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## Journalists' hostility toward public relations: an historical analysis

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### Abstract

Journalists seem to treat public relations and its practitioners with contempt. However, this tension is complex and no studies have investigated the problem's historic roots. Thus, this paper explores the perspective of "early insiders" through an historical analysis of autobiographies, biographies, and magazine articles written by and about early US newspaper reporters and editors. Results revealed six interrelated factors that contributed to the origins, persistence, and contradictions surrounding the hostility. The paper concludes with practical implications and future research directions.

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### 1. Introduction

Journalists seem to treat public relations and its practitioners with contempt. The negativity currently permeates journalism and is frequently reflected in verbal comments and in printed articles throughout the profession and in academia. For example, in a recent news industry publication, an editor of *The Charlotte Observer* wrote the following regarding PR practitioners: "it's their job to call you about their client, but you don't have to waste your time listening to them; just be polite about it" and "often the stuff they send goes directly into the waste basket."<sup>1</sup> This attitude is puzzling since journalists depend on PR practitioners for information and midway through their careers often accept jobs in public relations. For years, journalists have charged that PR practitioners are unethical, manipulative, one-sided, and deceptive. They also complain that PR practitioners serve special interests rather than the public.<sup>2</sup> PR practi-

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tioners respond that journalists have a narrow and self-righteous view of their work and know little about public relations, a profession in which ethical conduct is important.<sup>3</sup>

The tension between journalists and PR practitioners is long-standing and also complex. It may not persist today in the same way that it has in the past. Important questions remain unanswered. While scholars have examined the current relationship between journalists and PR practitioners, there have been no studies (to our knowledge) that have uncovered the problem's historic roots specifically from the views of "journalism's early insiders" (those individuals who have spent much of their professional lives in news reporting or editing). As noted by Berg, "historical analysis of social knowledge, traditions, and conditions can increase appreciation and understanding of contemporary issues."<sup>4</sup> We believe that gaining insights into journalists' hostility toward PR from the perspective of "early insiders" will assist today's journalists and PR practitioners in better understanding how and why certain prejudices and stereotypes arose. These insights may, in turn, help today's practitioners correct these prejudices and stereotypes either by changing their behavior or by trying to change mistaken attitudes. Thus, the purpose of our paper is to explore the following research questions: (1) What are the origins of journalists' hostility towards public relations from the perspective of "early insiders"? (2) Why has this hostile attitude persisted? (3) Why is the relationship between journalists and practitioners riddled with stereotypes and contradictions?

## 2. Review of the literature

Prior academic work has found that the hostility between journalists and PR practitioners began at the end of World War I, when the newspaper industry started a campaign against "spacegrabbers" (primarily press agents). Journalists feared that publicists' efforts to obtain free publicity would reduce newspapers' advertising revenue. Trade journals lead the battle, urging journalists to discard publicists' handouts.<sup>5</sup> Research by Stegall and Sanders revealed that misunderstandings and stereotypes arose as journalists and PR practitioners tried to define their roles, causing their relationship to become an adversarial one. For instance, reporters often dismissed public relations as "flackery," while many PR practitioners began to view journalists, "as incompetent bunglers who quote out of context and sensationalize the negative."<sup>6</sup> As noted by Kopenhaver, Martinson, and Ryan, hostility between the two groups hurt the public. They explain:

A journalist who will not use information from a public relations person because he or she does not trust *any* practitioner may miss out on some good stories or include incomplete, unclear, or inaccurate information in articles. A practitioner who finds he or she is not trusted simply because of the position he or she holds will find it harder to do a job and may feel forced to use unethical means to get a message to the public. Neither situation benefits the news media, public relations, or society.<sup>7</sup>

### 2.1. *Research on the current relationship*

The topic of source–reporter relations has received substantial attention in the social scientific literature.<sup>8</sup> A critical review by Cameron, Sallot, and Curtin provides a good summary of

this work.<sup>9</sup> Though mainly descriptive in nature, these studies indicate that the source–reporter relationship is tense but complex and that assumptions of outright animosity may be exaggerated and generalized.<sup>10</sup> In one study on the current relationship between journalists and PR practitioners, Sallot, Steinfatt, and Salwen found that journalists and PR practitioners seemed to perceive the worst in each other, but that some differences were based on fact. “In an effort to gain ink and air time,” Sallot, Steinfatt, and Salwen explained, “practitioners continually offer journalists unsolicited assistance in the performance of their jobs. With good reason, journalists perceive that practitioners have self-serving motives for offering this ‘service.’” Still, these researchers concluded that both journalists and PR practitioners are professionals who share similar news values and that both, in their own ways, serve beneficial social roles.<sup>11</sup>

Other scholars have documented current journalists’ dependence on PR practitioners. Turk, for example, found that newspapers were more likely to use than discard the information provided by PR practitioners. Specifically, the newspapers examined in this study used 51% of the news releases distributed by six state agencies, resulting in 183 news stories, or 48% of all the stories published about the agencies.<sup>12</sup> Several other investigations have found that many current PR practitioners were actually former journalists—a fact that may help explain journalists’ and PR practitioners’ shared values (and the practitioners’ success in placing stories).

A conceptual article by Charron characterized the nature of the relationship between journalists and PR practitioners as involving necessary dimensions of both cooperation and conflict. While the struggle for control over the production of news can create political conflict between the two groups, they are interdependent economically and must negotiate and compromise in order to exchange resources and accomplish their goals. Charron emphasized that influence in this negotiation is not unidirectional but flows in both directions between journalists and PR practitioners. He also notes, however, that this influence is not necessarily balanced.<sup>13</sup>

## 2.2. *Research on current trends*

Work by Weaver and Wilhoit revealed that compared to the total US labor force, journalists were, “disproportionately clustered in the 25- to 34-year-old age bracket . . . offering some support for the oft-cited observation that journalism tends to be a younger person’s occupation.” The number of journalists 45 and older was considerably lower than average, suggesting that many journalists left the field in their forties to pursue other occupations.<sup>14</sup>

Clearly, many moved to public relations. For instance, a study by Nayman, McKee, and Lattimore found that nearly two-thirds of the PR practitioners in the Denver area were former journalists and that half the area’s current journalists said they might someday enter the field of public relations.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Fedler, Buhr, and Taylor found that 45% of Central Florida’s former journalists turned to community or public relations, 6% to marketing, and 6% to advertising. Furthermore, the former journalists preferred their new jobs on 19 of 20 variables including freedom, variety, security, challenge, autonomy, and personal satisfaction. The primary advantages were better working conditions and salaries. Overall, former journalists experienced less pressure in their new jobs and enjoyed more opportunities to help people, be creative, advance, experience feelings of achievement, and influence important decisions.<sup>16</sup>

The move from newsrooms to public relations seems certain to continue and possibly even to accelerate due, in part, to declining newsroom morale. Repeated surveys have found that today’s

journalists are burned out, fed-up, and pissed-off.<sup>17</sup> Journalists have always complained about their stress, poor pay, and long hours, but they also dislike current trends in the newspaper industry including stagnant readership; growing domination of large, publicly traded companies; and efforts to cut costs, staffs, and news holes.<sup>18</sup> In fact, a study by Pease found that 46% of the nation's journalists would not want their children to pursue careers in the newspaper industry. Although many journalists cited traditional concerns, some feared that newspapers were becoming obsolete.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, research by the American Society of Newspaper Editors recently revealed that only 46% of the nation's reporters and editors planned to remain in the industry.<sup>20</sup>

