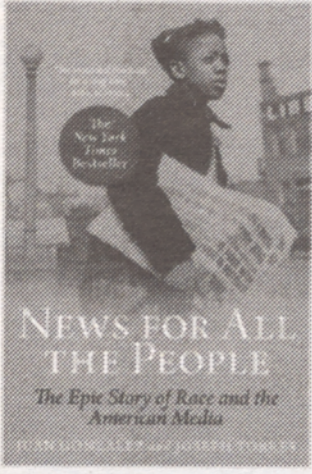


Fair and balanced? Hardly, but was it ever?

BY PAUL K. HAEDER
CONTRIBUTING WRITER



News for All the People: The Epic Story of Race and the American Media, by Juan Gonzalez and Joseph Torres

The foundational question all journalists – all Americans, for that matter – should be asking is: How should news and information flow through American democracy, and who can access that media? Believe it or not, the founders of the United States, through huge fits, spasms and debates created the U.S. Postal Office in 1774 to move newspapers throughout the land, for hardly anything or nothing at all.

How times have changed, with media monopolies lobotomizing the news, the centralizing of newspaper and broadcast reporting, the looming death of independent publishers and booksellers and the evisceration of U.S. mail service. In fact, much of the ugliness in the media associated with Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, Bill O'Reilly, Ann Coulter, Glenn Beck, Rupert Murdoch and other mainstream corporate press shells is a rerun of this country's media history.

The groundbreaking book, "News for All the People," takes the reader on a 400-year journey from the past transgressions to today's democratic crisis, one largely created by the deeds of those controlling the media and the narratives our citizens are actually "consuming." It delves deeply into why those narratives are slanted, misrepresented or scrubbed altogether by the so-called liberal media. "It is our contention that newspapers, radio and television played a pivotal role in perpetuating racist views among the general population," write Juan González and Jose Torres.

What do Torres and González find? For one, they dig up haunting stories of Reconstruction-era newspaper editors calling for the lynching of abolitionists, the burning of alternative presses and the hateful stigmatization of Native Americans, Latinos and blacks. And it's clear early on in this book that the two Latino authors know history repeats itself, constantly, when it comes to media and the press:

"Descriptions of 'Sculking' or 'barbarous' Indians were commonplace then, much as today's news media use terms such as 'wolf packs,' 'drug gangs, and 'super-predators' as

monikers for non-white criminals," the authors write. "Those early accounts thus establish a voluminous and entirely one-sided newspaper narrative: Native Americans were depicted as cunning, barbaric, and evil – and certainly undeserving of the vast lands coveted by the European settlers."

The pair makes a clear case on how marginalized people of color literally fought to fund and publish their papers. There were contradictions among them, to be sure. Many Native American editors held slaves. Some of the white Hispanic editors were proponents of Indian removal. But these tales are overwhelmed by stories like that of escaped slave Frederick Douglass. As the editor of several African-American newspapers, he not only employed black male writers, he was a feminist who employed dozens of female writers, too.

In his papers, Douglass railed against the U.S. war against Mexico: "We have seen for eighteen months, the work of mutilation, crime and death go on, each advancing step sunk deeper in human gore. By every mail has come some new deed of violence. Cities have been attacked, and the cry of helpless women and children has risen, amid the shrieks and agony of death and dishonor. The living have gone forth, and dead corpses encased in lead have returned. Thousands of widows and orphans have sent up to the heavens their pitiful wail."

The authors tell us about John Rollin Ridge, a Cherokee writer and novelist, who moved to California and founded the Sacramento Bee. He sold the paper to James McClatchy, one of his employees. McClatchy developed the Sacramento Bee into the flagship newspaper of the McClatchy newspaper chain. It's a great story. But here's what's so superb about Torres and González's work: On the McClatchy website, they find no mention that a Cherokee was the founder of its first paper.

The co-authors have earned their journalistic chops. González co-founded "Democracy Now!" in 1996; currently, its daily news show, "The War and Peace Report," is heard on more than 950 TV and radio stations. Gonzalez has codified his 30 years working in corporate media and 15

years with the award-winning radio program into this seven-year book project with Torres, himself a journalist, a former National Association of Hispanic Journalists deputy director and adviser for the media reform organization, Free Press. All this expertise comes together in "News for All the People."

Their book ends by bringing us into the modern era of Latinos, Asians, Indians and African Americans fighting for their own voices in media. They get into debates about whether the Internet will stay free and open – if it ever was in the first place. Both authors are clear about the need for an alternative press, and more debate and discussion of news for and by the corporate war state.

"One of the things that we've uncovered is that this fundamental debate that is constantly occurring is: Does our nation need a centralized system of news and information, or does it need a decentralized, autonomous system? And which serves democracy best?" González said on "Democracy Now!"

This book will help contextualize how media outlets such as Fox News or Clear Channel have become propagandized and cruel, as well as why the limited number of publishers controlling a majority of printed materials is bad for democracy. And the book also shows what gave rise to pugnacious independent writers and alternative periodicals of old, along with those still waging the fight today. "In These Times," the "Texas Observer," "Mother Jones," "ProPublica" and "The Nation" give us some hope that an alternative press will gain favor over the profit-driven, war-promoting mainstream press.

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What Brought Him

by David Mair

What brought him to end it
Thought of having it all
Top the world was he
Even to the far reach of each tree knew he
Mourning after, Morning after, Mourning,
Waking to the smell of every cry
Faking to want to help why?
Flushed with power
Hushed by the hour
Living in the cobblestone grave of his own
Bombs of despair blew
Couldn't find the time to meet his mind
He knew the dagger of love beseech the power
Simply forgot to measure
For it was always right
in front of him

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