

THE HISTORY OF YELLOW JOURNALISM

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Summary: The article deals with the history of yellow journalism. Yellow journalism is studied as one of the main types of journalism. Some newspapers ("New York" and "The World") of yellow press are considered. Special attention is paid to the activity of the famous American and English journalists Pulitzer and Hearst.

Key words: headline, newspaper, yellow press.

Анотація: Стаття присвячена історії жовтої преси. Жовта журналістика вивчається як один з головних типів журналістики. Розглядаються деякі газети жовтої преси ("New York" та "The World"). Особлива увага приділяється діяльності видатних американського та англійського журналістів Пулицера та Херста.

Ключові слова: газета, жовта преса, заголовок.

Аннотация: Статья посвящена истории желтой прессы. Желтая журналистика изучается как один из основных типов журналистики. Рассматриваются некоторые газеты желтой прессы ("New York" и "The World"). Особенное внимание уделяется деятельности выдающихся американского и английского журналиста Пулицера и Херста.

Ключевые слова: газета, желтая преса, заголовок.

Yellow journalism or the yellow press is a type of journalism that presents little or no legitimate well-researched news and instead uses eye-catching headlines to sell more newspapers. Techniques may include exaggerations of news events, scandal-mongering, or sensationalism. By extension "Yellow journalism" is used today as a pejorative to decry any journalism that treats news in an unprofessional or unethical fashion.

Campbell (2001) [5, P. 32-33] defines yellow press newspapers as having daily multi-column front-page headlines covering a variety of topics, such as sports and scandal, using bold layouts (with large illustrations and perhaps color), heavy reliance on unnamed sources, and unabashed self-promotion. The term was extensively used to describe certain major New York City newspapers about 1900 as they battled for circulation.

The term "Pulitzer vs. Hearst" was coined by Erwin Wardman, the editor of the New York Press. Wardman was the first to define the term but there is evidence that expressions such as "yellow journalism" and "school of yellow kid journalism" were already used by newsmen of that time. Wardman never defined the term exactly. Possibly it was a mutation from earlier slander where Wardman twisted "new journalism" into "nude journalism". Wardman had also used the expression "yellow kid journalism" [5, P. 32-33] referring to the then-popular comic strip which was published by both Pulitzer and Hearst during a circulation war. In 1898 the paper simply elaborated: "We called them Yellow because they are Yellow" [1, P. 77-82].

Joseph Pulitzer purchased the New York World in 1883 after making the St. Louis Post-Dispatch the dominant daily in that city. Pulitzer strove to make the New York World an entertaining read, and filled his paper with pictures, games and

contests that drew in new readers. Pulitzer only charged readers two cents per issue but gave readers eight and sometimes 12 pages of information (the only other two cent paper in the city never exceeded four pages) [2, P. 18-22].

While there were many sensational stories in the New York World, they were by no means the only pieces, or even the dominant ones. Pulitzer believed that newspapers were public institutions with a duty to improve society, and he put the World in the service of social reform.

Just two years after Pulitzer took it over, the World became the highest circulation of newspaper in New York. Older publishers began criticizing the World, harping on its crime stories and stunts while ignoring its more serious reporting — trends which influenced the popular perception of yellow journalism. Charles Dana, editor of the New York Sun, attacked The World and said Pulitzer was "deficient in judgment and in staying power" [3, P. 79].

Pulitzer's approach made an impression on William Randolph Hearst, a mining heir who acquired the San Francisco Examiner from his father in 1887. Hearst read the World while studying at Harvard University and resolved to make the Examiner as bright as Pulitzer's paper.[3, p. 54-63] Under his leadership, the Examiner devoted 24 percent of its space to crime, presenting the stories as morality plays, and sprinkled adultery and "nudity" (by 19th century standards) on the front page. A month after Hearst took over the paper, the Examiner ran this headline about a hotel fire.

Hearst could be hyperbolic in his crime coverage; one of his early pieces, regarding a "band of murderers," attacked the police for forcing Examiner reporters to do their work for them. But while indulging in these stunts, the Examiner also increased its space for international news, and sent reporters out to uncover municipal corruption and inefficiency. In one well remembered story, Examiner reporter Winifred Black was admitted into a San Francisco hospital and discovered that indigent women were treated with "gross cruelty." The entire hospital staff was fired the morning the piece appeared [3, P. 69-77].

In 1890s, Hearst began looking for a New York newspaper to purchase, and acquired the New York Journal in 1895, a penny paper which Pulitzer's brother Albert had sold to a Cincinnati publisher the year before.

Metropolitan newspapers started advertising in the 1890s. Hearst using Pulitzer's strategy, he kept the Journal's price at one cent (compared to The World's two cent price) while providing as much information as rival newspapers. The approach worked, and as the Journal's circulation jumped to 150,000, Pulitzer cut his price to a penny, hoping to drive his young competitor (who was subsidized by his family's fortune) into bankruptcy. In a counterattack, Hearst raided the staff of the World in 1896. While most sources say that Hearst simply offered more money, Pulitzer — who had grown increasingly abusive to his employees — had become an extremely difficult man to work for, and many World employees were willing to jump for the sake of getting away from him.