### 3. Method

The goals of our study required historical research. In sum, “historical research attempts to systematically recapture the complex nuances, the people, meanings, events, and even ideas of the past that have influenced and shaped the present.”<sup>21</sup> As part of a larger project, the historical analysis reported here involved a comprehensive, detailed, and close examination of multiple data sources including 148 autobiographies, 91 biographies, and approximately 250 magazine articles written by and about early US newspaper reporters and editors. These data sources were selected because they are “preserved” and thus provide the opportunity to study people who no longer exist to be observed or interviewed.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, these sources not only document specific events in these journalists' careers but also record their introspective reflections about experiencing these events.<sup>23</sup> An effort was made to gather as much relevant source material as possible.<sup>24</sup>

Many of the books in this study are described in annotated bibliographies devoted to journalism. The magazine articles examined include those that were written for an audience of fellow journalists (i.e., published in trade magazines such as *The Writer* and *The Journalist*) as well as those that were written for the general public (i.e., published in consumer magazines listed in *Poole's Index to Periodical Literature* and *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*).<sup>25</sup>

Across data sources, our sample includes journalists who worked during the late 1800s (when public relations was emerging as a field) and journalists who worked during the first half of the twentieth century (when public relations was developing into a recognized profession). [Appendix A](#) identifies and provides background characteristics for a portion of our sample of journalism's insiders—the newspaper editors and newspaper reporters quoted in this paper, especially the authors and the subjects of books.

The sample was combined and analyzed as a whole. The analysis process involved carefully evaluating the authenticity of the sources; intense reading and immersion in the materials; and interpreting, categorizing, and synthesizing the data while searching for patterns and themes pertaining to our three research questions.<sup>26</sup>

### 4. Results

Analysis identified six interrelated factors that contributed to the origins of journalists' hostility toward public relations, the persistence of this negative attitude, and contradictions

surrounding the relationship. These interrelated factors are: (1) hunger for publicity; (2) situational context of publicity's origins; (3) methods of early PR practitioners; (4) early criticisms of PR practitioners; (5) journalists' own problems; and (6) journalists' goals and ultimate fate. Each factor will be discussed in turn supported by illustrative examples and quotations from the perspectives and voices (words) of "journalism's early insiders" themselves.

#### 4.1. *Hunger for publicity*

Some Americans have always sought publicity and journalists generally considered them pests.<sup>27</sup> For example, in 1880 Congdon complained that everyone wanted to use his newspaper to print the smallest details of their lives from the birth of their first child to the size of their biggest pumpkin. In his view, the worst offenders were actors, authors, and politicians, "together with all men who have bees in their bonnets."<sup>28</sup>

Although many Americans accused newspapers of intruding upon the sanctity of private life, many of the very same people complained when newspapers failed to report in detail their weddings, parties, dress, and other personal matters. According to Warner, every editor experienced a constant pressure to print, "much more of such private matters than his judgment and taste permit or approve."<sup>29</sup> In 1884, *The Journalist* concluded that reporters encountered two groups of people: one that tried to suppress information and the other that encouraged its publication. Sometimes the people seeking publicity invaded newspapers offices in an effort to advertise themselves and to lobby for causes they favored. For example, unwelcome visitors evaded barriers that were erected to protect Horace Greeley<sup>30</sup> and interrupted his work. Newspaper editors in big cities throughout the United States experienced similar problems.<sup>31</sup>

During the twentieth century, newsroom visitors became even more common. According to Beaman, the 1920s and 1930s were an era of goldfish eaters and flagpole sitters, "with other crack-brained individuals hopping from state to state on pogo sticks just to get their pictures in the paper."<sup>32</sup> Newspaper offices became, "the constant prey of all sorts and kinds of publicity stunts." Editors recognized most of the stunts but were occasionally fooled "by these seekers after the golden fleece of free publicity."<sup>33</sup> On the whole, journalists resisted the efforts of the hordes of lobbyists, toadies, and publicity-seekers trying to invade newsrooms.<sup>34</sup> Even gangsters submitted news releases.<sup>35</sup>

#### 4.2. *Situational context of publicity's origins*

It is difficult to determine when public relations became a recognized industry. Although some historians believe that the discipline emerged after World War I, journalists encountered publicists before the Civil War. Washington Irving staged one of the field's first field stunts in 1809. In the 1830s, P.T. Barnum was a master of ballyhoo and people in business, politics, religion, and education copied his techniques. Circuses and theaters in particular lacked large budgets and found that publicists helped minimize their cost of advertising. By the 1880s, the use of publicists expanded to include hotels, professional sports, railroads, and steamboat lines. Reporters who were poorly paid and overworked, generally welcomed publicists' flattery and favors, especially the free passes to their attractions. Moreover, the prospect of lucrative jobs

in publicity gave reporters something to anticipate. Editors also benefited from the publicists' appearance. With limited staffs and growing news holes, they welcomed well-written handouts, provided they had some news value.<sup>36</sup>

"The press agent grew out of the old advance agent of the circus or traveling theatrical company."<sup>37</sup> According to Kent Cooper, an executive with The Associated Press, everyone who worked for newspapers recalled the circus press agents. The agents talked in extravagant adjectives while submitting extravagantly worded copy about the "greatest show on earth" and carried pockets full of free passes. Editors used the publicists' stories because the public was indeed interested in circuses. Cooper stated, "what the press agent has to tell about his circus is news, and his utterances are usually interesting, even if exaggerated."<sup>38</sup> Julian Ralph, a reporter for the *New York Sun*, recalled first encountering a large publicity apparatus while covering a world's fair in 1893. He said the fair's publicists flooded journalists with glowing material.<sup>39</sup> Seven years later, three former journalists established the first independent public relations firm in Boston.<sup>40</sup> Other men and women then started similar agencies or added publicity departments to existing advertising agencies.<sup>41</sup>

Some observers insist that the public relations industry arose between 1900 and the First World War.<sup>42</sup> Until then, many large corporations apparently enjoyed monopolies, did not seek publicity, and did not care what the public thought of them. Muckrakers and government investigators put large corporations on the defensive. The corporations' executives complained that some stories about them were untrue<sup>43</sup> and they gave journalists carefully prepared response statements. However, because the statements were prepared by amateurs and had little news value, many were edited or discarded. Corporations needed more effective representatives and thus a new profession arose—the public relations counsel, generally called "the publicity man."<sup>44</sup> According to Cooper, many of these first PR practitioners were former journalists.<sup>45</sup>

World War I contributed to the public's skepticism, if not hostility, toward propagandists, yet simultaneously contributed to the growth of the public relations industry. Several writers explained that propaganda was so effective during the war that it became a universal practice.<sup>46</sup> Bernays explained:

The World War left business astounded at what the technique of propaganda had accomplished in the conflict. Not only had it raised men and money for individual governments. There had been propaganda in favor of the love of nations and other propaganda for the hate of other nations—all successful. There had been propaganda to raise morale and other propaganda to break it down. Propaganda—all of it—making its mark on millions of people.<sup>47</sup>

Big corporations competing for the public's dollar and goodwill recognized the techniques' possibilities, "and so there developed a special profession" labeled by Bernays as "the public relations counsel."

