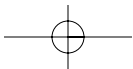
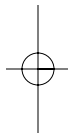
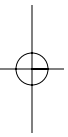


PART II

Print Media



CHAPTER 4 Newspapers

Sometimes comic books are pretty close to real life. In 1999, mild-mannered reporter Clark Kent (aka Superman), Lois Lane, Jimmy Olsen, and Perry White lost their jobs when Superman's archrival, Lex Luthor, bought the *Daily Planet* and shut it down. In its place, Luthor started a website: www.lex.com.

The *Planet* eventually reopened, but that's another story. What's important for this chapter is the question posed by this comic book story line: What will happen to traditional newspapers in the age of the Internet? At the start of the new millennium, the newspaper industry was still struggling with this question. Almost all newspapers had started websites, and many had expanded their sites into more than just online versions of the paper. The result was an industry whose economic fortunes

looked good in the short term but whose long-term prospects were still cloudy. Some of the trends that signaled trouble in the future included a continuing decline in readership, increased competition from electronic media and Internet news providers, and increased costs of raw materials. Despite these disquieting trends, newspapers continued to be highly sought-after investments, profit margins were healthy, and advertising revenue

continued to rise. As we have mentioned before, the emergence of a new mass medium seldom kills off the existing media. Instead, existing media change and adapt. The newspaper business is currently going through this period of transition. This chapter looks at the history, structure, features, economics, and future of this seemingly paradoxical industry as it moves into the digital age.



Is this the future of the newspaper? A foldable, updatable, eight-page prototype that uses electronic paper and electronic ink. (Evan Kafka)

HISTORY

Journalism in Early America

Before we get to the details, it might be helpful to identify some general features of newspapers in early America:

- There were few papers.
- Printers and postmasters did most of the early publishing.
- News was not as timely as it is today.
- The idea of a free press was not endorsed by colonial governments.

In 1690, Boston printer Benjamin Harris published the first American newspaper, *Publick Occurrences both Foreign and Domestick*. One of the items in the paper alleged an affair between the king of France and his son's wife. This news story infuriated the Puritan officials of the colony, and they shut down the paper after one issue. The notion of a free press had yet to surface in America; most colonists believed that a paper had to have royal consent to be published.

Fourteen years later, John Campbell, the local Boston postmaster, published the *Boston News Letter*. Published with royal permission, the paper was dull and lackluster, with many news stories simply reprinted from European papers. Campbell's paper had only about 300 subscribers and never made a profit.

A few years later, another Boston paper, the *New England Courant*, came on the scene. Published by James Franklin, Ben's older brother, the paper was

published without government permission. Eventually, the elder Franklin's paper got him into trouble with the local authorities and he was thrown into prison. Ben took over and the paper prospered under his leadership. Ben eventually moved on to Philadelphia where he started the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, which boasted such innovations as more legible type, headlines, and a cleaner layout.

Ben Franklin retired from a successful publishing career at the age of 42. During his career, he had started several papers, published one of America's first magazines, run the first

Benjamin Franklin became the publisher of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* in 1729, when he was 24 years old. The paper became the most successful colonial newspaper, and Franklin became the best-known colonial journalist and publisher. (Brown Brothers)



editorial cartoon, proved that advertising copy could sell merchandise, and, perhaps most important, demonstrated that journalism could be an honorable profession.

■ The Beginnings of Revolution

Tensions between the colonies and the Crown were rising during Franklin's tenure as publisher, and this controversy sparked the development of the early press. One example of this tension was the trial of John Peter Zenger. Zenger published a paper openly critical of the British governor of New York. The governor threw Zenger into jail and charged him with criminal libel. Zenger's lawyer argued that no American jury should feel bound by laws formed in England, and Zenger was acquitted, striking a symbolic blow for press freedom.

Newspapers grew in numbers during the Revolutionary War, and most were partisan, siding with the colonies or with the Crown. This period marked the beginnings of the **political press**, which openly supported a particular party, faction, or cause.

