

THE NEW JOURNALISM



graphic by allthingscahill

Sometimes tectonic shifts are underfoot and society fails to recognize the acts and effects. Such is the case with journalism and its daily outlets, newspapers and television. Newspapers are dying left and right, those that are not are struggling to stay alive and relevant. The most recent glaring example is the Boston Globe.

The Boston Globe has been published for over 137 years and, over that period, became one of the grand ladies of the news press. You would think that the purchase of, and partnership with, the Globe in 1993 by the New York Times would place the Globe in a position of strength in even these perilous times. Not so. From Eugene Robinson in today's Washington Post:

Despite the whole Red Sox vs. Yankees thing, employees of the Boston Globe were mostly relieved in 1993 when the paper was bought by the New York Times Co. for an astounding \$1.1 billion. If the era of local family ownership had to end, nestling beneath the wing of one of the world's great newspapers seemed the best alternative. And if the Times was willing to pay so much, it must have been serious about putting quality ahead of the bottom line.

That was then. Now, after several rounds of painful cutbacks and layoffs at the Globe, the Times is squeezing a further \$20 million in savings from the Boston newspaper's unions – and threatening to shut down the paper if the demand is not fully met. The economics of our industry are cruel and remorseless, but still it's alarming to witness what looks like an act of cannibalism.

To be fair, the Globe is reportedly on

pace to lose about \$85 million this year. The New York Times Co. is hardly in a position to swallow a loss of that magnitude, given that the company's flagship newspaper is waging its own fight against a rising tide of red ink.

So that is the background for the discussion I want to have. My proposition is that it is not just the financial status of the major newspapers in decline, it is also, and even more significantly, the quality of content. Quite frankly, the traditional press has become deficient in both content *and* quality. I am not sure that it has ever been so apparent as in the last two to three weeks on the issue of the complicity of the United States government in a demented torture regime.

We started this discussion in earnest a little over two weeks ago when Marcy Wheeler scooped the world by revealing that Khalid Sheikh Mohammed Was Waterboarded 183 Times in One Month and Abu-Zubaydah 83 times. Marcy didn't get handed the information by a governmental press flack and she didn't print it as a result of a leak from some coddled and conflicted secret source with an agenda. Nope, she did it the old fashioned way, she earned it by doing the tedious grunt work of reading the memos and documents. The very work the traditional press shirked. Perhaps they couldn't fit it in between their martinis and cocktail weenies.

Marcy's scoop out in front of the rest of the media world was not isolated; she did it again yesterday in relation to John Conyers, head of the House Judiciary Committee, along with Jerry Nadler, Howard Berman and Bill Delahunt writing to the National Archives to demand Zelikow's dissenting memoranda *and* related material. In fact, the only two news sources even close to Emptywheel on the story were Spencer Ackerman at the Washington Independent and Zach Roth at TPM Muckraker, two other internet based sources. And Emptywheel not only reported the letter and contents, she was spot on with the legal

analysis of what it really meant:

That's because if the memo isn't there, then not only is it suggestive of criminal intent, but it also violates the Presidential Records Act.

That is precisely right, and precisely what wasn't reported by our old friends the traditional press, who were late on the story and lame on the analysis. The first main paper to hit the story, the Washington Post, finally got something up on their website last night and datelined for today, May 5. The Post came in long after Ms. Wheeler had posted, and published an article containing no cogent analysis and rehashed from months ago tidbits that the coming OPR report may make disciplinary referrals for Yoo and Bybee. Thanks for nothing WaPo, we already knew that. This is the same sugar coated type of nothing I commented on in relation to the secret source love poem Mark Mazzetti and Scott Shane wrote Sunday to assist the Condi Rice/Porter Goss rehabilitation tour:

I am a little disturbed by the sanitary descriptions and deference Mazzetti gives it even now. The stories of "the dispute and concern" in the Bush administration are left standing as some kind of reasonable discourse. It wasn't. It was the discussion of a group of children that murdered the neighbor's dog for kicks and didn't want to admit it. It should be treated as what it is, not sugar coated and given the patina of reasonable discourse.

The reporters have become the village they were designed to report on. Self puffed on their own importance and place. The working press is a critical part of society and a necessary hedge on government. The fourth estate is important; they better wake up and get their butt in gear, because right now they are just getting it kicked.

So the new paradigm involves dedicated and dogged blogger journalists competing head to head with the biggest, best and brightest of the traditional press. It is not an unusual occurrence when a blogger like Marcy Wheeler takes the old newsmen to the cleaners, it is now such an everyday event that we no longer even notice. Pretty soon they will even be winning the Pulitzers and other lofty prizes of journalism, and rightly so.

All of the foregoing having been said, I want to remind people of the effort we have underway to gear up the work, effectiveness and exposure of Marcy Wheeler. Two weeks ago, Jane Hamsher started the Organic Blogging Project to do just that. The folks that read here have been nothing short of remarkable in their response, having raised in excess of \$64,000 to date. But I want to renew the call to action at this point and make sure that everybody knows this is not just another standard (even if laudable) "pledge week" effort to help pitch in for a blogger. This effort has as its goal to create a new working investigative dynamic to pick up where the normal pros have dropped off.

Marcy Wheeler, Emptywheel and Firedoglake are The New Journalism. Support the future and start something new. This is an opportunity to invest in the startup and be a part of something transformational. As Muhammed Ali would say, shock the world!

Get in on the action here.