By 1923, organizations of all types had publicists.<sup>48</sup> As the field evolved, so did its practitioners' titles. Partly to improve their image, publicists were given more impressive titles, including "director of publicity," "publicity engineer," "public relations counselor," "goodwill ambassador," "vice president," or "assistant to the president."<sup>49</sup> Whatever they called themselves, all PR practitioners sought approximately the same thing—free and profitable advertising for their employers and the goodwill of the public.<sup>50</sup>

### 4.3. *The methods of early PR practitioners*

Early PR practitioners relied on bribes, gifts, and stunts to gain attention and gradually refined their techniques. These methods were often successful but were generally viewed by journalists as deceptive, unethical, or foolish. Each of these techniques will be discussed and supported with examples.

#### 4.3.1. *Bribes*

In the 1800s, some publicists offered journalists cash, a practice that continued through the 1920s and 1930s. However, most journalists agreed that they should not accept money, especially not large sums, from people they wrote about. Moreover, they condemned colleagues who did.<sup>51</sup> For example, in 1858 *The New York Tribune* criticized seven reporters who were paid US\$200 each for services to the city. Another reporter was criticized for accepting a golden-headed cane from a politician, a gold watch from a lawyer, and a weekly salary and free passes from the owner of a theater.<sup>52</sup>

As noted by many authors, the activity of bribing reporters became widespread. Blake found that, “nobody hesitates about trying to bribe a reporter.” For instance, a teacher might offer a reporter US\$1 for a glowing story about a Sunday school class, a traveling minister might leave US\$5 on a reporter’s desk, or a visitor might want a glowing obituary for a relative.<sup>53</sup> Vanderbilt documented that *The New York Herald* was besieged by all kinds of agents seeking space for photographs and news stories about their clients, with some offering reporters large sums to use their material.<sup>54</sup> For example, while working in Paris after World War I, a correspondent was offered one bribe to ignore an accident and another bribe to promote corsets.<sup>55</sup> Police reporters, especially, were tempted by graft. People arrested for drunken driving offered reporters bribes to keep their names out of newspapers, while judges offered reporters bribes to get their names into newspapers. Similarly, attorneys paid reporters for tips about cases they might handle.<sup>56</sup> Other bribes went directly to newspapers’ owners. For example, *The San Francisco Bulletin* received a monthly check for US\$125 from the Southern Pacific railroad and additional checks from a gas company and other corporations, creating an atmosphere of dishonesty that permeated the newspaper.<sup>57</sup>

#### 4.3.2. *Gifts*

Offering gifts to reporters became the popular practice by the early 1900s. The most common gifts included liquor, tickets (e.g., theater events, sporting events), books, railroad passes, Christmas presents, and invitations (e.g., dinners, parties, and clubs).<sup>58</sup> Critics called the gifts a form of petty graft and said they corrupted journalists, tarnished their reputations, and tainted the news because journalists treated their benefactors more kindly.<sup>59</sup> Nonetheless, poorly paid journalists seemed to welcome publicists’ handouts.<sup>60</sup>

#### 4.3.3. *Stunts*

During the early 1900s, “stunts” (i.e., sensational creations that attracted columns of free publicity) became popular. Following a publicist’s advice, a circus might report that several of its most dangerous animals had escaped or an actress might report that her jewelry had been stolen. Publicists announced that other clients eloped, disappeared, or narrowly

escaped death.<sup>61</sup> See [Appendix B](#) for more specific illustrations of publicists' early stunts and fakes.

The “stunt” era was epitomized by the activities of three early PR practitioners—P.T. Barnum, Harry L. Reichenbach, and James S. Moran. P.T. Barnum, the “father of publicity” and “world’s greatest showman,” was a former newspaper editor, understood the press, and earned editors’ goodwill by advertising in their newspapers.<sup>62</sup> As a showman, Barnum flooded newspapers with stories about his amazing new discoveries. He emphasized the unusual, planted lies, indignantly denied his lies, engineered bogus arrests, and filed frivolous lawsuits. Also, to make his stories more credible, Barnum frequently concealed his identity as their source. For example, Barnum acquired Jumbo, “the biggest elephant ever known,” and claimed that it had saved a little girl attacked by a Bengal tiger. To help publicize the attraction during a tour across the country, Barnum gave free rides on its back to children with disabilities, but also to the children of local editors.<sup>63</sup> Hundreds of thousands of people fought for tickets and in 6 weeks Barnum’s receipts totaled US\$300,000.<sup>64</sup>

One of the movie industry’s first PR practitioners, Harry L. Reichenbach, also obtained free publicity by staging practical jokes and hoaxes. “They can’t help printing it,” he said. “When we pull something off it has a genuine news value as far as the eye can see.” He added that he never did anything malicious nor hurt anyone.<sup>65</sup> A colleague, James S. Moran, became known as a prankster and “the last great bunco artist in the profession of publicity.”<sup>66</sup> He, too, worked briefly as a reporter before starting his new career, which spanned four decades (1937 until his retirement in 1985). Moran implemented a variety of zany stunts to gain publicity such as the following: to help a dairy get a cow into print, he dyed it purple;<sup>67</sup> to promote refrigerators, he traveled to Alaska to prove that he could sell an icebox to an Eskimo; and to promote the 1946 movie *The Egg and I*, he sat on an ostrich egg until it hatched (a feat that took 19 days, 4 h, and 32 min).<sup>68</sup>

#### 4.4. *Early criticisms of PR practitioners*

Journalists charged that PR practitioners were inaccurate and unqualified, calling them “fakers,” “flacks,” “propagandists,” and “publicity crooks.” Some journalists compared PR practitioners to pimps. Others accused them of corrupting the nation’s channels of communication and democratic process.<sup>69</sup> An analysis of journalists’ criticisms reveals that four beliefs or perceptions predominated: (1) PR practitioners sought free advertisements for special interests;<sup>70</sup> (2) PR practitioners’ fakes and stunts weakened public confidence; (3) PR practitioners made it more difficult for journalists to report legitimate stories; and (4) PR practitioners violated the basic rules of news writing.

##### 4.4.1. *PR practitioners sought free advertisements for special interests*

Originally, readers were newspapers’ primary source of profit, with advertising a byproduct. After the Civil War, however, advertisements became more important.<sup>71</sup> Journalists complained that PR practitioners tried to obtain free advertisements for their clients. Cooper explained, “Press agents were furnishing, and newspapers were printing gratis, matter that the business office held to be advertising that should be paid for at space rates. It belonged in advertising columns.”<sup>72</sup>



#### 4.4.2. *PR practitioners' fakes and stunts weakened public confidence*

Journalists who were fooled by PR practitioners' stunts and fakes felt stupid but were resentful for other reasons as well. They complained that publicists' stories served special interests rather than the public and feared that the stunts and fakes would weaken the public's confidence in every story. Summarizing journalists' viewpoint, McKernon said:

It is just as wrong morally to invade the strictly news columns with propaganda for a good cause as it is to invade them with propaganda of evil intent. Either invasion falsifies the picture due to the one who pays two or three cents for a newspaper and has a right to expect that what he finds in the strictly news columns will have been influenced by no consideration other than the obligation of the editor to give him the significant news of the day presented with a proper sense of proportion.<sup>73</sup>

