversy. Eason Jordan knows that. **And yet:**

I have decided to resign in an effort to prevent CNN from being unfairly tarnished by the controversy over conflicting accounts of my recent remarks regarding the alarming number of journalists killed in Iraq.

Continue reading "Closing Thoughts on the Resignation of Eason Jordan"

Posted by Jay Rosen at **05:27 PM** | **Comments (115)** | **TrackBack (25)** | **Link** 

FEBRUARY 13, 2005

Will Collier E-Mails With a Question

And I ask one back: Is the point to have a dialogue with the MSM or cause its destruction? Please advise.


Will Collier **from VodkaPundit** e-mails:

Jay, a serious question. When a former Philadelphia Inquirer managing editor and current managing editor of the Columbia Journalism Review's website **refers** to presumably-conservative critics of Eason Jordan as "salivating morons" constituting a "lynch mob" of "Liliputians," doesn't that suggest that the "hate" between conservatives and the MSM at the very least runs both ways?

--Will Collier (see his **reply** to Lovelady.)

If your point is "this is not a one-sided transaction," yes. Runs both ways, but not in a tit for tat manner. Steve was definitely saying: I have contempt for... He would tell you that, I think.

Continue reading "Will Collier E-Mails With a Question"

Posted by Jay Rosen at **07:09 PM** | **Comments (95)** | **TrackBack (9)** | **Link** 

FEBRUARY 11, 2005

Eason Jordan Resigns

Just got off the phone with Howard Kurtz. It's confirmed. Eason Jordan resigned today about an hour ago (6 pm EST). There are lots of reactions.

Here is an **AP Story**. Here is **CNN's account**. And **Howard Kurtz's**. See **Instapundit**.

This is the statement Eason Jordan released tonight around 6:00 pm EST:

After 23 years at CNN, I have decided to resign in an effort to prevent CNN from being unfairly tarnished by the controversy over conflicting accounts of my recent remarks regarding the alarming number of journalists killed in Iraq.

Continue reading "Eason Jordan Resigns"

Posted by Jay Rosen at **07:09 PM** | **Comments (190)**
| **TrackBack (32)** | **Link** 

FEBRUARY 10, 2005

Blog Storm Troopers or Pack Journalism at its Best?

"A good number of PressThink readers think I am in error for tracking the Eason Jordan story as closely as I have. By writing about the furor I am voting for it, and in some sense endorsing it, they say." Plus: Who broke the story? And Steve Lovelady blasts Hugh Hewitt.

UPDATE, 7:00 pm, Feb. 11: **Eason Jordan resigns.**

1. Release the Tape.

Dan Kennedy of the Boston Phoenix asks at his Media Log: **Where's the Tape?**

Like Kennedy, I was in the "reserve judgment until we hear for ourselves" camp on Eason Jordan's comments. But we may never hear for ourselves. The World Economic Forum is not thinking ahead when it says it will withhold the tape of the event. It doesn't realize how bad it looks when it offers the public **this** account instead, which does not even mention the events in question. (An **AP story** about those events finally made the New York Times today, at 8:22 pm.)

Continue reading "Blog Storm Troopers or Pack Journalism at its Best?"

Posted by Jay Rosen at **11:32 PM** | **Comments (59)** | **TrackBack (15)** | **Link** 