6 Controlling the News— The Undeceiving of the People

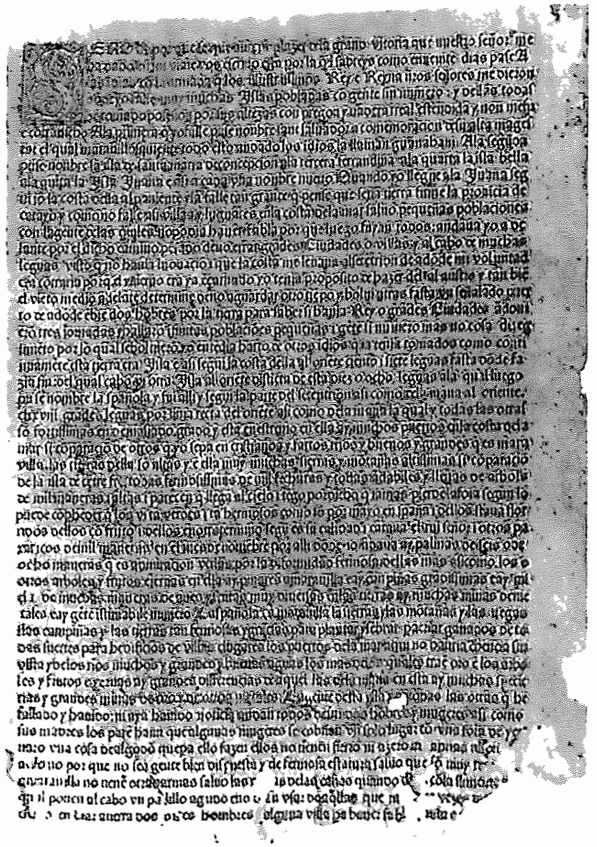
. . . if any read now-a-days, it is a play-book, or a pamphlet of news.

—Robert Burton, 1621[1]

In school most of us are introduced to two events from the fifteenth century: The first is Columbus's discovery, or rediscovery, of America in 1492; the second is Johann Gutenberg's invention, or reinvention (the Chinese and Koreans deserve some credit), of the letter press, employing movable type. The impact of Columbus' voyage is obvious. Perhaps the impact of Gutenberg's machine becomes clearer when we consider what the printing press, fewer than 40 years after it cut its teeth on the Bible, was able to do for news of Columbus' voyage.

When Vikings sailing from Greenland 500 years earlier had discovered and temporarily settled an attractive land still farther west, the news had to rely on word of mouth and the written word for its passage back across the North Atlantic. This new land had probably been first sighted (by Europeans) in 986; Vikings, under the command of Leif Eriksson, first landed in "Vinland" 15 years later. In about 1070 the German cleric Adam of Bremen interviewed the King of Denmark and was told "of yet another island. . . . It is called Wineland."[2] So the news had reached Denmark, and those few in Germany who saw Adam's handwritten history also learned of the discovery, though by then the story was about 70 years old. In the end, however, conversation and writing proved unable to propel news of the Viking discovery deeply enough into European consciousness for Vinland to secure a place in the worldview Columbus would encounter.

When Columbus returned to Europe with his two remaining ships in March 1493, news of his remarkable accomplishment also began to spread by word of mouth. The explorer apparently handled much of the early public relations himself, disseminating the news as he made the rounds of banquets and celebrations, as he was received by various notables, and as he talked with the people who hailed him on the street and along the road to Barcelona and the Spanish court. To reinforce his own account of his new route to "the Indies," Columbus had brought back with him parrots, gold and even "Indians."[3]



A letter from Columbus describing his discoveries in "the Indies" was first printed, in Spanish, in Borcelono in 1493, probably before Columbus arrived in that city to be received by the Spanish court. This is the first poge of thot early newsbook.

The news also began to travel in a few handwritten letters. There is evidence that a letter arrived in Florence by the end of March with information on the discovery of an island inhabited by people "wearing certain leaves about their genitals but nothing more."[4] And Columbus himself produced the most thorough written account of his adventure, forwarding to the court one or perhaps two letters completed on board the *Nina* by March 14.

Medieval Europe had methods for circulating news of this weight. Even without seeing the parrots or reading Columbus' own letters, conversations with travelers, formal proclamations or letters from acquaintances would eventually have informed many Spaniards that ships had sailed west and reached land. In time, travelers and correspondence would also have acquainted some of the more cosmopolitan inhabitants of cities such as Florence or Augsburg with Columbus' accomplishment. However, those oral reports would inevitably have been delayed and distorted as they spread and those hand-

News of the Real Discoverers of America

The first humans to set foot in America came from Asia, not Europe; probably by foot, not by ship; perhaps 40,000 years before Columbus or the Vikings. The "ice-bridge peoples," they are sometimes called, because they may have walked across an ice bridge between Siberia and Alaska. Their descendants, who populated two continents, are the Native Americans or the people Columbus mistakenly stuck with the label "Indians."

These original discoverers of America had no writing, let alone a printing press, to spread word of what they found. Instead they must have relied upon spoken news, with its inability to remain accurate over distance. It is doubtful that much reliable news of America spread back to Asia. No record of these discoveries survives in any culture.

written letters would have been available only to a limited audience and would have been vulnerable to the errors or the editing of each hand that recopied them. One letter written in Italy about Columbus' voyage, for example, reported that it took 16 days to reach land (it took 33); a letter from a Barcelona merchant stated that Columbus was "in a province where men are born with a tail" (Columbus had reported that some natives told him such men existed in another province).[5]

Leif Eriksson had returned from his voyage to an isolated outpost on Greenland; Columbus returned to one of the more sophisticated corners of Europe. Even if there had been no printing press, news of Columbus' voyage would have penetrated farther. Yet it still would have suffered from lapses in speed, reach, accuracy and credibility similar to those that must have obscured the Vikings' accomplishment.