#### 4.4.3. *PR practitioners made it more difficult to report legitimate stories*

Journalists added that PR practitioners concealed important facts and made it more difficult for them to see important sources.<sup>74</sup> For instance, when John D. Rockefeller was married the publicity was handled by Ivy Lee, a man who was considered "oddly distrustful of the press." Lee gave journalists some information about the wedding but tried, unsuccessfully, to stop them from attending it.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, journalists accused PR practitioners of hiding bad news and several cited the aircraft industry. For example, when a plane crashed in 1931, airline employees tried to prevent photographers from taking pictures of the wreckage. Airline employees at other wrecks even painted over or scratched out the names on airplanes.<sup>76</sup> Prager, a police reporter, also resented a publicist's cover-up. While working in 1944, he saw one of the country's most famous comedians go free after kicking a pregnant woman in the stomach. When he tried to talk to the comedian, a publicist intervened and the victim was persuaded to drop her complaint making it impossible for Prager to report the story.<sup>77</sup>

#### 4.4.4. *PR practitioners violated the basic rules of news writing*

By the start of the twentieth century, journalists had developed a unique style of writing and they complained that PR practitioners failed to conform to it. Editors wanted stories that were clear, specific, and interesting.<sup>78</sup> To save valuable space, they taught reporters "to state a fact and to state it quickly," cutting reporters' cherished adjectives.<sup>79</sup> Typically, Croly insisted in 1868 that newspapers should be honest and present all the news "regardless of parties or persons, and without the slightest tinge of personal or partisan bias."<sup>80</sup> Editors wanted restraint, not exaggeration. They encouraged the use of nouns and verbs, not adverbs and adjectives. Editor Morton Sonthheimer voiced the following typical statement, "One well-chosen verb packs more power than a string of adjectives and adverbs. Leave the adjectives to the circus press agents."<sup>81</sup> PR practitioners, however, used favorable adverbs and adjectives. In addition, news stories were expected to be accurate, objective, and fair—not bogus.<sup>82</sup> Reporters were trained to see both sides of every issue and to get all the facts.<sup>83</sup> They therefore complained that publicists favored their clients' side instead of presenting both sides of issues.

Briefly, three other factors exacerbated the conflict. First, journalists may have been envious, since PR practitioners seemed to enjoy better salaries and working conditions. Second, they annoyed journalists by repeatedly calling with unimportant stories. Third, journalists felt

that their work of informing the public was noble and pure whereas PR practitioners were propagandists willing to work for anyone able to pay them.<sup>84</sup>

#### 4.5. *Journalists' own problems*

Given journalists' own problems and reputations, some of their criticisms of PR practitioners seem puzzling, even hypocritical. Problems within the newspaper industry contributed to journalists' shift from newsrooms to related fields, including public relations. Whenever journalists gathered the talk moved "to the lack of reward, the hopelessness as to the future, and the general worthlessness of newspaper work as a career." Analysis identified the following five major problems with newspaper work: (1) long hours; (2) lack of job security; (3) unpleasant assignments; (4) incessant work demands; and (5) negative reputations.

##### 4.5.1. *Long hours*

Seltzer found that reporters in Cleveland worked 16–18 h a day when a big story was breaking.<sup>85</sup> Lancaster also found that 12-h days were routine and 15-h days not uncommon.<sup>86</sup> "To work 36 h at a stretch on a big story was not unusual," Sontheimer agreed, "and sometimes there'd be 48 h steady going under pressure."<sup>87</sup> In New York after World War I, Vanderbilt seldom worked fewer than 12 h a day and felt lucky to receive one day off a week. Further, he worked every Christmas, New Year's, Thanksgiving, Fourth of July, and all other holidays.<sup>88</sup> St. John added that reporters often went days with little food and no sleep, calling on reserves of nervous energy to sustain them. To succeed under those conditions, he said, reporters needed a youthful stamina "and the ability to think quickly, move fast, and live on black coffee and cigarettes."<sup>89</sup> As they grew older, journalists unable to maintain that pace saw their incomes dwindle and often were stuck away at a desk.<sup>90</sup>

##### 4.5.2. *Lack of job security*

The work in newsrooms was insecure as well.<sup>91</sup> Periodically to save money, a half-dozen or so employees would get the ax, and Sontheimer said one "would almost surely be an old-timer who'd spent his life with the outfit and couldn't produce much any more."<sup>92</sup> A New York daily newspaper fired 20 employees in one day, and a Boston daily fired seven. Why? "Fundamentally," Wright said, "because of the overwhelming supply of reporters." Wright explained:

An editor in any of the metropolitan centers of today would have no more hesitation, if he chanced to feel in the mood, in ordering out seven or eight men than in hurriedly clearing waste 'copy' from his desk. For he knows that, early next morning, perhaps 20 men, not freshlings but capable writers and copy-handlers, would be in his office beseeching him for the positions vacated, and in a half-hour he could have newcomers doing efficiently the work performed by those ejected the day before.<sup>93</sup>

##### 4.5.3. *Unpleasant assignments*

Some assignments were both difficult and unpleasant. As a beginner in 1912, Miller covered a police court in Chicago's most disreputable section and said:

Every morning the court was jammed, and the cases dealt with almost every kind of human malfeasance—prostitution, perversion, sluggings, stabbings, shootings, burglary, dope addiction, razor fights, and hatchet killings. It was a dreary and disheartening introduction to newspaper work. Nearly every person in the foul, dirty room was vicious and depraved. The place stank with the mingled odors of unwashed bodies, alcoholic breaths, and the cheap perfumery of prostitutes.<sup>94</sup>

Sontheimer, too, found that a police reporter “will meet the underworld, see legs and arms amputated and abdomens opened up . . . touch cadavers, elbow the bereaved and discourse with the despondent.”<sup>95</sup> Worse, journalists witnessed executions and informed sources that relatives had died.<sup>96</sup>

#### 4.5.4. *Incessant work demands*

Because of the work’s constant demands, journalists found it difficult to marry and balance their responsibilities at work and at home.<sup>97</sup> “The reporter’s role was more Spartan than romantic,” King concluded. “His job required a constitution of iron, a bottomless well of energy, and inexhaustible patience merely to cope with working conditions.”<sup>98</sup> Copeland called journalism the hardest profession in the world and one with a high death rate.<sup>99</sup> Journalists enjoyed no Sabbath, no holiday, no day of rest. Rather, newspapers were printed 365 days a year, exhausting their staffs.<sup>100</sup> There were no such things as overtime, vacations, health insurance, severance pay, or pensions.

#### 4.5.5. *Negative reputations*

Early reporters and editors were no great paragons of virtue. Rather, many engaged in the very practices (e.g., faking) that they condemned when conducted by PR practitioners. Through the 1920s and 1930s, journalists were portrayed as coarse, loathsome, loudly dressed, ill mannered, nauseously obtrusive, irresponsible, never entirely clean, and never entirely sober.<sup>101</sup> Walker said there was no great mystery about how journalists acquired the reputation of being heavy drinkers—they drank.<sup>102</sup> When Sontheimer entered the business, he found that every office had at least one drunk on its staff, and some had several who staggered in every payday so drunk that they had to be sent home in a cab.<sup>103</sup>

Journalists’ newsgathering techniques and choice of stories contributed to their sordid reputation. Reporters seemed to invade other people’s privacy, to lie, to fake, and to steal.<sup>104</sup> “Anyone who can’t be a convincing deceiver, who can’t lie with a sincere face, is going to have a heck of a time as a reporter,” Sontheimer said. “There are lots of times when a reporter has to be downright dishonest to get a story.”<sup>105</sup> For years, reporters invented colorful details that made their stories more interesting, a practice called “filling in.” Other reporters invented entire stories, a practice that continued through the 1930s.<sup>106</sup> Still others stole pictures and diaries.<sup>107</sup> Thus, one reporter exclaimed: “The things we do for our papers! We lie, we cheat, we swindle and steal. We break into houses. We’d almost commit murder for a story.”<sup>108</sup> Some newspapers were indeed sensational and emphasized stories about lurid crimes, adultery, and other scandals.<sup>109</sup> Nonetheless, journalists felt superior to PR practitioners.

