



What Good Is Journalism?: How Reporters and Editors Are Saving America's Way of Life

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To go by today's critics of the news media—who have created a virtual cottage industry—American journalism has reached a nadir. Yet with all its well-documented faults, journalism is vital to the health of our democracy, the glue of information that holds this complex nation together. This book shows the most important roles that journalism plays in the world's oldest democracy. Two seasoned educators and practitioners of journalism have assembled a team of writers who look beyond the critics to show that there is much to be praised about the state of American journalism today.

Journalism tells us most of what we know about the world beyond our own experience by going where its audience cannot or will not. It keeps watch on the government and other powerful institutions, exposes wrongdoing and injustice, and shares the endless fascinations of everyday life. Through stories of real people, this book forcefully argues that American journalism is better than its critics admit and a force for good in the lives of both individuals and the nation. Like the exemplary journalism it describes, it offers dozens of instances that show how good journalistic practices enrich the daily lives of citizens and enable them to play their own roles in the democracy.

These essays offer a multifaceted view of the press, tracing the development of free expression through American history and showing how the principles of journalism that we take for granted are playing a revolutionary role in emerging democracies. They report the results of a unique national survey—undertaken for this book—revealing how Americans really view and use the press, and cite the successes of good reporting, from hometown newspapers to NPR. They show how investigative journalism and computer-assisted reporting unearth important truths and even create new knowledge and suggest how citizens can demand the good journalism they need.

What good is journalism? This book spells out the answer through a conversation about journalism and democracy that offers both an antidote to the recent storm of ideologically based criticism of “liberal media” and a demonstration of the true worth of an institution essential to the protection of freedom. It provides today's readers—and tomorrow's journalists—a fresh perspective on the press to remind us where we would be without it.

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