In 1776, when the Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence, the text of the document was published in the *Pennsylvania Evening Post* on July 6, 1776. The next year the Continental Congress authorized Mary Katherine Goddard, publisher of the *Maryland Journal*, to print the first official copies of the declaration with the names of the signers attached. Under Goddard's direction, the *Journal* became one of the leading colonial papers during the war. Goddard was one of about 30 women who printed or published colonial newspapers.

■ The Political Press: 1790–1833

The politicization of newspapers did not end with America's victory in the Revolutionary War. Instead, partisan leanings of the press were transferred into another arena—the debate over the powers of the federal government. The participants in this controversy included some of the best political thinkers of the time: Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, John Jay. Newspapers were quick to take sides in this debate, and their pages were filled with Federalist or anti-Federalist propaganda. Heated political debate gave way to name-calling and quarreling between these two groups, and the content of many newspapers became colored by volatile and inflammatory language.

At the vortex of this debate between Federalists and anti-Federalists was the Constitution of the United States. Although the original document made no mention of the right of a free press, the Bill of Rights did contain such a provision. The **First Amendment** held that "Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press." Thus the idea of a free press, which had grown during the Revolutionary period, became part of the law of the new nation when Congress ratified this amendment in 1791.

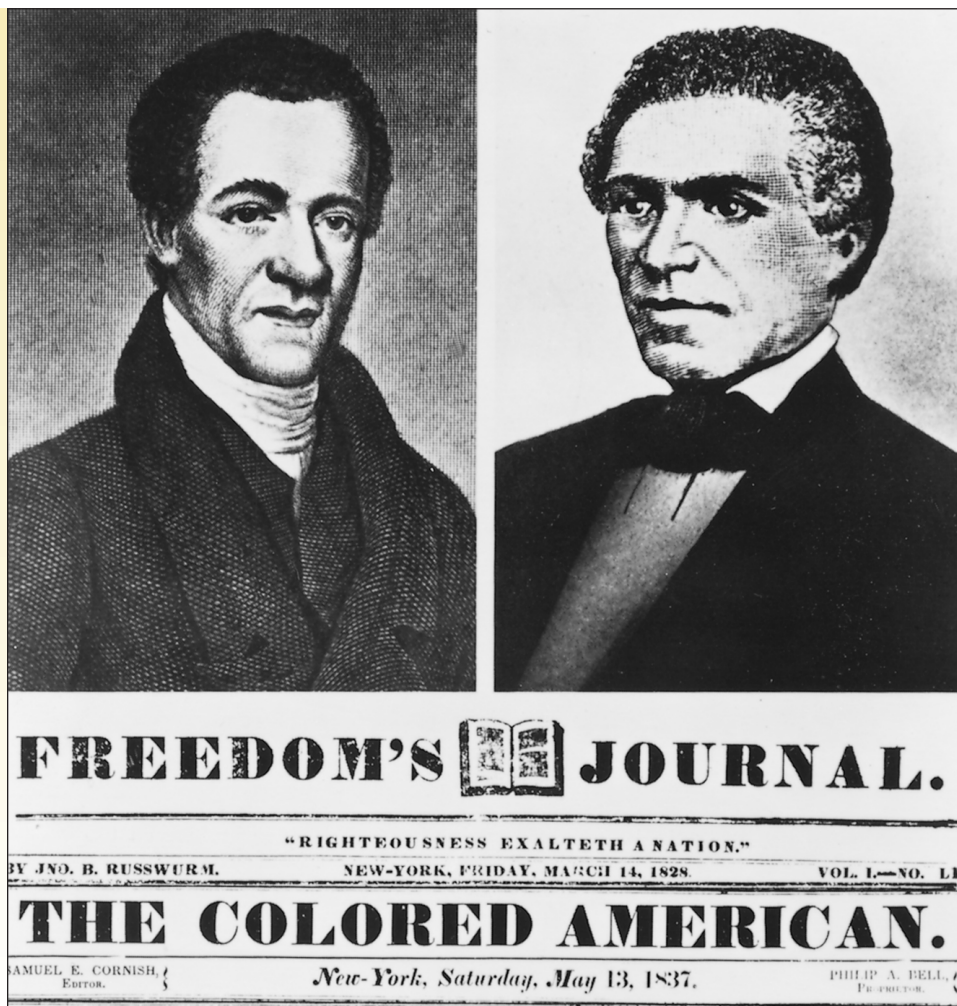
Newspapers grew with the country in the first 20 years of the new century. The daily newspaper began in 1783 and grew slowly. By 1800, most large cities had at least one daily paper. By 1820, there were 24 dailies, 66 semi- or tri-weeklies, and 422 weeklies. These newspapers were read primarily by the upper socioeconomic classes; early readers had to be literate and possess money to spend on subscriptions (about \$10 per year or six cents an issue—a large sum when you consider that during those years, five cents could buy a pint of whiskey). The content was typified by commercial and business news, political and congressional debates, speeches, acts of state legislatures, and official messages.