However, the printing press had arrived in Spain 23 years before Columbus returned,[6] and it was put to work spreading news of his voyage. The letter Columbus wrote to the Spanish court was set in type, printed and distributed in Barcelona probably as early as April 1. So by the time Columbus himself made his entrance into Barcelona in the middle of April, *hundreds* of copies of a pamphlet describing his discoveries *in his own words* must have already been circulating. One copy has survived:

> I found a great many islands peopled with inhabitants beyond number. . . . The people . . . all go naked, men and women, just as their mothers bring them forth; although some women cover a single place with the leaf of a plant, or a cotton something which they make for that purpose. They have no iron or steel, nor any weapons; nor are they fit thereunto; not because they be not a well-formed people and of fair stature, but that they are most wondrously timorous. . . .[7]

This or a second, similar letter Columbus forwarded to the Spanish court was translated into Latin on April 29, 1493, and printed in Rome early in May, where it became, according to one Columbus biographer, Samuel Eliot Morison, a "bestseller."[8] Three separate Latin editions of Columbus' letter were printed in Rome that year. The letter

was reprinted in Paris, probably shortly thereafter, where, as in Rome, it reappeared in two additional editions during the year. And before the year was out, editions of Columbus' letter would also be printed in Antwerp, Basel and Florence.[9]

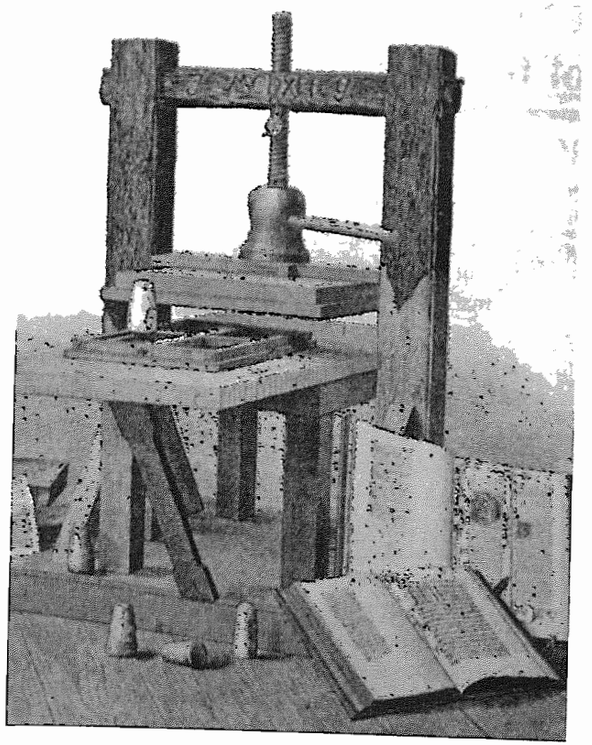
Thus the letter press Gutenberg had developed—the invention of the century—was able to circulate a firsthand account of Columbus' voyage—the story of the century—to a significant portion of literate Europe within months of his return. Columbus' voyage helped demonstrate the power of Gutenberg's press as a method for moving news. And the letter press arrived in a Europe whose geographical, philosophical and economic frontiers were about to race outward, a Europe ready for a news medium equipped to give chase.

News was published before it was printed, but print would transport news to a larger public, at faster speeds than it had ever before known. (Printing is so effective a means of publication that the words would become synonymous.) As writing had, the printing press would go on to rearrange human thinking—changing, wrote Francis Bacon, "the appearance and state of the whole world."[10] Like writing, it would lead to a procession of scientific discoveries and a reordering of the arts. But, unlike writing, the printing press would also lead to a procession of journalistic advances, advances that would be accelerated by the newspaper but would not wait for the newspaper.

A more primitive form of printing had been available in Europe perhaps half a century before Gutenberg developed his letter press. A page could be printed by rubbing a sheet of paper against an inked block of wood carved to produce an impression of pictures or words. Both the paper and the technique were Chinese inventions that had apparently completed the long journey to Europe.[11] There is some evidence that block printing was used to publish newssheets in the 15th century, particularly in Germany.[12] (In Japan as early as 1615, newssheets—called *kawaraban*—were printed from engraved clay or wood plates.)[13] However, Gutenberg's letter press, in which each letter could be removed and reused after a page was printed, offered huge advantages of speed, convenience and quality of impression. (The Chinese—and later the Koreans—had been experimenting with moveable type in earlier centuries, though not on a press. Their ability to exploit this technique was also limited by the multiplicity of written characters with which they had to work.)[14]

News followed Bibles, Latin grammars, and almanacs in the rush to make use of the early letter presses. One of the first printed works that might qualify as news was an Italian report on a tournament printed in about 1470 (the press had arrived in Italy in 1464). From these first decades of the letter press, some scattered pamphlets also survive on the wars with the Ottoman Empire: A report on the Turkish wars was printed in Augsburg in 1474; a letter reporting on the Turk's success in taking the Genoan colony of Caffa was printed shortly thereafter (most likely in Italy in 1475); and additional German publications on the Turks appeared in 1480 and 1482.[15]

Print presented the nascent journalist with a gift well beyond the means of mere handwriting: a large audience. The letter press, it has been argued, introduced the world to mass production.[16] The world would soon be using it to produce masses of news and news for the masses. In 1483 the owner of one press charged three florins for each 20 pages to print a book that a scribe might have copied for one florin for 20 pages. But that press could produce 1,025 copies for the money, the scribe one copy[17]—three times the



A reproduction of Johann Gutenberg's printing press.

expense, a thousand times the audience. An item of new information of public interest, once set in the movable type Gutenberg had devised, was able to reach a much larger public. And each printed copy that marched off a press had a crucial advantage: It was an exact replica. Those thousands of readers would each receive the same story, with no *added* errors, distortions or embellishments.