#### 4.6. *Journalists' goals and ultimate fate*

Another contradiction seems undeniable. While condemning public relations, journalists simultaneously embraced it. In 1889, New York's dailies employed about 500 young reporters, and according to *The Journalist*, "very few of them expect to make the reporting of news a life business."<sup>110</sup> Keller estimated that 90% of the people who entered journalism left it before they became "old."<sup>111</sup> Some reporters advanced at their newspapers and became foreign correspondents or editorial writers. "To become a great editor . . . is a reporter's highest ambition," Vanderbilt said.<sup>112</sup> Kirby disagreed, insisting that most reporters dreamt of fame as short story writers. He found that talented writers from all parts of the United States came to New York, intending to earn a living at newspapers only temporarily, while striving for success as novelists, short story writers, or magazine editors.<sup>113</sup>

Holmes knew two types of reporters: "youngsters who planned to be foreign correspondents or big-name writers, and more mature men, many of whom hoped to buy a country weekly."<sup>114</sup> According to St. John, reporters had three dreams: to write a column with the freedom to say whatever they wanted, to save enough money to buy a weekly, and to buy a quiet farm where they could write books.<sup>115</sup> Despite their dreams, most reporters abandoned the newspaper industry entirely. Many left for law, business, politics, finance, or the theater business.<sup>116</sup> Others became soldiers, professors, or private detectives.<sup>117</sup> Salisbury also found that journalists used their jobs at newspapers as stepping stones to becoming great poets, artists, dramatists, novelists, statesmen, explorers, military heroes, financiers, doctors, and lawyers. However, Salisbury, a cynic, added that a larger number became "press agents, politicians, private secretaries, grocery keepers, druggists, theatrical managers, street car conductors, gamblers, blackmailers, drunkards, opium fiends, paupers, and lunatics."<sup>118</sup>

Journalists often accepted part-time jobs in other fields while still employed at newspapers. As early as 1867, Wilcox declared, "hardly any journalist in New York lives upon his regular salary, eking it out in a dozen ways."<sup>119</sup> Reporters in small towns served as correspondents for newspapers in big cities.<sup>120</sup> They also wrote for magazines and other publications, including encyclopedias.<sup>121</sup> Some in big cities were paid for extra duties (e.g., writing editorials or articles for newspapers' Sunday editions) or reviewed books but typically were given only the books (which they then sold).<sup>122</sup>

During the twentieth century, more and more journalists found part-time jobs as publicists for theaters and other entertainment companies. Typically, each theater had its own press agent.<sup>123</sup> For example, Morehouse handled the publicity for several in Atlanta.<sup>124</sup> "The outside employment newspapermen obtain is usually publicity work," Sontheimer agreed.<sup>125</sup> Hartt also found that poorly paid reporters and editors would "cheerfully act as passionate press agents for theaters."<sup>126</sup>

Although journalism's beginners rarely mentioned public relations as their ultimate goal, a growing number accepted full-time jobs in the field. Journalists became effective practitioners because they understood the media and were able to use their contacts in newsrooms.<sup>127</sup> Newsroom observers began noticing the trend as early as the 1890s.<sup>128</sup> Lancaster said, "many reporters, including some of the best, eventually departed for business, government, and the developing specialty of press agency."<sup>129</sup> Walker agreed that, "for the newspaper man who has lost his job for whatever cause . . . publicity work is the first and sometimes the only refuge."<sup>130</sup>

Still, journalists felt betrayed and contempt when a colleague left for public relations. Beaman called public relations “a form of purgatory.”<sup>131</sup> When *The New York World* ceased publication in 1931, leaving hundreds of men and women without jobs, St. John said the unlucky “would wind up in the poorhouse, the morgue, or in some public relations office, which is almost the worst that can happen to a newspaperman.”<sup>132</sup> Editors refused to hire beginners who seemed likely to leave for public relations. Walker explained, “newspaper executives do not like the idea of spending much time and patience on beginners, only to find after a few years that the paper actually has been training, not newspaper men, but press agents who would leave at the first offer of more money.”<sup>133</sup> Similarly, few editors rehired reporters who left for public relations and then wanted their old jobs back. Again, Walker explained:

To the newspaper editor it is always a little sad when one of his best men leaves the paper to take a publicity job. The feeling, indeed, is sometimes bitter, and the editor knows that, even though the man may be starving next year, he cannot come back to his old job on the paper. The door often is closed to many fairly able men who have found press agency less profitable and attractive than they had expected, and who seek to return to newspaper work. “You thought you were smart; now suffer!” is the attitude.<sup>134</sup>

Holmes experienced that prejudice himself. After working for two dailies, he accepted a job as the publicist for a politician. When the politician placed second in a primary, Holmes needed a new job and found that “once a newsman has turned publicist, he finds it hard to settle back into the newspaper world: in the first place, he has to swallow a lower salary, in the second place, the editor has to swallow a writer who once turned his back upon what is considered a ‘truly ethical’ job to take the Judas silver of a subsidized pen.”<sup>135</sup> That prejudice continued into the twenty-first century and Wizda explained that when journalists leave a newsroom “it’s like quitting the fraternity.” Colleagues think those who depart are bailing or selling out. Wizda added, “traditionally people who left the newsroom went into public relations, the death star of jobs after journalism.”<sup>136</sup>

Despite the general contempt in newsrooms, only a few journalists admitted their dependence on PR practitioners. In 1928, Cooper said the information PR practitioners provided “was really necessary if newspapers were to fulfill their duty of giving the public news.”<sup>137</sup> Prager said New York’s firefighters earned reporters’ eternal gratitude by hiring a publicist to appear at all major fires and immediately tell reporters how the fires started, what was burning, who (if anyone) had been hurt or rescued, and what special problems firefighters encountered.<sup>138</sup> Further, reporters assigned to lunches, dinners, and banquets appreciated the fact someone reserved seats for them near a speaker’s table or, even better, distributed printed copies of the speeches to be made.<sup>139</sup>

Systematic studies documented these few journalists’ casual observations. For example, on December 29, 1926, Bent found that 147 of the stories in *The New York Times* had been suggested, created, or supplied by PR practitioners. Only 83 had not, with another 26 doubtful. Excluding the doubtful, about 60% of the stories *The Times* published that morning had originated with PR practitioners. Moreover, Bent did not count any sports, society, or real estate stories, although all 50 of *The Times*’ stories about real estate seemed to have originated with publicists.<sup>140</sup> In 1934, Walker estimated that, “the hand of the publicity man, often carefully disguised, may be found in perhaps one-third the news items in many issues of a New York

newspaper.” Of 64 local stories in one paper, Walker found that 42 “were rewritten or pasted up from press agent material: a little more than 60%.” Without PR practitioners, Walker added, the city’s daily newspapers would have to double the size of their staffs.<sup>141</sup>