Politics was still the main focus of many of the nation's papers, and several sent correspondents to Washington to report political news. James Gordon Bennett, whom we shall meet again later, covered Washington for a New York paper. The first woman to achieve recognition as a political journalist was Anne Royall, who published two papers in Washington between 1831 and 1854. Royall was a crusader for free speech and state's rights, and campaigned against graft and corruption.

During this period, several newspapers arose in response to the needs and interests of minority groups. *Freedom's Journal*, the first of over 40 black newspapers published before 1860, was founded in the late 1820s by the Reverend Samuel Cornish and John Russwurm. Written and edited by blacks, the paper championed the cause of black people by dealing with the serious problems arising from slavery and by carrying news of foreign countries such as Haiti and Sierra Leone that appealed to its black audience.

At about the same time, in 1828, another minority group, the Cherokee Indian nation, published the *Cherokee Phoenix*, written in both Cherokee and English.

Two early examples of the black press: *Freedom's Journal* was started in 1827 by John Russwurm, the first black to graduate from a college in the United States, and by Samuel Cornish. Cornish later edited *The Colored American*, a paper that had subscribers from Maine to Michigan. (Schomburg Center for research in Black Culture, The NYPL)



When the Cherokees were evicted from their home in Georgia and resettled in Oklahoma, a new paper, the *Cherokee Advocate*, was started and continued to operate until 1906.

■ Birth of the Mass Newspaper

Several conditions had to exist before a mass press could come into existence:

1. A printing press had to be invented that would produce copies quickly and cheaply.
2. Enough people had to know how to read to support such a press.
3. A mass audience had to be present.

In 1830, the U.S. firm R. Hoe and Company built a steam-powered press that could produce 4,000 copies per hour. This and subsequent steam-powered presses that were even faster made it possible to print an extremely cheap newspaper that everybody could afford.

The second element that led to the growth of the mass newspaper was the increased level of literacy in the population. The first statewide public school system was set up during the 1830s. The increased emphasis on education led to a concomitant growth of literacy as many people in the middle and lower economic groups acquired reading skills.

The third element was more subtle and harder to explain. The mass press appeared during an era that historians call the age of Jacksonian democracy, an age in which ordinary people were first recognized as a political and economic force. Property requirements for voting had died out. Every state but one chose presidential electors by popular vote. In addition, this period was marked by the rise of an urban middle class. The trend toward democratization of business and politics fostered the creation of a mass audience responsive to a mass press.

■ The Penny Press

Benjamin Day was only 22 years old when he launched the mass-appeal *New York Sun* in 1833. Day's idea was to sell his daily paper for a penny (a significant price reduction from the six cents a copy for other big-city dailies). Moreover, the *Sun* contained local news, particularly those items that featured sex, violence, and human-interest stories. Conspicuously absent were stodgy political debates. Day's gamble paid off as the *Sun* attracted readers, and the **penny press** was launched.