In a society that depends on word of mouth or handwritten letters for its news, reliability is always at issue. "No one ever hears twice alike about English affairs," a Milanese diplomat stationed in London complained to his government in 1471. The diplomat's problem was well illustrated on April 6, 1483, when the mayor of York learned "on what appeared to be excellent authority" that Edward IV had died. A requiem mass was sung in York on April 7. Edward IV, however, though fatally ill, was still alive. Information twisted and turned like this all across Europe. In October 1525 criers in Paris announced that King Francis I of France had died in captivity, though he too was alive and would live for another 21 years. Deaths were so difficult to confirm that, according to the historian C. A. J. Armstrong, "the end of the Middle Ages teemed with imposters who impersonated the dead." There was a false Richard II, a false Joan of Arc, a false Charles the Bold.[18]

The printing press did not protect the news from the falsehoods of either deceptive or deceived printers—some of their products were wildly incredible. But with the ability to produce a thousand exact copies of documents, statements or news reports, the

The Beginnings of the Information Age?

Those of us today who are well off enough to lead well-equipped lives are constantly bombarded with information: on politics, on business, on science, on entertainment, on sports, on weather, on crime. The "information age," our era has been labeled.

This book presents a few possible candidates for the technology that might be credited with giving birth to this information age, the telegraph, with its ability to move information almost instantly across great distances, is one (see Chapter 15). Radio, specifically the first all-news radio station, is another (see Chapter 16).

But no invention changed the amount of information available to humankind as radically as that nonelectric, hand-operated machine that arrived in Europe in the 15th century: the printing press.

printing press did at least guarantee that the original news item had not been distorted between the press and the reader. Readers could accept or dismiss the work of the printer without fear that additional falsehoods had been added in transmission or transcription. The vulnerability of a message along the road from the battlefields where the fate of kings was being determined to the towns where news of their fate was so eagerly awaited was considerably reduced. And that was a crucial step toward a world where the dead assuredly were and would stay dead.

It would take some time before the full power of the printing press was felt throughout European society. Lack of literacy would limit readership of printed news. As late as the Reformation, the bulk of the population of Europe "remained relatively indifferent to writing"; by 1688 according to one estimate, only 40 percent of all adult males in England could read.[19] Transportation difficulties would limit the spread of printed news. The *Nuremberg Chronicle* was printed on July 12, 1493, without any mention of Columbus' journey, and the first hard evidence that news of his voyage had crossed the English Channel is a letter written in 1496![20] And finally, authorities, fearful of the geysers of information beginning to erupt within their domains, would severely restrict the subjects upon which printed newssheets could report.

Johann Gutenberg had presented Europe's leaders with a new tool. Many Renaissance rulers would take advantage of the opportunity to publish their news more widely; many were eager to exploit the printed word's potential for what the 17th-century English censor and journalist Roger L'Estrange termed "the *Undeceiving of the People.*" However, authorities also grew concerned that the flow of news might "deceive" citizens into underestimating the wisdom, right and indispensability of their leaders. They succumbed to the fear that their subjects might be, as L'Estrange put it, "Juggled out of their Senses with so many Frightful *Stories* and *Impostures.*"[21]

Even with limitations in literacy and transportation, even before the arrival of the newspaper, print proved itself a remarkably powerful news medium. But printed news would not soon escape the domination of Europe's anxious leaders.

News Management and Manipulation—The Newsbook

Those with arguments to make to a society did not need the printing press to convince them that news items could strengthen or weaken their cases. Leaders may not have perceived the subtle role the circulation of news played in drawing together their societies, but they certainly had seen how word of the birth of a son or the fall of an enemy could bolster their authority, while word of a blunder or defeat could threaten it. Efforts had been made to commandeer the news and turn it to political advantage since the earliest days of messengers and criers.

There was enough of an appreciation of the power of news in late medieval Europe to motivate efforts to hide deaths, close roads by which bad news might spread, commission panegyrics to the sovereign's valor and launch and disseminate false rumors. News manipulation, even the production of "disinformation," was well enough recognized as a political skill that a British diplomatic letter, written in 1578, could observe that "the Turks have learnt excellently to imitate Christians in putting out false news."[22]

In his oral reports and his two letters written to the court, Columbus probably was engaging in a form of news management or public relations: extolling the territories he had discovered in an effort to enhance his reputation and stimulate interest in future expeditions. In one of the letters, for example, Columbus descants on the prodigality of an island he had visited:

> . . . the mountains and hills, and plains and fields, and land, so beautiful and rich for planting and sowing, for breeding cattle of all sorts for building of towns and villages. There could be no believing, without seeing, such harbours as are here, as well as the many and great rivers, and excellent waters, most of which contain gold. . . .[23]

News was managed and manipulated before Gutenberg, but those concerned with the power of individual news reports must quickly have realized the potential power of the machine that was so effective in amplifying Columbus' promotional effort on behalf of "the Indies," the machine that helped Martin Luther's 95 theses, posted in 1517, become "known throughout Germany in a fortnight and throughout Europe in a month."[24] The printing press would intensify the battle for the control of news.[25]

Europe's rulers were among the first to exploit the power of the press. In England in 1486, Henry VII had printed and distributed the papal bull confirming his shaky claim to the throne.[26] (The first printing press had arrived in England in 1476.) And in France, the press became an important tool in Charles VIII's campaign to persuade a skeptical public of the merits of his invasion of Italy.

Charles VIII marched into Italy one year after Columbus returned from his first voyage to America, 126 years before the first newspaper would be printed in French, and 360 years before "the first war correspondent" is supposed to have galloped to within sight of a battlefield.[27] Yet the preparations of Charles' army, its successes, its discovery of the riches and pleasures of southern Italy and its painful retreat received extensive

Masters of News Manipulation

The manipulation of news, which took on new urgency for government leaders after the printing press, developed in the 20th century into an art and a profession: public relations (see Chapter 14).

