

## PRESS &amp; MEDIA

# Journalism's 'Gilded Disaster'

**THE SOURCE:** "Down With the Newseum!" by Jack Shafer, in *Slate*, Feb. 7, 2008.

NOW BELTWAY JOURNALISTS who tire of flattering D.C.'s political poo-bahs can soothe their own egos at a shrine to their profession. The seven-story Newseum, just off the National Mall, opened in April.

The steel-and-glass edifice on Pennsylvania Avenue took four years to build and cost \$450 million, mak-

ing it one of the most expensive museums ever erected. Among its impressive features are a multilevel Wolfgang Puck restaurant, 15 theaters, and a 50-ton marble tablet on which the First Amendment is chiseled. All told, the museum's 6,214 journalism artifacts weigh more than 81,000 pounds. (Most of these numbers are on the Newseum's website in a handy press release, a fact-minded reporter's dream.) But for all its opu-

lence, writes media critic Jack Shafer, the Newseum fundamentally misses the story.

The process of gathering and reporting the news isn't readily conveyed through "trivial" artifacts, he argues. Gazing on "fascinating curios"—such as the satchel, pencil, and eyeglasses that belonged to *Bismarck Tribune* reporter Mark Kellogg, who was killed in 1876 along with Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer at Little Big Horn—"tells you what about journalism?" A museum can provide insight into the news industry—Shafer cites New York's Paley Center for Media—but the Newseum is all flash, a "gilded disaster." For the fortune it cost, the funders could have endowed a newspaper.



Money well spent? The Newseum, a \$450 million artifact-filled monument to journalism, opened this spring near Washington's National Mall.

And consider the source, Shafer cautions. The Newseum is underwritten primarily by the Freedom Forum (formerly the Gannett Foundation), and donors include many of the nation's leading media organizations and dynasties. Like the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian, whose content was heavily determined by Native American tribes, "the Newseum suffers from the fact that curatorial power is invested in the home team." In other words, don't look for any exposités.

## PRESS &amp; MEDIA

## Can This Business Be Saved?

**THE SOURCE:** "Online Salvation?" by Paul Farhi, in *The American Journalism Review*, Dec. 2007–Jan. 2008.

THE BELEAGUERED NEWSPAPER industry, losing subscribers and advertisers like spring runoff down a steep mountain, has built a solid presence on the Internet and is banking on Web advertising to secure its future. But while such revenue has

more than doubled in the past four years, it may be too weak a financial platform to support the heavy costs of old media.

After years of healthy increases, the Internet audience is barely growing, and while newspaper websites draw a lot of traffic, visitors click on the sites to glimpse the offerings, rather than ponder them. The typical visitor to *nytimes.com*, a site that attracts more than 10 percent of the industry's Internet customers, spends about 68 seconds a day reading the paper online. And that is a far more leisurely visit than the typical newspaper site receives, notes Paul Farhi, a reporter for *The Washington Post* who writes frequently about the media.

The buoyant growth in Web advertising that has sustained the hopes of newspaper publishers in recent years has begun to evaporate. The rate of advertising growth started on a downward slide in 2007, and a worsening economy means the decline will likely continue.

Most at risk are local newspapers without a national brand name. Their traffic is decreasing, sometimes

sharply, as they face tougher competition from local television stations, which can quickly post video clips of breaking events and flog their websites relentlessly on air. Publishers who have enjoyed near-monopoly status in their communities now face literally millions of competitors online, though most of the challengers don't offer the range and depth of the smallest local newspaper.

Despite experiments with online "pay-to-read" news stories, partnerships with Internet giants, and inventive new categories and compilations of news, nobody has figured out a model that will permit newspapers to support the costs of gathering and presenting the news with the revenue generated from Internet advertising alone, Farhi says. One idea is to use the advanced technology available on the Web to target both news and advertising to readers whose viewing habits reveal an interest in certain topics. The challenge is to identify and post these features ahead of the competition. The 24-hour news cycle of journalism's glamour days used to seem frenetic. Now that's the speed of sludge.

## HISTORY

## The Barbary Precedent

**THE SOURCE:** "The United States and Barbary Piracy, 1783–1805" by Patrick J. Garrity in *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 26, No. 5, 2007.

THE WAR ON TERROR ISN'T America's first battle against an amorphous Muslim "quasi-state."

In its first years of existence, the fledgling United States waged war against the Barbary pirate regencies. Buccaneers were their business, and the corsairs energetically targeted American merchant ships peacefully ferrying pickled fish and

wheat across the Mediterranean.

Today, the United States is hardly the feeble upstart it was around the turn of the 19th century, and the Barbary pirates look like puffed-up weaklings in comparison with Osama bin Laden. But the attempt to halt piracy illustrates the extraordinary level of effort required to deter quasi-states from attack when "prestige or religious obligation" is at stake, writes Patrick J. Garrity, a researcher at the University of