Others imitated the *Sun's* success. The colorful James Gordon Bennett launched the *New York Herald* in 1835, which was an even more rapid success than the *Sun*. The *Herald* introduced a financial page, a sports page, and an aggressive editorial policy that emphasized reform.

Another important pioneer was Horace Greeley. His *New York Tribune* appeared in 1841 and ranked third behind the *Herald* and *Sun* in circulation. Greeley used his editorial pages for crusades and causes. He opposed capital punishment and gambling and favored trade unions and westward expansion.

Greeley also favored women's rights. In 1845, he hired Margaret Fuller as literary critic for the *Tribune*. In addition to her commentary on the fine arts, Fuller published articles dealing with the hard lot of prostitutes, women prisoners, and the insane. Greeley's decision to hire Fuller is typical of his publishing philosophy: Like Fuller, he never talked down to the mass audience and attracted his readers by appealing to their intellect more than to their emotions.

Front page of the *New York Sun*: Benjamin Day's reliance on advertising for revenue is illustrated by the several columns of classified ads appearing on the front page. (Courtesy of the NY Historical Society, NYC)

The last of the major newspapers of the penny-press era that we shall consider began in 1851 and, at this writing, is still publishing. The *New York Times*, edited by Henry Raymond, promised to be less sensational than the *Sun* or the *Herald* and less impassioned than Greeley's *Tribune*. The paper soon established a reputation for objective and reasoned journalism.

Finally, all these publishers had one thing in common. As soon as their penny papers were successful, they doubled the price.

Significance of the Penny Press At this point, we should consider the major changes in journalism that were prompted by the success of the mass press during the period from 1833 to 1860. In short, we can identify four such changes. The penny press changed

1. The basis of economic support for newspapers.
2. The pattern of newspaper distribution.
3. The definition of what constituted news.
4. The techniques of news collection.

Before the penny press, most of a newspaper's economic support came from subscription revenue. The large circulation of the penny papers made advertisers realize that they could reach a large segment of potential buyers by purchasing space. Moreover, the readership of the popular papers cut across political party and social class lines, thereby assuring a potential advertiser a broadly based audience. As a result, advertisers were greatly attracted to this new medium, and the mass newspapers relied significantly more on advertising revenues than did their predecessors.

Older papers were distributed primarily through the mails; the penny press, although relying somewhat on subscriptions, also made use of street sales. Vendors would buy 100 copies for 67¢ and sell them for 1¢ each. Soon it became common to hear newsboys hawking papers at most corners in the larger cities. Since these papers had to compete with one another in the open marketplace of the street, editors went out of their way to find original and exclusive news that would give their paper an edge.

The penny press also redefined the concept of news. The penny press hired people to go out and look for news. Reporters were assigned to special beats: police, financial, sports, and religion, to name a few. Foreign correspondents were popular. Newspapers changed their emphasis from the affairs of the commercial elite to the social life of the rising middle classes.

This shift meant that news became more of a commodity, something that had value. And, like many commodities, fresh news was more valuable than stale news. Any scheme that would get the news into the paper faster was tried. Stories were sent by carrier pigeon, Pony Express, railroads, and steamships as the newspapers kept pace with the advances in transportation. The Mexican War of 1846 made fast news transmission especially desirable, and many newspapers first used the telegraph to carry news about this conflict. All in all, the penny papers increased the importance of speed in news collection.

■ Newspapers Become Big Business

A new reporting technique emerged during the Civil War as telegraphic dispatches from the war zones were transformed into headlines. Because telegraph lines sometimes failed, the opening paragraphs of the story contained the most important facts. If the line failed during a story, at least the most important part would get through. Thus, the “inverted pyramid” style of reporting was developed.