Among the masters in United States:

- James Haggerty, press secretary to President Dwight Eisenhower in the 1950s, who used to squirrel away stories that he might then release to make it seem the president was working on days when he was in fact playing golf.
- President John Kennedy, who showered his abundant charm on certain select journalists and was rewarded with kinder, gentler coverage.
- President Richard Nixon, who noted that attacks get placed on the front page, while responses to those attacks are buried near "the deodorant ads" and who, therefore, often attacked.
- President Ronald Reagan's White House and campaign staff, Michael Deaver, David Gergen, and others, who not only knew the proper moment to release the red, white and blue balloons at Reagan appearances, but who managed to keep their many colleagues focused on a single, carefully crafted message each day, which ensured that that message made the network evening newscasts.

coverage in printed pamphlets. The French bibliographer J. P. Seguin has located 41 different pamphlets on the campaign, which lasted ten and a half months—from September 1494 to July 1495; others presumably were printed and lost.[28]

Such pamphlets were often called "relations," and later, "newsbooks." Unlike a newspaper, each usually focused on a single event. These newsbooks were small—perhaps 14 by 22 centimeters. They ranged from 4 to 28 pages in length, and were illustrated by large initial letters and woodcuts.[29]

No new news medium immediately establishes its own self-sufficient news system; it attaches itself to the systems that are already in place. As early television newscasts relied on newsreel film, newspaper reporting and radio correspondents, the first printed newsbooks were frequently read aloud in public to enable them to reach even the illiterate, and their content generally consisted of the text of a letter. (This accords with McLuhan's theory that the content of any new medium will be the medium that preceded it.)

The bulk of the newsbooks on Charles' march through Italy reproduced the text of letters from named or unnamed participants in or observers of the invasion, including Charles VIII himself. The king's letter to Parlement reporting on the battle of Rapallo, for example, was printed in a newsbook in September 1494. Handwritten letters on matters of state were already flowing steadily between Italy and Paris at the end of the 15th century.[30] With the help of the printing press, which had first arrived in Paris in 1470, hundreds or even thousands of additional copies of these written letters could be produced.

Charles's scheme to press his claim on the crown of Naples had seemed foolhardy to many of his subjects. The newsbooks on the invasion appear to have been designed,

in part, to counteract that impression. One reprints a letter reporting on the position and strength of the formidable army the king had assembled, including the number of "bombards" it possessed and their size—some so "enormous" it took 60 horses to move them. This information, the author of the letter explains, was "dictated" to him by an eyewitness. In other words, this report is based on an interview. In one of the later newsbooks Charles goes out of his way to contradict the pessimistic rumors that had been spreading about his health. Other newsbooks contort themselves in an attempt to associate this invasion of Italy with a crusade against the Muslim peril.[31]

These early printed war reports also emphasize the ease with which the French armies conquered and dwell upon the marvels the soldiers discovered in the cities they captured—marvels that included "Greek wines, sour wines and rosé wines, sweet wines, muscadel wines . . . and [wines] that were so strong that they warmed one's stomach as if one had eaten strong spices." (Only when we read a Frenchman describing the wines found in Italy as "the best in the world" do these publications seem truly dated.) By July the military and oenological adventure had soured, however, and one newsbook reports with some candor that Charles' retreating army was straggling home—hungry, thirsty and overrun by "sutlers and thieves."[32]

Authorities found additional uses for the printing press in succeeding centuries. During the reign of Francis I in France (1515–1547), the government routinely printed the text of treaties—with preambles placing them in the most favorable light.[33] In England in the 16th century, Henry VIII would use the press to spread news of his complex marital arrangements, along with his rationalizations for them and for the split with Rome they would precipitate.[34]

Monarchs, who fancied their power absolute, often found it humbling to have to appeal to the masses gathered by a printing press. In a pamphlet printed in 1622, James I of England complained that justifying in print his decision to dissolve Parliament required him to "descend many degrees beneath Our Selfe." Nevertheless, James and other monarchs would make that descent again and again in the battle for public support.[35]

The oldest surviving publication printed in Britain's American colonies that might be said to contain news represented an attempt by the government to use the press to influence public opinion. Its title: *A declaration of former passages and proceedings betwixt the English and the Narrowgansets, with their confederates, Wherein the grounds and justice of the ensuing warre are opened and cleared. Published, by order of the Commissioners for the united Colonies: At Boston the 11 of the sixth month 1645.*[36] The oldest surviving example of printed news in all the Americas is a report printed in Mexico City on a storm in Guatemala in 1541.[37]

The government's use of the press was occasionally more duplicitous. In 1571 a pamphlet had appeared in England justifying Queen Elizabeth's arrest of the Duke of Norfolk for participating in an alleged Spanish plot to put Mary, Queen of Scots, on the English throne. The pamphlet announced that it consisted of a letter written by one "R. G." to his brother-in-law. Instead, it is believed to have been composed by Lord Burghley,[38] Elizabeth's chief minister and the engine of Norfolk's demise.

With or without such subterfuges, the views held by governments were being aired in these early newsbooks—in official publications, in subsidized publications and in the publications of other loyal or toadying printers. Usually, however, theirs was the only

side of the argument that was set in print. That pamphlet on the arrest of the Duke of Norfolk, for example, advertised itself as an attempt to "stop the lying and open slaunderous mouthes of the evill and seditious" by explaining "the cause that the Duke of Norffolke is newely commytted to the Towre."[39] But although the claims, or potential claims, of the "evill and seditious" that Norfolk might be innocent (and he was proclaiming his innocence up to the moment he was hanged) must have been on the mind of Lord Burghley as he wrote this newsbook; there is no evidence that this view of events ever received the attention of a printing press. No newsbook survives entitled, for example, *The discoverie and confutation of the tragicall fiction devysed by the Queenes Majestie against a loyall Subject* or *A defence of the honour of the Duke of Norffolke.*

In print, at least, the public was "undeceived" without ever having had the opportunity of being deceived—for authorities combined their use of the early presses with forceful measures designed to ensure that potential enemies could not use them.

