

Exposé: Press Biggies Rake Media

Hearst, Knight Shock Hundreds Here

Jan Harald

(Page 2 of *The South End* insert)

Two of the nation's biggest media barons shocked hundreds of student and professional journalists yesterday when they delivered a searing attack on the American news industry and exposed themselves as "mass manipulators."

John S. Knight, Editorial Chairman of Knight-Ridder newspapers, and William Randolph Hearst Jr., Chairman of the Hearst Corporation, told a Journalism Day crowd in WSU's Alumni Lounge that long-held assumptions about newspapers being "objective" and "independent" were nothing but illusions and myths.

"The media in this country is merely another corporate entity," said Knight. "It's a business, and a big one at that, whose main interest is preserving the status quo, even if it means appearing slightly radical at times," the aging chairman told the crowd, some of whom shook their heads in disbelief, while others shook theirs in anger and vowed to fight back.

The 400 journalists, including employees of some of the state's largest papers, students from Wayne, U of M and MSU, as well as teachers, sat through the two separate, hour-long speeches with stunned looks on their faces as Knight and Hearst shattered one after another of the icons of the profession of journalism.

The crowd appeared to take the two moguls' message to heart.

"They own it, they must be right," sighed one journalism student as she left the Lounge, dropping her reporter's notebook in a nearby trashcan.

Knight and Hearst, who earlier had been honored by the WSU Journalism Department for their "lifelong struggle to inform the public" and their "long adherence to the most important tenets of American journalism," spared no one in their savage denunciations.

"Journalism is a business. A manipulative business that helps channel people to accept what we, the nation's upper crust—ruling class, call us what you will—what we think is best," said Knight.

"Each morning, the first thing I turn to after I read my horoscope is the business page," Knight revealed to the crowd. "This morning, I was happy to see that Knight-Ridder stock was up a half at 28-1/4."

The two repeatedly stressed how newspapers, radio and TV act as reinforcers, not challengers, of the existing order.

"Someone in our profession recently denied that we are in the business of behavior modification after the brouhaha over media responsibility in covering the attempts on President Ford's life," Knight explained. "They think Squeaky Frommes' picture in Newsweek and Time led to Sarah Moores' attempt.

"Well, we are in the business of behavior modification," he said. "The total income for the 1,750 daily newspapers in the US is around \$7.5 billion annually, \$6 billion of which comes from advertisers. Advertisers support the entire media spectrum, lock, stock and barrel," Knight thundered. "Moreover, as corporate empires themselves (newspaper publishing is the tenth largest industry in the country) their interests are identical with other corporations in preserving the domination of corporate power and the passivity of the American people."

“Someone once said, ‘Freedom of the Press only belongs to those who control the presses.’ Well, I’ve controlled 11 papers for years and after our recent merger with the Ridder chain, I control a lot more. You never saw me challenging anything but the readers’ patience in my ‘Notebook’ columns—you never will,” Knight yelled, slamming his fist on the lectern. Exhausted, Knight was helped to his chair by an aide.

Picking up where Knight left off, a natty William Hearst continued to peel the layers of duplicity from the media barons’ bones.

“When was the last time a newspaper or TV station really took one of Detroit’s corporate interests to task?” he asked. “It’s never happened. The papers pick on fire chasers, abortion rings, motor cycle gangs, two-bit dope dealers. When was the last time a paper picked on one of the Fords or the unions, Pontiac Stadium or the Renaissance Center. It’s nothing but boosterism that you’ll get in the Detroit papers.”

“Speaking of Detroit,” Hearst continued while pointing out toward the McGregor Mall, “I’ve often remarked how ironic it is that in the city where the contradictions of modern capitalism are so apparent, people think they are well served by the media because there are still two papers. Hunkboeey. How many Detroiters read *The News*, watch channel 4 and listen to WWJ in their cars? All owned by the same company.”

Hearst widened his range to explode several of what he called, “The current myths of American journalism.” He lashed out at “The Watergate Syndrome” as he termed it, that “makes us believe the media is really doing ‘its job’.

“Everyone seems to think *The Washington Post* is some sort of ranting and raving radical rag after it supposedly did in Nixon. But don’t believe it,” Hearst cautioned the crowd.

