

NORTH COAST



TIMES EAGLE

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In a dark time the eye begins to see
~Theodore Roethke

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THE EAGLE HAS LANDED



BY MICHAEL PAUL McCUSKER

'CENSORSHIP IS MORE OBSCENE THAN OBSCENITY'

~THE REV. BILLY HULTS
EDITOR & PUBLISHER OF THE UPPER LEFT EDGE

Thirty years ago Americans rode an Eagle to the moon. Ten years later, when gas shortages made it difficult to get home from work, a three year dead Eagle emerged from a crypt and declared itself reborn.

The resurrected Eagle celebrates its twentieth birthday July 20, 1999, thirty years to the day a human spaceman stepped outside his spacebird and described the arid barren moonscape in front of him as "A magnificent desolation."

The Born Again Bird reawakened into a desolate world of its own. Instead of lifeless the planet swarmed with billions of busy ambitious creatures who carelessly despoiled Gaia in their unceasing drive to transform Terra into their own hubris. A few of the species impoverished the many yet strangled on the effluents of their affluence. Half of humanity was at least underfed. Millions killed each other or planned to. Truth as usual was the first casualty.

The *North Coast Times Eagle* is born again, it's first editorial proclaimed because *First Amendment newspapers have become as rare as the nation's symbol the Bald Eagle.* * *The independent press has virtually disappeared, homogenized into huge corporations that control the country and probably the world....In this age of the great systems devotion to any principle other than the status quo seems quaint and naive, and faintly dangerous... (but) the enormous pressures of population and economics threaten the way we live. The great contradictions between freedom and property have finally reached us.... Like everything else the role of the press is in question. There should be no doubt. The press should have no other special interest than the First Amendment. This becomes patently impossible when the press is controlled by corporations whose interests are often in conflict with the Constitution. The great renegade journalist A. J. Leibling once said the press was free only to those who owned one.*

Twenty years later (the Cold War over, Russian communism swept into the "dustbin of history," the USA the world's most supreme superpower since the Roman Empire; China once more on the rise), the nation and its citizens are plugging rapturously into an electronic superhighway of infotainment that proposes infinite possibilities and no few dark prophecies. Government and the newly consolidated mediocrities desire control of the worldwide computer internet that until recently was used primarily by rural traffic (scientists, nerds and lovelorn). Power in the new world corporate capitalist order is shifting to control and manipulation of the immense flow of information, up until recently a vital resource but now a post-Orwellian system of indoctrination, propaganda and sensationalism.

The information highway is plastic, fluid, and still unpredictable despite corporate and government invasion of its cyberspaces. But the pervasive ambitions of monopoly are felt and reverberate through electronic and print networks. The concentration of media ownership is ominous and significant cause for public paranoia. Huge conglomerates own and manipulate information that is increasingly vital for the survival of personal and public freedoms while simultaneously producing mediocrity.

The persistent efforts by government and powerful elites to control public dialogue, particularly in matters of social behavior, have always been dangerous and usually the guise for authoritarian usurpation of the apparatus(es) of communication. Realization of this led directly to the First Amendment, which states clearly and simply that neither government nor anyone else has the right to deny or interfere with freedoms of speech, press or religion, or with public gatherings.

Without an independent press journalism is hardly more than a useful method of misleading the public, of providing illusions and deceptions to thwart and atrophy personal and collective values and liberties. An important assumption of democracy is that the flow of information should not be restricted or tampered with. But of course interfering with and

*Recently removed from the Endangered Species list.

The only corpse successfully revived in recorded history was that of Lazarus, who was said to have lived for several years afterward. Jesus Christ is reported to have arisen from the dead, but even the most ardent supporters of his resurrection admit he was on earth only forty days; and Jonah was still alive when the whale spit him ashore. Countless other claims of resurrection or rebirth have been made, not least among them Count Dracula and Richard Nixon. With such inspired precedent, the North Coast Times Eagle is born again.

~MPMc, NCTE VOL. 1, NO. 1, 20 JULY 1979

manipulating information is a high priority of political and corporate power that accurately assumes the general populace will not give much thought or greatly resist mind control efforts most of the time.

If anyone took stock of the contemporary use of press and speech freedoms, it should confirm the worst cynicisms about the tastes of the greater mass of people, most of whom acquiesce to banal, violent and sexually exploitive entertainment — addicted to spectacle and blatantly commercial rituals conjured by shameless promoters who appeal to base and witless instincts for no loftier purpose than to sell a product and make a buck.