Press Controls

Controlling "lying and open slaunderous mouthes" or even handwritten letters seems beyond the power of earthly authorities. Printed reports, however, can be controlled. The printing press may have been the first means of circulating information that would in fact prove mightier than the sword, but it had one great drawback as a weapon: its bulkiness made it difficult to conceal[40] and, consequently, easy for authorities to regulate.

In one particularly energetic effort to evade government controls, a secret Puritan printing press in England from 1588 to 1589 was smuggled from Kingston to Northamptonshire, then to Coventry, then to Wolston Priory. This press had been dismantled again and was on its way to Lancashire when a curious crowd figured out what was in the boxes and called the authorities.[41] Mounting an attack with a printing press would require a secluded, secure location (a colony in America would do nicely). In 16th-century Europe such locations were not readily available to Puritans or to supporters of the Duke of Norfolk, at least not within the boundaries of the countries they were trying to influence.

When they were not exploiting the printing presses themselves, monarchs and their ministers busied themselves monitoring the presses—which were ostensibly in private hands—and making sure the news others printed on them was not, as a British jurist was to put it some years later, "possessing the people with an ill opinion of the government."[42] One of the gentler methods of control they employed was the awarding of exclusive "privileges" to print certain information or even certain types of information. Privileges were distributed as early as 1467 in Berne. In England, Queen Elizabeth excelled in the manipulation of these privileges—shuffling them about among printers, "rewarding here and penalizing there."[43]

Governments also controlled the output of the presses through more straightforward transactions: paying for kind and helpful words. Francis Bacon may have helped earn himself a payment from the queen of 1,200 pounds by writing a pamphlet, in 1601, reporting on the alleged conspiracy against the crown led by his former patron, the popular earl of Essex.[44]

Earthquake or Storm?

It is the oldest surviving news report printed in the Americas—in Mexico City in 1542. And atop the front page of this eight-page newsbook are Spanish words saying "Relation"—a widely used name for early news reports—"of the earthquake." However, the report on this terrible event in Guatemala, written by a notary public named Juan Rodriguez, speaks not of an earthquake but of a "storm . . . so great that floods rushed boulders and trees and those of us that witnessed it were astonished" (Gutiérrez).

Did an earthquake help release those flood waters in the form of a tsunami? Or is this an early example of a misleading "headline"?

European authorities were not adverse to taking sterner measures either. Just before Columbus departed on his first voyage, the Inquisition had begun burning books in Spain. And in 1502 Ferdinand and Isabella required that all printed works be licensed by government or church authorities.[45]

In England, the number of printers was strictly limited. As the simplest route to securing one of the few dozen available positions as a master printer in 16th- and early 17th-century England, printers' widows were in great demand as wives. All works printed in England had to be licensed after the year 1538; printers themselves—through their organization, the Stationers Company—not only registered licensed works but were empowered to inspect each other's shops and warehouses for unlicensed works.[46] In Germany, the Edict of Worms in 1521 required printers to submit to prior censorship and obtain permission to publish from church or government authorities.[47] (The divisions produced in Germany by the Reformation, however, contributed to what one historian calls "a great glut of pamphlet-type printed matter.")[48] In France, the regulations were as stiff or stiffer. After 1561 flogging became the penalty for disseminators of defamatory or seditious broadsides or pamphlets the first time they were caught, and death the penalty for recidivism.[49]

Under Tudor rule in England, one printer was put to death—William Carter, a Roman Catholic convicted of having printed an allegorical attack on the queen's religious policies. In fact, the targets of most of these controls on the press were tracts inspired by dissident religious beliefs.[50] Religion was a subject that caused many a printer to risk a fine, a jail sentence, a flogging or even death in 16th-century Europe. Political issues independent of religious beliefs, to the extent that political opinion was able to organize itself unaided by religious feelings, do not often seem to have inspired such passion.[51] And the mere commercial advantage presented by some bit of news, say, an exclusive on the real explanation for the Duke of Norfolk's arrest, was rarely of sufficient worth to risk the wrath of authorities.

The bonds restricting printers would bend and break in succeeding centuries as printers swelled with belief in such political causes as the rights of Parliament, the rights of the people and even the liberty of the presses. In the 17th century, England would move from rigid press controls to a period of press freedom during the civil war in the

1640s, then back again. In France, between the years 1600 and 1756 more than 800 authors, printers and booksellers would cause sufficient discomfort to the government to be thrown into the Bastille.[52]

Even in the 16th century there were some cracks in the censorship on the Continent, with its easily penetrable borders. And English eyes, despite the island's greater isolation, could not be completely protected from provocative print. During the brief reign of Queen Mary (1553–1558), for example, the Protestant forces, suddenly the object of persecution themselves, were able to smuggle into England a number of pamphlets favorable to their cause.[53]

Nevertheless, most 16th-century printers and newswriters—unburdened by a cause worthy of smuggling or martyrdom, intimidated, if not actually imprisoned, by testy authorities—were content to take the hand of the monarch and respectfully, if occasionally rambunctiously, follow along.

A Fear of Controversy

The presence of the licenser, hovering over the early newsbooks, seems most palpable when the topics these publications underplayed or ignored are considered.

Perhaps the major continuing news story in Europe in the 16th century was the war with the Turks, who were battling for territory in southern and eastern Europe. The hysteria with which news of their advances was greeted can be seen in the title of one of the many German newsbooks published in 1529 on the Turkish attack on Vienna: *The siege of Vienna in Austria by the most terrible tyrant and destroyer of Christianity, the Turkish Emperor known as Sultan Suleiman. . . .*[54]

The Turks entered a Europe that was poorly prepared to resist their progress but increasingly well prepared to report on it. One bibliographer, Carl Göllner, has located 33 publications discussing Suleiman's siege of Vienna, printed across Europe in French, German, Italian and Latin. Altogether Göllner lists 2,463 surviving publications printed in Europe from 1501 to 1600 on the wars with the Ottoman Empire. Some are just essays, arguing, for example, that the "cruell power of the Turkes, bothe may, and ought for to be repelled [by] the Christen people," as one English pamphlet in 1542 put it.[55] But most of these publications did present their readers with fresh information on the battles or treaties; most contained news.