After the war, from about 1870 to 1900, the total U.S. population doubled and urban population tripled. Newspapers grew even faster than the population; the number of dailies quadrupled, and circulation showed a fivefold increase. As a result, newspapers became a big business and some big-city papers were making more than \$1 million a year in profits by the mid-1890s. The thriving newspaper business also attracted several powerful and outspoken individuals who had a profound influence on American journalism. We will consider three: Pulitzer, Scripps, and Hearst.

Joseph Pulitzer came to the United States from Hungary and eventually settled in St. Louis. After a string of unsuccessful jobs, he found he had a talent for journalism and turned the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* into a success. In 1883, he bought the *New York World*. In a little more than three years, Pulitzer increased the paper’s circulation from 15,000 to 250,000.

What was Pulitzer’s formula for success? Pulitzer stressed accuracy. He also introduced practices that appealed to advertisers: more advertising space and ads priced on the basis of circulation. Moreover, he aimed his paper at the large population of immigrants then living in New York by stressing simple writing and lots of illustrations. Pulitzer reintroduced the sensationalized news format of the penny press. The *World’s* pages carried stories about crime, violence, and tragedy. Finally, Pulitzer endorsed the notion that a paper should promote the welfare of its readers, particularly the underprivileged. Although Pulitzer didn’t originate the idea, he certainly put it into practice. The paper crusaded against unsanitary living conditions, corrupt politicians, and big business, all topics that gained Pulitzer many supporters among the working class.

Attempts to reach a working-class audience were not confined to the East. In the Midwest, E. W. Scripps started papers in Cleveland and Cincinnati, both growing industrial cities with large populations of factory workers. The Scripps papers featured concisely edited news, human-interest stories, editorial independence, and frequent crusades for the working class. Scripps pioneered the idea of a newspaper chain. By 1911, he owned 18 papers.

Perhaps the best-known of these three newspaper giants, thanks to the film *Citizen Kane*, was William Randolph Hearst. While Pulitzer was succeeding in New York and Scripps was acquiring papers in the Midwest, 24-year-old Hearst was given control of the *San Francisco Examiner*, thanks to the generosity of his wealthy father. Hearst went after readers by appealing to their emotions. Fires, murders, and stories about love and hate were given splashy coverage. Hearst banked heavily on sensationalism to raise his readership level. It worked. The *Examiner* shot to the number-one position.

■ Yellow Journalism

Hearst, like Pulitzer before him, then invaded the big league—New York City. In 1895, he bought the *New York Journal*. Soon, Pulitzer and Hearst were engaged in a fierce circulation battle as each paper attempted to outsensationalize the other. As one press critic put it, the duel between these two spread “death, dishonor and disaster” all over page one. Sex, murder, self-promotion, and human-interest stories filled the two papers. This type of reporting became known as **yellow journalism**, and whatever its faults, it sold newspapers.

The battle between Pulitzer and Hearst reached its climax with the Spanish-American War in 1898. In fact, many historians have argued that the newspapers were an important factor in shaping public opinion in favor of hostilities. When the battleship *Maine* was blown up in Havana harbor, the *Journal* offered a \$50,000 reward for the arrest of the guilty parties. Circulation jumped over the 1 million mark. War was finally declared in April, and the *World* and the *Journal* pulled out

William Randolph Hearst, the successful publisher of the *San Francisco Examiner* and later the *New York Journal*, employed sensationalism (yellow journalism) to win the circulation wars of the late 1800s. He created a major publishing empire consisting of a chain of newspapers, a wire service, and four syndicates. (Brown Brothers)



all the stops. Hearst chartered a steamer and equipped it with printing presses. He also brought down his yacht and sailed with the U.S. fleet in the Battle of Santiago. The *Journal* put out 40 extras in a single day.

Although the period of yellow journalism was not the proudest moment in the history of the American newspaper, some positive features did emerge from it. In the first place, it brought enthusiasm, energy, and verve to the practice of journalism, along with aggressive reporting and investigative stories. Second, it brought wide exposure to prominent authors and led to some fine examples of contemporary writing. Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Dorothy Dix, and Mark Twain all wrote for newspapers during this period (1880–1905). Further, yellow journalism helped popularize the use of layout and display devices—banner headlines, pictures, color printing—that would go on to characterize modern journalism.