The small independent press in America and throughout the world provides a necessary forum for the exchange, analysis, understanding and arguments that are the basis of any culture or society. Their goals are in miniature the same as are debated everywhere on Earth: to assist in the eradication of sexism, racism, poverty and war, and to document the dooms and glooms, the perversities and horrors (rarely its triumphs) of our busy illtempered species.

Small independent newspapers such as the *North Coast Times Eagle* dwell in local obscurity. They are often in opposition to bland or autocratic community rule and standards of their circulation areas. The fringe is most normally their habitat, from which they operate happily however bitter their goals or from despair their momentum. They incubate and hope to hatch ideas or ideologies that hold them captive. Controversy, flirtation with original ideas or any other form of journalistic experimentation is anathema to megamedia, which consolidates immense technologies to hype the salacious, mendacious and indigestible.

Out on the fringe publications like the *North Coast Times Eagle* struggle mightily to survive in this era of media titans. The NCTE is a member of the Poverty Press. It is one of a few small presses obsessed with a vision unaffected by commerce. (Commercial media prints and broadcasts to make a buck; public media chases a buck to print or broadcast.) It is descended from radical newspapers that blossomed briefly in the 1950s and 1960s, but its lineage threads back to the prickly press that fostered the First Amendment (and Oregon's later even more stringent guarantee of press freedoms, Article 1, Section 8 of the State Constitution: *No law shall be passed restraining the free expression of opinion, or restricting the right to speak, write, or print freely on any subject whatever; but every person shall be responsible for the abuse of this right*).

The independent advocacy press has few pretensions toward objectivity and fewer illusions about its probability. Most small independent journals are understaffed, underfunded and generally misunderstood because they seldom reflect popular opinion. They act, often myopically and insensitively, as consciences and torchbearers, and most are fierce and shrill advocates of large or esoteric causes. They are usually on hard times and fail more often than they are replaced.

Although small newspapers like the *North Coast Times Eagle* (and listener sponsored public radio stations such as KMUN-FM in Astoria and Portland's KBOO) defy the trend toward megabig, a significant trend in media traffic is paradoxically toward specific, or more ominously, specialized audiences. Mainstreaming more often seems to mean segmenting into selective user groups that become hermetically sealed by appropriate media.

In the twenty years the *North Coast Times Eagle* has been out of its three year tomb the world far and near has proceeded with its usual human melodrama of wretchedness, poverty, squalor, ignorance, needless tragedy, injustice and wanton slaughter, and here and there a few laughs. The mainframe of human life remains essentially as it has been for millennia, despite recent influxes of a parallel virtual reality.

Lean, hungry, improvident and hogtied by its own paradoxical vows of poverty that dovetail with probability and implicitly limit financial contact with ideologically incorrect sources of wealth and funding that spread the diseased creed of consumer/consumption through mainstream commercial media, the *North Coast Times Eagle* might be considered a forum for impractical, perhaps Paleolithic dreams of a less grim future than prophesied by millennial myths and terrors — a beacon for an equally ancient concept of personal and collective freedom, in history only a dream, but its most persistent dream. Mouses must roar after all and bite at the ankles of ponderous tyrannies if we are to keep our heads and humor. Micromedia, flamboyant, irreverent, raffish and Raggedy Ann is on the march into the 21st century.



Two decades after its rebirth, the North Coast Times Eagle remains on the endangered list at the end of the 20th century and the terminus of the Oregon Trail, where Lewis and Clark spent the rainiest winter of their lives in a never dry little fort they built on a river later named after them. Like the explorers and ancestors whose hard wagon wheels rutted the virgin plains and fertilized them with their dead, the newspaper is a hopeful pioneer striving for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness at the mouth of the Columbia River and at the fringe of sensibility. A past of conestogas and a future of starships straddle its double life. Pained optimism is its stimulation.

I. F. Stone, who died ten years ago in 1989 at age 82, wrote:

"To be a pariah is to be left alone to see things your own way, as truthfully as you can. Not because you're brighter than anyone else — or your own truth so valuable. But because, like a painter or a writer or an artist, all you have to contribute is the purification of your own vision, and add that to the sum total of other visions. To be regarded as nonrespectable, to be a pariah, to be an outsider, this is really the way to do it. To sit in your tub and not want anything. As soon as you want something, they've got you."