The battle in 1571 at Famagusta, a heavily fortified Venetian outpost on Cyprus, proved one of the more significant in this long struggle, not so much because of its results—the Turkish siege of the town succeeded—but because allegations of Turkish atrocities after Famagusta's fall helped spur Venice, Spain, and the pope to merge their fleets to fight the "cruell power of the Turkes." The newsbook that appeared in England in 1572 recounting details of this battle and some of the atrocities that followed, *The true Report of all the successe of Famagosta . . .*, provides a good indication of how international news made its way onto the early printing presses. It contains a letter from "Earle Nestor Martinengo," who had survived the siege, to the "Duke of Venice." The letter, originally printed in an Italian newsbook,[56] was "Englished out of Italian" for this pamphlet.

Martinengo's report was filled with remarkable detail. The newsbook includes sections on each of the six Turkish assaults on Famagusta. "They battered and holde with so great rage," he explains in his account of the third assault, "that on the 8 of July, with the same night also, was numbered 5000 cannon shot." When the outpost surrendered, Martinengo reports that he managed to hide where he could observe the treatment of the prisoners at the hands of the Turkish general: ". . . they being unarmed . . . and bound, were lead one by one into the market place, before hys pavilion, being presently cutte and hewen in sunder in his presence." Martinengo himself was, according to his letter, able "to geve . . . the slippe, and to flye"—escaping in a small boat with a "saile made of two shirtes."[57]

This English newsbook on the siege of Famagusta, however, is the exception that proves an important rule. Göllner found a total of eight English publications that appear to contain news of battles against the Ottoman Empire (they appeared from 1532 to 1593). Of those, seven report on "most Noble victorie[s] of the Chrestiens over the armie of the great Turke." Famagusta is the *only* Turkish victory reported on in any of these surviving pamphlets.[58] The European armies hardly achieved a victory rate of seven to one in their efforts to check the Turkish advance; the reverse would be closer to the truth. Bad news for "the Chrestiens" was clearly being underreported.[59] Reports of invasion by the infidels have impact, but news of victory of the infidels must have been unwelcome to readers and authorities, and therefore to printers. It should be noted that Suleiman's siege of Vienna in 1529, which attracted so much attention in European newsbooks, was unsuccessful.

Controversy connected with matters of state, normally a magnet for newsmongers, was a warning for these printers to back off. Military defeats suffered by their motherland or fatherland must have been considered too touchy to handle; most were simply not reported. J. P. Seguin lists nearly 120 surviving reports on battles printed in France from 1498 to 1559, but his list includes no contemporary publications reporting, for example, on the decisive French defeat at Pavia in 1525 in which King Francis I was taken prisoner.[60] A fear of controversy may also explain why no printed epitaph marking the death in 1601 of the once-popular earl of Essex was registered in England until after the death in 1603 of the woman who had him executed—his former benefactor, Queen Elizabeth.[61]

News from abroad was generally less controversial than news from home—one reason English readers seemed better supplied with printed news on French politics than on their own politics. Matthias Shaaber, who in 1929 produced the most thorough study of printed news in England before the newspaper, found evidence of 38 English publications reporting on French affairs in 1590, the year of King Henry IV's greatest successes against the Catholic League. Not all foreign news was safe to handle, however. English printers apparently chose to ignore Henry's conversion to Catholicism in 1593,[62] and Turkish victories on the Continent, though they did not represent direct defeats for English armies, were certainly underplayed.

Comments on the workings of government made by those *outside* the government are also conspicuous in their absence from these early publications. We can occasionally read Queen Elizabeth's thoughts on her actions or policies: *A Declaration of the Causes mooving the Queenes Maiestie . . . to . . . send a Navy to the Seas, for the defence of her Realmes against the King of Spaines forces,* for example.[63] We cannot read the

thoughts on those actions or policies of others not involved in their formulation.[64] In fact, two fully articulated positions almost never confront each other in these pamphlets and broadsides; instead, the government position wrestles with the "slaunderous" arguments of "evill and seditious" phantoms.

Dissent was not completely silenced in the 16th century—it survived in unchecked rumors, uncensored personal letters and the occasional smuggled pamphlet. Nonetheless, the control of lawfully printed news reports does appear to have been remarkably successful. With few exceptions (most the work of dedicated and print-savvy proponents of the Protestant "heresies" or, where the "heresies" had become orthodoxies, of "Papists"), the press was not available to those who challenged authority. Shaaber suggests that "practically without exception [the] tenor and the purport" of these publications "were such as the authorities themselves would have contrived had they been the authors and publishers."[65]

Chauvinism—The News Ballad

On Aug. 10, 1588, a ballad, signed T. D., about a skirmish with the Spanish armada 12 days earlier, was registered with the Stationers Company. It focused on the capture of a Spanish warship:

. . . The chiefest Captaine,
of this Gallion so hie:
Don *Hugo de Moncaldo* he,
within this fight did die.
Who was the Generall,
of all the Gallions great:
But through his braines w' pouders force,
a Bullet strong did beat.
And manie more,
by sword did loose their breath:
And maine more within the sea,
did swimme and tooke their death,
There might you see
the salt and foming flood:
Died and stained like scarlet red,
with store of Spanish blood. . . .[66]

Poetry, especially poetry worthy enough to mount a printing press, has climbed to such rarefied heights in our culture that it infrequently traffics in issues as blunt and as public as news.[67] However, a species of poet in earlier centuries was employed recording news of warring states and earthquakes, instead of mental states and landscapes. In fact, these topical ballads formed a considerable part of the output of the early presses.[68]

Three months after it was written, Columbus' letter was printed for the first time in the Tuscan language—transformed into 68 stanzas of verse by the Florentine theologian and poet Giuliano Dati.[69] In France, printed news ballads appeared alongside newsbooks from the reign of Charles VIII to the end of the 19th century.[70] In England, printers and poets frequently teamed up to disseminate information.