“That whole Watergate episode at the Post might just as well have never happened. Is Ford any different? Has the government changed, even an iota? Aren’t Kate Graham (*Post* Publisher) and Ben Bradlee (Executive Editor) still kissing governmental ass and dining with Henry Kissinger?” Hearst asked pointedly.

Speaking to many young and aspiring journalists in the audience, Hearst noted several instances of media obfuscation in the past. He told of a study conducted by the late Walter Lippman, a man Hearst called “a towering figure in American journalism,” which examined news coverage of the Russian Revolution in *The New York Times*, the “paper of record” of the 20’s just as today.

“For four years, the *Times* never wrote an accurate word about the revolutionaries,” Hearst said Lippman’s study showed. “They were always depicted as coming out on the losing end of every battle and confrontation. That is what the American people read about the Revolution. Those were the “objective” accounts,” Hearst explained.

“But the revolutionaries won, remember,” he added.

“That was nothing of course, compared to what my father did before the turn of the century,” Hearst said proudly. “He and his papers actually elected a couple of presidents back then and even started a war. Dad had a story on page one even before the Maine exploded in Havana’s harbor. Do you think Americans today are getting an accurate view of life in Portugal or China or Harlem? Nothing has changed,” Hearst declared to the silent gathering.

“Take my daughter for instance—

“I mean take her for example,” Hearst said. “Does she not appear as a brainwashed waif who longs for Mommy and her Persian wall hangings? If not, your editors are not doing their job.”

Assured by a young member of the audience that headlines in the local papers continue to read, “Patty”, Hearst smiled, muttered, “Nothing has changed,” and then continued to muse about the further reaching implications of the media.

“The tentacles of the media go far beyond just their corporate control,” continued Hearst in a serious tone. “The very word itself is rife with subtle meanings. The media is a mediator in the lives of everyone exposed to it, and you cannot avoid exposure to it. We, as a social institution, take peoples’ lives from them, molding them to what we want, and feed it back to them.

We make people’s lives into the spectacle which they passively watch and read about, reinforcing with every page of newsprint their need for leaders, interpreters and authorities,” he continued.

“This is in fact the real nature of media. Our power is not measured in an exchange of dollars, but in the manipulation of lives, and this is true of the smallest newspaper all the way up to the American Broadcasting Corporation.”

Concluding his remarks, Hearst quoted Joseph Pulitzer, father of journalism: “The journalist is the lookout on the bridge of the ship of state...Pulitzer was a great man who recognized the reality of capitalist society.”

Knight, dressed in a three-piece-suit with a gold watch band, staggered to the mike once more for a few additional remarks as applause for Hearst subsided. He painted a bleak picture for those young people in the crowd intent on careers in journalism.

“With all the attention that the profession of journalism has been given in recent years,” said Knight, “we have created a glut of journalists on the job market. This has been a boon for employers, who now have their pick among people hard-pressed to find a job. They can fire or refuse to hire potential journalists who refuse to knuckle under to the wishes of management. Wages also can be kept down,” explained Knight, who sponsors many awards for high school students in Miami and Akron, home of Knight-owned newspapers.

Knight continued, “To those of you who publish student newspapers now, exercise your freedom while you have the chance, before you come under the sway of some corporate newspaper. If you can find a job, that is.”

“Advisors to student newspapers and journalism teachers have a great responsibility to stifle the creativity and starve the imaginations of students under their sway. As long as they keep feeding you all that crap about professional journalism, those of us who own the media can go on our merry way. You will never again have the freedom you now have,” he warned.

As the meeting broke up, an intrepid reporter caught up with Stan Putnam, faculty advisor to the *South End*, and Jake Highton, head of the WSU journalism department. They were asked for their reactions to the revelations by the two great media barons.

Putnam, hidden by dark sunglasses moaned, “Why, oh why, did they have to shatter all these kids’ illusions? I always wanted them to believe in Santa Claus.”

Highton, dazed and staring quizzically off into space, said, “I didn’t know that.”



Jan Harald
Exposé: Press Biggies Rake Media
Hearst, Knight Shock Hundreds Here

[https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/267-november-1975/expose-press-biggies-rake-
media](https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/267-november-1975/expose-press-biggies-rake-media)

Fifth Estate #267, November, 1975

fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net