■ The Early Twentieth Century

From 1900 to 1920, consolidation made itself felt in the newspaper business. Although circulation and profits went up, the number of daily newspapers decreased and the number of cities with competing newspapers dropped by 60 percent. What happened?

First, the cost of new technology—Linotype machines, high-speed presses—proved too expensive for many marginal papers. Second, advertisers showed a preference for the paper with the largest circulation in the market. Smaller-circulation papers saw their revenues shrink to the point where they could no longer compete. Third, consolidation had increased profits in the railroad, grocery, and hotel businesses, and newspaper publishers decided it could do the same for them. Consequently, newspaper chains—companies that owned several papers—grew quickly. By 1933, six chains—Hearst, Scripps-Howard, Patterson-McCormack, Block, Ridder, and Gannett—controlled 81 dailies with a combined circulation of more than 9 million, about one-fourth of all daily circulation.

Appearing with the consolidation trend and enjoying a short but lively reign was **jazz journalism**. At the end of World War I, the United States enjoyed a decade of prosperity: the Roaring Twenties. The radio, Hollywood, the airplane, Prohibition, and Al Capone all captured national attention. The papers that best exemplify jazz journalism all sprang up in New York between 1919 and 1924. All were characterized by two features: (1) They were **tabloids**, printed on a page that was about one-half the size of a normal newspaper page; and (2) they were all richly illustrated with photographs.

The *New York Daily News* debuted first. After a slow start, by 1924 the *News* had caught on. Its tabloid size was easy for people to handle while reading on buses and subways; it abounded with photos and cartoons; writing style was simple and short. The biggest content innovation of the *News* and the most noticeable was the lavish use of pictures. The entire front page was frequently given over to one or two pictures, and a two-page photo spread was included on the inside.

■ The Impact of the Great Depression

The depression had great social and economic impact on newspapers and magazines. During the 1930s, total daily newspaper circulation increased by about 2 million; the total population increased by 9 million. The total income of the newspaper industry, however, dropped about 20 percent in this decade. Marginally profitable papers were unable to stay in business, and approximately 66 dailies went under.

Although worsening economic conditions were one cause of the newspaper's decline, more important was the emergence of radio as a competitor for national advertising dollars. From 1935 to 1940, newspapers' share of national advertising revenues dropped from 45 to 39 percent, while radio's share jumped from 6 to more than 10 percent. By 1940, however, thanks to increased revenue from local advertisers, newspaper revenues were back up. Nevertheless, the economic picture was still not rosy, and the number of daily papers declined to 1,744 in 1945, an all-time low.

■ Postwar Newspapers

After World War II, economic forces continued to shape the American newspaper. Some trends of the postwar period were created by advances in print and electronic technology, but others had begun even before the war. For example, the postwar economy forced the newspaper industry to move even further in the direction of contraction and consolidation. Although newspaper circulation rose from approximately 48 million in 1945 to about 62 million in 1970, the number of dailies stayed about the same. There was actually a circulation loss in cities with populations of more than a million, and several big-city papers went out of business. Moreover, the number of cities with competing dailies dropped from 117 to 37 between 1945 and 1970. This meant that about 98 percent of American cities had no competing papers.

In 1945, 60 chains controlled about 42 percent of the total daily newspaper circulation. By 1970, there were approximately 157 chains that accounted for 60 percent of total circulation. Why had the number of chains continued to grow? One factor was the sharp rise in costs of paper and labor. Newspapers were becoming more expensive to print. The large chains were in a position to share expenses and to use their presses and labor more efficiently. Several papers could share the services of feature writers, columnists, photographers, and compositors, thus holding down costs.

The consolidation trend was also present across media, as several media conglomerates controlled newspapers, magazines, radio, and television stations. Black newspapers were also caught up in the trend toward concentration. In 1956, the *Chicago Defender* changed from a weekly to a daily, and its owner, John Sengstacke, started a group of nine black papers, including the *Pittsburgh Courier* and the *Michigan Chronicle*.