Bixler agreed in 1930 that PR practitioners enabled newspapers to hire smaller staffs. He found that four of newspapers’ sections (sports, drama, movies, and real estate) had become particularly dependent on publicists. Bixler added that women’s pages had become almost as dependent on publicists, and that many stories in business sections were also influenced by publicists. Only newspapers’ stories about crime remained unaffected by PR practitioners.<sup>142</sup> Commenting on the trend, McKernon added:

For the honest publicity representative who works in the open I have the greatest respect. Many such have done the newspapers an inestimable service by facilitating the work of reporters, and they have served both the papers and the reading public by making possible better, more intelligent, and more nearly accurate reports of the activities of the institutions they represent. They have brought to the press a technical knowledge that newspaper men could not be expected to possess, and through their cooperation have made it easier for reporters and editors to determine the news value and the ‘carrying power’ of stories dealing with a thousand and one differing subjects.<sup>143</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

The books and articles written by and about early US newspaper reporters and editors support the belief that journalists treated public relations and its practitioners with contempt. Together, all the entries reveal that journalists who worked in cities from New York to Los Angeles and from Minneapolis to Atlanta expressed negative attitudes about public relations and its practitioners. Moreover, their attitudes remained negative through every decade, from the nineteenth century through the mid 1950s. Journalists’ hostility toward public relations developed quickly, appears to stem from a myriad of interrelated factors, and persists. This study focused on three unanswered questions about that relationship.

### 5.1. *What are the origins of journalists’ hostility toward public relations?*

Americans always have sought publicity but initially as unorganized individuals. It may be impossible to determine when public relations emerged as a distinct field—during the mid 1800s, at the start of the twentieth century, or after World War I. Clearly, however, the field’s expansion during the early twentieth century was dramatic.

Regardless of the exact date of the field’s origins, its early practitioners angered journalists. They invaded newsrooms and tried to use or manipulate journalists. Further, some corrupted journalists by offering them money and gifts. Whatever their tactics, their goal was the same—free publicity and preferably on newspapers’ front pages. Many PR practitioners were former journalists who understood the press and knew how to write (or invent) good stories. They flattered, cultivated, and exaggerated, creating sensational stories which reporters seemed unable to ignore. Journalists resented their efforts, complaining that publicists misled them, misled the public, and endangered the media’s credibility. PR practitioners, however, had conflicting

interests and priorities. They had to satisfy their clients but also felt that what they did was important—that they, too, helped inform the public. Those who created fakes felt they were necessary and harmless.

### 5.2. *Why has journalists' hostility persisted for 100 or more years?*

Journalists rarely acknowledged PR practitioners' contributions, focusing primarily on the negative. They resented publicists' efforts to promote special interests and (for newspapers' economic well being) wanted other institutions to buy advertisements. Other institutions, however, found that the cost of hiring PR practitioners was considerably less than the cost of hiring ad agencies and paying for space in newspapers' advertising columns. Moreover, the stories that PR practitioners placed in news columns were more credible. Journalists also seem to have been envious. They were overworked, underpaid, and overwhelmed by a multitude of other problems. Those problems were so severe that most abandoned the newspaper industry. There also was another continuing source of hostility—the perception (at least among journalists) that they had a more honest, honorable, important, and altruistic mission.

### 5.3. *Why is the relationship riddled with stereotypes and contradictions?*

There are two or more sides to every conflict, yet journalists proud of their objectivity seemed to lose their objectivity when issues affected their own lives and work. Then, they tended to see only their side of issues. Early journalists, for example, had a terrible reputation, caused in part by the types of stories they reported and by the tactics they used to obtain stories. Yet forgetting their own faults, journalists condemned PR practitioners with similar faults. Journalists also generalized, creating persistent stereotypes, some contradictory. Five major contradictions are revealed through our results.

#### 5.3.1. *Journalists wanted information easily available, yet resented those who made it available*

In one contradiction, journalists wanted information to be easily available, yet resented the men and women who made it available. By the mid twentieth century, journalists were dependent upon PR practitioners for a large percentage of the stories appearing in newspapers. But admitting their dependence would shatter cherished ideals. Journalists were proud of their ability to uncover stories, verify details, and expose sham. Thus, they were unlikely to admit their dependence, lack of skepticism, failure to verify, and failure to expose every sham.

#### 5.3.2. *While condemning public relations, journalists simultaneously embraced it*

A second contradiction seems even more apparent. While condemning public relations, journalists simultaneously embraced it. Young journalists were idealists with dreams impossible to fulfill. Not every journalist could become a foreign correspondent, buy a country weekly, or become a famous author. So when burned out and disillusioned by the newspaper industry, they turned to related fields and found that public relations offered a multitude of good jobs for which they were well-qualified.

### 5.3.3. *Journalists complained the PR practitioners were unqualified, yet admitted many spent years working for newspapers*

In a third contradiction, journalists complained that PR practitioners were unqualified and poor writers who failed to understand the press. At the same time, they admitted that many of public relation's practitioners spent years working for newspapers. No one said that only newspapers' least capable reporters and editors left for public relations. Rather, the exodus from newsrooms included some of newspapers' most talented men and women. Still, the instant men and women left, they were ostracized.

### 5.3.4. *Journalists own problems contributed to their shift to public relations*

Journalists' own problems contributed to their shift to public relations. They seemed to be chronic complainers, forever griping about their long hours, low pay, stress, insecurity, and unpleasant assignments. However, anyone who left a newsroom as a result of those problems risked being condemned, especially anyone who moved to public relations.

### 5.3.5. *Journalists' rarely expressed a similar contempt for related fields*

Journalists' contempt for public relations and its practitioners is also puzzling because they rarely, if ever, expressed a similar contempt for related fields. Thousands of journalists accepted jobs in the magazine, book, radio, television, and advertising industries, with little or no stigma attached to any of those fields. However, those fields involved other conflicts (e.g., competing for audiences' time and advertisers' dollars).

Finally, the answers to this study's three questions reveal some fault on both sides. Public relations evolved over a period of 100 or more years before blossoming after World War I. Some tactics used by the field's early practitioners were crude and by today's standards, unethical. Nonetheless, those tactics worked and at the time, may have seemed necessary. During that 100-year period, journalists became increasingly hostile and developed negative stereotypes. Some skepticism is healthy, even necessary but—once established—stereotypes are difficult to change, even when no longer warranted. As a result, journalists' prejudice against public relations shows no signs of abatement. Rather, current trends in the newspaper industry, including cutbacks in staffs and budgets, seem likely to increase journalists' dependence on PR practitioners—and also journalists' shift from newsrooms to public relations.

In answering the above research questions, we believe that our exploratory study not only contributes to the scholarly literature, but also has potential practical implications for helping solve this persistent problem. Specifically, we hope that our paper will serve as a springboard for open discussion and ongoing dialogue on this topic between journalism and public relations practitioners and educators. By acknowledging the contextual and situational conditions of the past and learning from the viewpoints of individuals who actually experienced those events, we can move toward strengthening the professional relationship in the future. Initial steps toward changing this attitude may include promoting greater awareness, understanding, and interactive discussion of the historic roots of this relationship through journalism and public relations publications on this topic in academic textbooks and journals; through presentations and joint sessions at professional conferences, meetings, and special workshops; and through classroom lectures and assignments in courses that could even be co-taught by instructors in both fields.