Of course, current events were far from the only concerns of the ballads that appeared in print. Their authors might wax poetic on the legendary adventures of Robin Hood as well as on a naval battle. Folk tales, moral instruction, romances, comic portraits, bawdy stories—all found their way into printed verses. Nonetheless, a large portion of these rhythmic, rhyming lines of print—perhaps the largest portion—was devoted to news.[71]

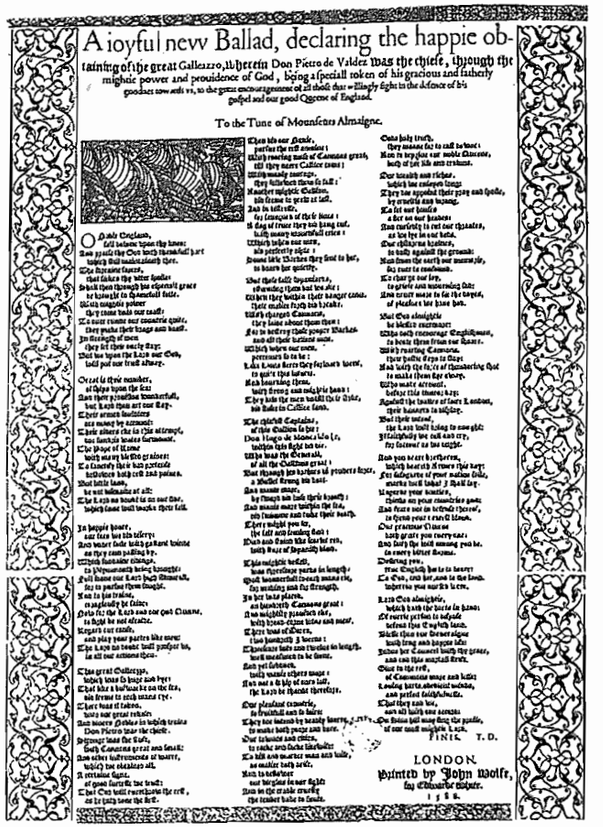
The debt these printed ballads owed to spoken news is clear. They were written to be performed aloud. Most included the name of a popular tune to which they could be sung and were printed on a single side of a large sheet—a broadside—so that they were easy to hold while reciting or singing. Literary exercises they were not. News was worked into verse for one reason: to make it more entertaining—especially for the large majority of the population whose tastes had been shaped by exposure to oral rather than written forms of communication. Ballad singers—part newsboy, part street musician—would sell the ballads in the streets or from stalls for a penny a copy. "Ballads! My masters, ballads! Will ye ha' any ballads o' the newest and truest matter in all London?"—is the way one 17th-century satirist rendered their cry.[72] A couple of verses might then be warbled as a sampler.

The author of one of these ballads could expect to be rewarded with 40 shillings, plus a bottle of wine.[73] Many of these rhyming journalists remained anonymous, but a few achieved a degree of fame, or infamy.[74] Among the best known was the man who signed his compositions T. D. "Thomas Deloney, the Ballatting Silke-Weaver [his previous career], of Norwich hath rime inough for all myracles," wrote Thomas Nash in 1596.[75] Another contemporary referred to Deloney more pointedly as "T. D. whose braines beaten to the yarking up of Ballades."[76]

Deloney wrote poems for print on subjects of "mere amusement," on historical events, on social issues and on contemporary events such as the confrontation with the armada. He tackled enough of the latter, with enough skill, to be considered, according to the editor of his collected works, the most popular "ballad journalist" of his day.[77]

Of 23 English printed ballads on the Spanish armada that have left evidence of their existence, three are by Thomas Deloney. In a second news ballad registered in London on Aug. 10, 1588, the poet descants upon some unusually timely news: Queen Elizabeth's visit to the troops gathered at Tilbury to defend the country against the possible Spanish invasion. The queen had left the camp at Tilbury only one day earlier, on Aug. 9.[78] In her attempt to inspire her soldiers there, Elizabeth was said to have delivered one of her more memorable lines: "I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king."[79] Deloney, perhaps operating under unusual deadline pressure, either missed that quote completely (assuming it was not simply apocryphal) or mangled the stomach metaphor:

And then bespake our noble Queene,
my loving friends and contriemen:
I hope this day the worst is seen,
that in our wars ye shall sustain,



A ioyful newv Ballad, declaring the happie obtaining of the great Galleazzo, wherein Don Pietro de Valdez was the chiefe, through the mightie power and providence of God, being a speciall token of his gracious and fatherly goodnes now vnto vs, to the great encouragement of all those that willingly fight in the defence of his gospel and our good Queene of England.

To the Tune of Mounsieurs Almaigne.

LONDON
Printed by Iohn Wolfe, for Edwarde white.
1588.

Before the first European printed newspapers, major news events were discussed in printed pamphlets or broadsides, often written in verse. This "news ballad" by Thomas Deloney, printed in London in 1588, reports on a skirmish between the English navy and the Spanish armado.

But if our enimies do assaile you,
never let your stomackes faile you.
For in the midst of all your troupe,
we our selves will be in place:
To be your joy, your guide and comfort,
even before your enimies face.[80]

Some accuracy in such news ballads must inevitably have been sacrificed to the exigencies of form. Elizabeth might, at the very least, have been surprised to find herself in Deloney's verses singing to her troops to the tune of something called "Wilsons *Wilde*."

These news ballads also listed heavily in the direction of chauvinism. Indeed, the tendency of news to reflect the prejudices of a society seems particularly apparent when it is arrayed in verse. Deloney's report on the queen's progress to and through the camp at Tilbury, for example, includes no mention of the difficulties her officers met with in gathering sufficient troops and supplies.[81] More significantly, although Deloney's account of the bullet the English put through the head of Don Hugo de Monçada, captain of that Spanish galleass run aground near Calais, appears to be correct, his claim earlier in that poem that the Spanish sailors had deceived the English with a false white flag does not jibe with historical accounts of the incident. Moreover, while historians report that British sailors appeared ready to plunder French civilians in the area of that battle, Deloney, if he knew about this "rude" behavior[82] by the queen's Navy, ignored it.