Although the competition between the World and the Journal was fierce, the papers were temperamentally alike. Both were Democratic, both were sympathetic to labor and immigrants (a sharp contrast to publishers like the New

York Tribune's Whitelaw Reid, who blamed their poverty on moral defects [3, P. 79]), and both invested enormous resources in their Sunday publications, which functioned like weekly magazines, going beyond the normal scope of daily journalism.

Their Sunday entertainment features included the first color comic strip pages, and some theorize that the term yellow journalism originated there, while as noted above, the New York Press left the term it invented undefined. Hogan's Alley, a comic strip revolving around a bald child in a yellow nightshirt (nicknamed The Yellow Kid), became exceptionally popular when cartoonist Richard F. Outcault began drawing it in the World in early 1896. When Hearst predictably hired Outcault away, Pulitzer asked artist George Luks to continue the strip with his characters, giving the city two Yellow Kids. The use of "yellow journalism" as a synonym for over-the-top sensationalism in the U.S. apparently started with more serious newspapers commenting on the excesses of "the Yellow Kid papers."

In 1890, Samuel Warren and Louis Brandeis published "The Right to Privacy" [1, p. 156] considered the most influential law review article of all time, as a critical response to sensational forms of journalism, which they saw as an unprecedented threat to individual privacy. The article is widely considered to have led to the recognition of new common law privacy rights of action.

Pulitzer and Hearst are often adduced as the cause of the United States' entry into the Spanish-American War due to sensationalist stories or exaggerations of the terrible conditions in Cuba. However, the vast majority of Americans did not live in New York City, and the decision-makers who did live there probably relied more on staid newspapers like the Times, The Sun, or the Post.

But Hearst became a war hawk after a rebellion broke out in Cuba in 1895 [1, P. 35]. Stories of Cuban virtue and Spanish brutality soon dominated his front page. While the accounts were of dubious accuracy, the newspaper readers of the 19th century did not expect, or necessarily want, his stories to be pure nonfiction. Historian Michael Robertson has said that "Newspaper reporters and readers of the 1890s were much less concerned with distinguishing among fact-based reporting, opinion and literature."

Pulitzer, though lacking Hearst's resources, kept the story on his front page. The yellow press covered the revolution extensively and often inaccurately, but conditions on Cuba were horrific enough. The island was in a terrible economic depression, and Spanish general Valeriano Weyler, sent to crush the rebellion, herded Cuban peasants into concentration camps, leading hundreds of Cubans to their deaths. Having clamored for a fight for two years, Hearst took credit for the conflict when it came: A week after the United States declared war on Spain, he ran "How do you like the Journal's war?" on his front page. In fact, President William McKinley never read the Journal, nor newspapers like the Tribune and the New York Evening Post. Moreover, journalism historians have noted that yellow journalism was largely confined to New York City, and that newspapers in the rest of the country did not follow their lead. The Journal and the World were not among the top ten sources of news in regional papers, and the stories simply did not make

a splash outside New York City. Rather, war came because public opinion was sickened by the bloodshed, and because leaders like McKinley realized that Spain had lost control of Cuba. These factors weighed more on the president's mind than the melodramas in the New York Journal.

When the invasion began, Hearst sailed directly to Cuba as a war correspondent, providing sober and accurate accounts of the fighting [3, p. 138]. Creelman later praised the work of the reporters for exposing the horrors of Spanish misrule, arguing, "no true history of the war can be written without an acknowledgment that whatever of justice and freedom and progress was accomplished by the Spanish-American war was due to the enterprise and tenacity of yellow journalists, many of whom lie in unremembered graves".

Hearst was a leading Democrat who promoted William Jennings Bryan for president in 1896 and 1900. He later ran for mayor and governor and even sought the presidential nomination, but lost much of his personal prestige when outrage exploded in 1901 after columnist Ambrose Bierce and editor Arthur Brisbane published separate columns months apart that suggested the assassination of William McKinley.

When McKinley was shot on September 6, 1901, critics accused Hearst's Yellow Journalism of driving Leon Czolgosz to the deed. Hearst did not know of Bierce's column, and claimed to have pulled Brisbane's after it ran in a first edition, but the incident would haunt him for the rest of his life, and all but destroyed his presidential ambitions.

Pulitzer, haunted by his "yellow sins," [3, p. 95] returned the World to its crusading roots as the new century dawned. Thus, in 1910, the World was a widely respected publication, and would remain a leading progressive paper until its demise in 1931. Its name lived on in the Scripps-Howard New York World-Telegram, and then later the New York World-Telegram and Sun in 1950, and finally was last used by the New York World-Journal-Tribune from September 1966 to May 1967. At that point, only one broadsheet newspaper was left in New York City. Nowadays "The World" is widely spread newspaper.

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