We also offer this framework of historic findings from early insiders' perspectives as a reference point for future comparative research efforts on this topic. Several worthwhile possibilities include historical analyses of early journalists' attitudes toward other industry personnel (e.g., early advertising practitioners) and attitudes towards different types of PR practitioners; comparisons of the attitudes of early print versus early broadcast journalists; and gender, ethnic, and cross-cultural comparisons regarding the historic roots of this relationship. The specific data collection methods used depends, of course, on the research question. Finally, it is important that longitudinal studies be conducted to track and monitor possible changes in journalists' perceptions and attitudes toward public relations over time.

### Appendix A. Background characteristics of sample

**Allsopp, Fred W.:** Like many nineteenth century journalists, Allsopp started as a printer. See: *Little Adventures in Newspaperdom* by Allsopp. Arkansas Writer Publishing Co., Little Rock, AR, 1922.

**Andrews, Robert Hardy:** After starting his career in Aberdeen, South Dakota, Andrews moved to the *Minneapolis Journal* during Prohibition and became that daily's city editor. During the 1920s, Andrews moved to the *Chicago Daily News*. See: *A Corner of Chicago* by Andrews. Little, Brown and Co., Boston, 1963.

**Beaman, Niver W.:** After working as a reporter in Connecticut during the 1920s, Beaman became a city editor. He later worked as a rewrite man for the *New York Daily News* and also worked for the *Philadelphia Morning Record*. See: *Fat Man in a Phone Booth* by Beaman. Cloud, Inc., Chicago, 1947.

**Blythe, Samuel G.:** The son of a newspaper editor, Blythe started in a small town at US\$10 a week. After serving as a city editor, he moved to New York, the Mecca for journalists, and also wrote magazine articles. See: *The Making of a Newspaper Man* by Blythe. Henry Altemus Company, Philadelphia, 1912. Reprinted in 1970 by Greenwood Press, Publishers of Westport, CT.

**Bovard, O.K.:** As the stern but brilliant editor of Joseph Pulitzer's *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* from 1908 to 1938, Bovard helped make that newspaper one of the country's finest dailies. See: *Bovard of the Post-Dispatch* by James W. Markham. Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 1954.

**Chapin, Charles:** After beginning as a paperboy at the age of 14, Chapin became city editor of the *Chicago Times*, then city editor of the *New York World* (and observed that hundreds of clever colleagues were lured into better-paying jobs in public relations). See: *Charles Chapin's Story* by Chapin. G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1920.

**Congdon, Charles T.:** After working as an editor, Congdon joined Horace Greeley's staff at the *New York Tribune*. See: *Reminiscences of a Journalist* by Congdon. James R. Osgood and Company, Boston, 1880.

**Diehl, Charles:** After starting as an apprentice in a village printing office during the 1880s, Diehl moved to the *Chicago Times* published by Wilbur Storey. See: *The Staff Correspondent* by Diehl. The Clegg Company, San Antonio, TX, 1931.

**Doherty, Bill:** The son of a police reporter, in 1933 Bill Doherty became a police reporter in Chicago. See: *Crime Reporter* by Doherty. Exposition Press, New York, 1964.

**Doherty, Edward:** After starting at the *Chicago Examiner*, Edward Doherty worked for the *Chicago Record Herald* and the *Chicago Tribune*, then moved to *Liberty* magazine. During the 1930s, he worked for a newspaper in New York. See: *Gall and Honey* by Doherty. Sheed & Ward, New York, 1941.

**Drawbell, James:** An immigrant from Scotland, Drawbell worked as a copy reader in Montreal, then took a train to New York during the 1920s and obtained a job at William Randolph Hearst's *Journal*. See: *The Sun Within Us* by Drawbell. Collins, London, 1963.

**Edgett, Edwin Francis:** For almost 50 years, Edgett worked for the *Boston Transcript*, sometimes supplementing his salary by writing magazine articles and handling the publicity for local theaters. See: *I Speak for Myself: An Editor in His World* by Edgett. The Macmillan Company, New York, 1940.

**Holmes, Victor:** After dropping out of college and inheriting US\$12,000, Holmes bought a country weekly. He also worked for a small daily in Missouri and for the *Kansas City Journal*, became a publicist, then worked for other dailies in Cleveland, Chicago, and Omaha. See: *Salt of the Earth* by Holmes. The Macmillan Company, New York, 1941.

**Kirby, Louis:** In an era before cars, telephones, typewriters, and handouts, Kirby found reporting difficult at the start of his career. During the 1880s, Kirby worked in Louisville, then in other big cities, including Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia. He also worked for several newspapers in New York City. See: *Fourscore Breathless Years* by Kirby. Meador Publishing Co., Boston, 1951.

**Koenigsberg, Moses:** At the age of 13, Koenigsberg became a reporter for the *San Antonio Times* at a salary of US\$13 a week. He moved to Houston, New Orleans, and New York, becoming an executive in the Hearst empire. See: *King News* by Koenigsberg. Books for Libraries Press, Freeport, NY, 1941.

**McCullagh, Joseph B.:** Born in Ireland in 1842, McCullagh became a printer, then a reporter, after immigrating to the United States. During the Civil War, he served as a correspondent for the *Cincinnati Gazette*. McCullagh moved to St. Louis in 1872 and worked there for 25 years, all but four as an editor at the *Globe-Democrat*, becoming one of the foremost editors in America. See: *Little Mack: Joseph B. McCullagh of the St. Louis Globe-Democrat* by Charles C. Clayton. Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, 1969.

**Mencken, H.L.:** Born in Baltimore in 1880, Mencken became famous as a journalist, humorist, columnist, and magazine editor. He started as a reporter for the *Baltimore Morning Herald*, then joined the staff of the *Baltimore Sun* and remained with the *Sun* most of his life. In 1923, he co-founded a magazine, *The American Mercury*. See: *A Choice of Days* by Mencken. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1980.

**Miller, Webb:** In 1912, Webb started as a cub, paid US\$12 a week, in Chicago. By the 1920s, he was a foreign correspondent stationed in London and Paris. See: *I Found No Peace* by Miller. Victor Gollancz Ltd., London, 1937.

**Morehouse, Ward:** After starting in Savannah in 1915, Morehouse moved to Atlanta, then New York, hoping to become a playwright. In New York, he started at the *Tribune*, moved to the *Sun*, then to the *World-Telegram*. See: *Just the Other Day* by Morehouse. McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., New York, 1953.

**Morton, Charles W.:** Entering the business late (at the age of 30) Morton began work at the *Boston Evening Transcript* in 1929 and was briefly employed by the *New Yorker* magazine.

See: *It has Its Charms* by Morton. J.B. Lippincott Company, Philadelphia, 1966.

**Older, Fremont:** After starting work in 1869 at a small newspaper in Berlin, Wisconsin, Older became famous as managing editor of the *San Francisco Bulletin*, making it a financial as well as a popular success. In 1918, he became editor of a daily published by William Randolph Hearst. See: *Fremont Older* by Evelyn Wells. D. Appleton-Century Company Inc., New York, 1936.

**Prager, Theodore:** After starting his career by running errands for a New York daily in 1916, Prager became a police reporter and worked for several newspapers during a long career in that city. See: *Police Reporter* by Prager. Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York, 1957.