Another continuing trend was the competition among media for advertising dollars. The total amount of advertising revenue spent on all media nearly tripled between 1945 and 1970. Although the total spent on newspapers did not increase at quite this pace, the amount spent on television increased by more than a three-fold factor. The rising television industry cut significantly into the print media's national advertising revenue.

■ Contemporary Developments

Investigative reporting received much attention in the 1970s because of the efforts of *Washington Post* reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein to expose the Watergate scandal, which eventually caused the resignation of President Richard Nixon.

The biggest development of the 1980s was the birth of *USA Today*. Following are some of the innovations sparked by this paper:

MEDIA PROBE Ethel L. Payne

When Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, he invited leaders of the Civil Rights movement to join him in the Oval Office. Only one woman was among the group that witnessed the historic moment—Ethel L. Payne, an African-American journalist who had reported on civil rights for more than a decade.

Ethel L. Payne was the granddaughter of slaves. She originally wanted to become a lawyer but was denied admission to law school because of her race. In 1948, she went to Japan to work with African-American troops who were stationed there. Two years later Payne showed excerpts from her personal journal about the problems of black soldiers to a reporter for the *Chicago Defender* who was visiting Japan. Her stories became a series in the newspaper and launched Payne into a journalism career.

Based in Chicago, she won awards for her coverage of problems in the African-American community. She went to Washington in the mid-1950s to cover the beginnings of the Civil Rights movement. She wrote stories analyzing the historic *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision. Payne made her presence felt at White House press conferences when she asked President

Dwight Eisenhower pointed questions about the lack of progress on civil rights during his administration.

In 1956, Payne covered the arrest of Rosa Parks in Montgomery, Alabama, and the subsequent bus boycott. She reported the big stories of the Civil Rights movement, including the efforts to integrate the University of Alabama, the violence in Little Rock, Arkansas, the confrontation at Selma, Alabama, and the march on Washington in 1965. She was one of the first reporters to interview Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

In 1966, she traveled to Vietnam to cover African-American troops, who were involved in much of the fighting. She later accompanied Secretary of State Henry Kissinger on a six-nation tour of Africa. In 1978, at age 67, she ended her career with the *Chicago Defender* to write a syndicated column. Seven years later she became a leader in the effort to free South Africa leader Nelson Mandela.

Ethel Payne died in 1991. The *Washington Post* published a tribute to her on its editorial page. It praised her for being fair, straightforward, and independent, an assessment probably shared by her millions of readers.

- Splashy graphics and color.
- Short, easy-to-read stories.
- Lots of graphs, charts, and tables.
- Factoids (a *factoid* is a list of boiled-down facts—much like this list).

A somewhat controversial reporting philosophy surfaced in the mid-1990s. **Public journalism** (see Social Issues, “Public Journalism”) embraces the view that newspapers should do more than just report the news; they should try to help communities solve problems and encourage participation in the political process. Some reporters think this philosophy exceeds the established tenets of journalism.

With the exception of the early 1990s, when a weak economy and a depressed advertising market caused several big-city papers to fold, the newspaper industry has enjoyed prosperity. By the late 1990s, layoffs, cost-cutting measures, and an increase in advertising revenue helped newspapers increase their profits.

The late 1990s also saw many newspapers start online editions. This trend continued into the new century as newspapers came to grips with the promises and pitfalls of the Internet.

NEWSPAPERS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

The newspaper industry is still experimenting to find the best way to incorporate an online presence with the traditional print editions. Fearful that online companies such as Yahoo! and Excite would use the web to steal away readers and advertising, many newspapers rushed to set up websites. The earliest newspaper sites were simply watered-down versions of the printed paper. They did little to promote the print version, nor did they generate enough revenue to pay for themselves. In short, for most papers, the website was simply a drain on finances and resources.