These apparent distortions or omissions in Deloney's reports must have owed something to the fact that his ballads were subject to government regulations (beginning with the need to register them with the Stationers Company). Europe's newswriters and printers were well aware of the aversion of Europe's rulers to seeing their slipups and setbacks published. (Had the armada fared better against the British fleet, far fewer English printers would have dared set ballads in type.) Eight years later, in a lapse of judgment, or perhaps even a display of honest concern, Deloney composed a ballad on a famine, *Complaint of great Want and Scarcity of Corn* (it has not survived). And England's best-known ballad maker apparently was forced into hiding to escape the wrath of authorities.[83] But fear alone does not explain the chauvinism that colors so many early printed news reports.

Deloney's final ballad on the confrontation with the armada, registered on Aug. 31, appears to contain little more than propaganda. It is titled: *A new Ballet of the straunge and most cruell Whippes which the Spanyards had prepared to whippe and torment English men and women: which were found and taken at the overthrow of certaine of the Spanish Shippes, in July last past, 1588.* (The lengthy titles that sat atop such publications told much of the story themselves.)

. . . One sort of whips they had for men,
so smarting fierce and fell:

As like could never be devisde
by any devill in hell . . .[84]

Given the waves of panic and pride that were breaking on the island's shores that summer, as the British Navy at once saved the motherland and made itself master of the seas, Deloney's equation of Spaniards and devils hardly seems surprising. Those who spread news—in verse or in prose—are immersed, by the nature of their profession, in the day-to-day thoughts of a society. It would take more detachment than humans can generally muster to avoid being swayed by those thoughts—especially when they reach wartime intensity (and especially in the days before the mustering of detachment was in vogue.)

Deloney certainly has had company in his patriotism and xenophobia. A random selection from the work of journalists living in virtually any country at war, no matter how free its press, could fill an anthology on jingoism. When a society falls into step, most journalists are too responsive to the stirrings of the crowd and too susceptible to martial music to do anything but grab a drum and join the parade. At these times government controls seem almost superfluous.

The inspirational efforts that pour from the pens of such loyal and committed journalists (and the stanzas and choruses of the news ballad provided a particularly suitable

Public Journalism

Public—or civic—journalism was an influential and controversial movement in late 20th century American newsrooms. The idea, originally put forward by Jay Rosen of New York University, is that journalists have a responsibility that extends beyond simply serving as "watchdogs" on the government—always cynical, constantly alert for evidence of malfeasance. The journalist's responsibility, public journalism's advocates argued, is instead to improve the dialog on civic issues, to help create a public capable of serving as a positive force in the process of governing.

Critics of public journalism feared that it would lead to a situation in which journalists spend more time organizing town meetings and reading public opinion polls than they do uncovering facts. They feared that it would make it easier for journalists to succumb to the ever-present temptation to go easy on those they cover and to become cheerleaders for their communities.

In some ways the role of facilitator of public dialog is an earlier role for journalists than that of watchdog. The first print journalists were not allowed to discuss the mistakes of their country's rulers. But they did manage—subtly and over time—to create a situation in which sections of the public felt informed on political issues and therefore in a position to take a stand on those issues. Historically, in other words, journalists have contributed to radical political change in both roles.

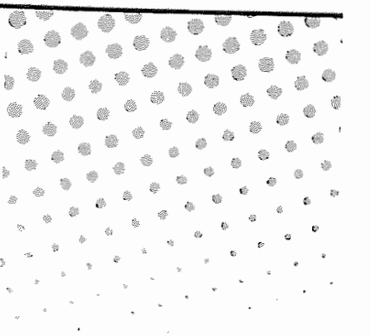
receptacle for their outpourings) also have a commercial advantage: An inspired audience is an enthusiastic audience. Chauvinism, in a word, sells.

In spreading news of provocative events such as Columbus' voyage with unprecedented reliability to unprecedented crowds, those who used the printing press for journalistic purposes in the first centuries after Gutenberg invented it may have helped overturn some prejudices and truly "undeceive" some minds. But more commonly newsbook writers and ballad makers exhibited a failing common to most newsmongers: Acceding to pressure from authorities and to their own rooting and commercial interests, they tended to provide their audiences with a version of what their audiences wanted to hear.

In time, the political landscape would change radically in lands irrigated by the printed word. Does this early printed news, most of it so politically timid and nonabrasive, deserve some credit for the erosion over the centuries of the authority of the old regimes of Europe and the spread of new political ideas? Probably. The printing press began amplifying the flow of news to the point where the members of these societies would gain more than a sense of participation in their societies, to the point where they would gain a sense of power. Printed news ballads on the successes of a navy increase the number of elements within a society able to share in those successes, but do they not also increase the number prepared to debate decisions affecting that navy?

As King James I and his fellow autocrats descended to place their views in print, their readers gradually began to ascend. These readers would gain a title—the public—and gain, en masse, a role in determining the legitimacy of those who attempted to govern them. Heresies and rebellions could be excised from early newsbooks and news ballads, but the development of a widening group of readers with an acknowledged interest in politics would contribute to greater heresies and more successful rebellions.

Questions



1. How might the world have been different if there had been a printing press in Greenland waiting for Leif Eriksson when he returned from "Vinland"?
2. Give examples from the past 10 years of news management and manipulation like that undertaken by Europe's rulers in the first centuries of printing.
3. News media today are often accused of emphasizing bad news, and in many ways this is true. Are there any types of stories today, however, where good news receives more attention than bad? Why?
4. To what extent can a bias similar to the chauvinism discussed in this chapter be found in news reports today?