**Ralph, Julian:** While employed by the *New York Sun* after the Civil War, Ralph worked as a police reporter, legislative reporter, Washington correspondent, foreign correspondent, and war correspondent—but also contributed articles to magazines. See: *Gentleman of the Press: The Life and Times of an Early Reporter, Julian Ralph of the Sun* by Paul Lancaster. Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, 1992.

**Salisbury, William:** Around the start of the twentieth century, Salisbury spent 9 years working for newspapers in five cities and found it a disillusioning experience. Salisbury complained that originality and initiative were frowned upon, that reporters were exploited, and that newspapers were dominated by their business office. See: *The Career of a Journalist* by Salisbury. B.W. Dodge & Company, New York, 1908.

**Seltzer, Louis B.:** Born in Cleveland in 1897, Seltzer left school at 13 to begin work as an office boy and cub at *The Leader*. After also working for *The Cleveland News*, then for an advertising agency, he went to *The Cleveland Press*, becoming its editor in 1928. See: *The Years were Good* by Seltzer. The World Publishing Company, Cleveland, 1956.

**Smith, H. Allen:** Entering journalism around 1920 (at the end of the era of itinerant newspapermen) Smith worked in numerous cities, including Louisville, Tampa, Tulsa, Denver, and New York. Arriving in New York in 1929, he worked for *United Press*, *Fortune* magazine, and the *World-Telegram*. See: *The Compleat Practical Joker* by Smith. Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, NY, 1953. See also: *To Hell in a Handbasket* by Smith. Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, NY, 1962.

**Sontheimer, Morton:** Entering the business when drunks were common and college graduates uncommon, Sontheimer, too, worked in several big cities, from Philadelphia to New York, and became an editor. See: *Newspaperman: A Book About the Business* by Sontheimer. Whittlesey House, New York, 1941.

**St. John, Robert:** After starting at the *Hartford Courant* during the early 1920s, St. John worked for several dailies in Chicago, then became an editor at a suburban daily. From there, he moved to Philadelphia and, in 1932, bought a quiet farm where he could write. By then, St. John had been a reporter, a rewrite man, a city editor, a managing editor, and a publisher. Leaving the farm in 1939, he sailed to Paris to cover the approaching war—and soon was broadcasting to millions of people every day. See: *This was My World* by St. John. Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, NY, 1953.

**Underwood, Agness:** After starting as a temporary telephone switchboard operator during the 1920s, Underwood became one of the first women to succeed as the city editor of a great daily, the *Los Angeles Evening Herald and Express*. See: *Newspaperwoman* by Underwood. Harper & Brothers Publishers, New York, 1949.

**Vanderbilt, Cornelius:** While most journalists only dreamed of obtaining a job in New York, Vanderbilt started there as a cub in 1919. See: *Experiences of a Cub Reporter* by Vanderbilt. Beekman Publishers Inc., New York, 1974.

**Walker, Stanley:** One of the country's most outstanding city editors, Walker worked for the *New York Herald Tribune* and was the author of several best-selling books. He also wrote magazine articles about journalism. See: *City Editor*. E.A. Stokes, New York, 1934. Reprinted in 1999 by The Johns Hopkins University Press.

**Winchell, Walter:** Although dependent upon publicists for many of the items in his Broadway column, Winchell was largely contemptuous of them. See: *Winchell: Gossip, Power and the Culture of Celebrity* by Neal Gabler. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1995

## Appendix B. Examples of early PR practitioners' stunts

During the movie industry's early years, PR practitioners created stunts, fakes, and hoaxes that attracted columns of front-page publicity. Briefly, seven examples include:

**Example 1:** In 1923, a publicist invited Denver's reporters and photographers to a picnic on Pikes Peak. At the summit, the picnickers found a 40-foot wooden whale built to publicize a movie about the sea.<sup>144</sup>

**Example 2:** When Thomas R. Zann checked into New York's Bellclaire Hotel, he said he was a pianist and wanted a huge box containing his piano hoisted through a window and into his room. The next day, Zann ordered 15 lb of raw meat, and hotel employees found a full-grown lion in his room. The police were called, and reporters followed. Reporters saw the lion, learned that it had frightened the hotel's employees, and interviewed the man—T.R. Zann—about his 1,100-lb pet. The stunt, staged by Harry Reichenbach, helped publicize the premiere of "The Return of Tarzan," the third movie in a series.<sup>145</sup>

**Example 3:** Another of Reichenbach's stunts involved an Arabian sheik who said he came all the way from Turkey to find a beautiful virgin princess believed to have eloped from Stamboul with an American Marine. She had been betrothed to a Turkish prince and left behind a fortune, perhaps as much as US\$100 million. The sheik had US\$25,000 in dollar bills, a reward for her return dead or alive. Newspapers were full of stories about the princess, who then appeared in a movie titled "The Virgin of Stamboul."<sup>146</sup>

**Example 4:** A man crossing a bridge in Camden, NJ, saw an attractive young woman climbing a handrail. A crowd gathered, and a police officer tackled the woman who clawed at him and screamed: "My unborn child! You do not understand. I must die. My unborn child!" The woman refused to identify herself but continued to say, "My unborn child." The story remained in the news until reporters learned that the woman was an actress paid to publicize a movie titled "My Unborn Child."<sup>147</sup>

**Example 5:** Anna Held, a European actress, became famous in the United States by asking a dairy to deliver 400 gal of milk each day for her baths at the Savoy Hotel. After several weeks, Held sued the dairy for delivering sour milk, and the dairy countersued for non-payment, a story picked up by newspapers everywhere. While immersed in a tub of milk, Held then called a press conference to explain how a daily bath in milk contributed to her beauty.<sup>148</sup>

**Example 6:** On the evening of July 18, 1920, a man walking through New York’s Central Park said he heard a splash and found a woman’s handbag and hat on the ground near a large lake.<sup>149</sup> The woman was named “Yuki Onda,” and a letter in her hotel room seemed to explain why she committed suicide; she had fallen in love with a US Navy officer who would not marry her.<sup>150</sup> Using lanterns, spotlights, and rowboats, police dragged practically every square inch of the lake but failed to find her.<sup>151</sup> On July 26, a critic for *The World* suggested that police looking for Miss Onda should drop in at the Astor Theater and watch a movie titled “The Breath of the Gods.” The critic had gone to review the movie and discovered that Yuki Onda was the name of its leading character. “It appears from *The Breath of the Gods* that Yuki did not commit suicide in New York at all,” he reported. Rather, she had returned to Japan and married a prince.<sup>152</sup>

**Example 7:** A year later—on August 17, 1921—a carrier pigeon, wet and exhausted, appeared in New York, and police found a message attached to one of its legs: “Notify Dan Singer, Belleclaire Hotel. I am lost in Hoodoo Mountains, Yellowstone Park. Send help, provisions, and pack-horses. The note was signed “Heller” and dated September 13. Daniel J. Singer of the Belleclaire Hotel rushed to the police station and identified the lost man as Edmund H. Heller, a famous explorer, naturalist, and cameraman who had gone to Yellowstone to photograph its animals.<sup>153</sup> Newspapers, from Chicago to San Francisco reprinted the story before skeptics calculated that, to fly 2,000 miles in a few days, the bird would have had to fly as fast as an airplane.<sup>154</sup> A publicist apparently created the hoax to advertise Heller’s lectures.<sup>155</sup>

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