REVIEWS:

Podcasts: A Digital Library for Journalism Instruction

A meta-review featuring "It's All Journalism," "WriteLane" and "IRE Radio"

Review by Nomi Morris

A month and a half after Donald Trump won the 2016 election, NPR's Fresh Air interviewed Craig Silverman, by then at BuzzFeed, about research proving Facebook played a key role in spreading campaign misinformation. "I have to add this to my syllabus," I thought when I heard it while driving. Since that 'aha' moment, several more radio interviews have made my course lists: *New Yorker* writer Evan Osnos discussing Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg in 2018; WBUR Boston's On Point in 2019 on YouTube's toxic algorithm that funnels increasingly extreme content to viewers the longer they watch; and an October 2020 episode of The Daily by the *New York Times* about a pay-to-play network taking over local broadcast news affiliates.

At a time when podcasts have created a renaissance in audio programming, they can spice up the resource menu for students and accommodate different learning styles. But where to start? An online search yields lists such as Best 25 Journalism Podcasts of 2022 that can help identify syllabus-worthy programs like On the Media with Brooke Gladstone at WYNC in New York. For individual examples of strong journalism in podcast form, the Poynter Institute's Barbara Allen has recommended several episodes of "journalists doing journalism" in her "Alma Matters" newsletter. Her story suggestions range from murder to the military, from police to prisons to pov-

erty. But what about those that highlight craft more than role-model stories? Which are the podcasts that can hold student attention and be worth the instructor's time to screen them for course-related nuggets?

It's All Journalism calls itself the "broccoli" of media-focused podcasts, because it dishes up what's good with healthy regularity—once a week. Produced since 2013, its episodes run from 20 minutes for a piece on digital media streams at legacy media outlets, to 30 minutes for a conversation with the editor of Ms. Magazine, to 40 minutes on data transparency in crime reporting. Fortunately, host Michael O'Connell provides a list of top 10 episodes of the year, since this valuable teaching resource requires advanced filtering to find the most exciting or relevant ones—as students surely prefer pizza to broccoli.

In WriteLane former *Tampa Bay Times* enterprise editor Maria Carillo interviews Pulitzer Prize-winning feature writer Lane DeGregory on how she does what she does, from the idea stage to factchecking. These coaching sessions average 25 minutes and are among the most practical podcasts out there for students of journalism, available on numerous podcast aggregators as well as the Poynter Institute website. They are deep dives, focusing on the nitty-gritty of craft with topics such as "Telling Details," "Reconstructing Scene," and "Great Openings." Lane reveals her list of five things you need to know before you

start writing, and 10 different ways stories begin. She and Carillo completed 159 episodes between 2017 and the end of 2020 before taking a break. Now they are back at it. Top marks for their strong rapport and getting right to the point.

Future magazine writers might enjoy [Longform Podcast](#), a weekly conversation with an individual nonfiction writer, produced by longform.org for the past decade, and since mid-2021 as a collaboration with Vox Media that includes documentary filmmakers and podcasters in addition to magazine and book writers.

For investigative reporting, podcasts such as [Reveal](#) serve up choice stories for the mainstream media consumer. But for the art of getting the story, check out [IRE Radio](#), a production of Investigative Reporters and Editors, a non-profit that has been around since 1975 and is housed on the website of the Missouri School of Journalism. Episodes went up about

once a month until the pandemic hit, and most are in a digestible 15 to 30 minute range. Topics are the staples of investigative reporting—police, local governments, crime, discrimination—and interviewers focus not just on the stories but on how the reporters got the stories, earning it a place in the curriculum.

A downside to podcasts is that most follow a chatty interview format so the listener must go with the flow and trust that they will learn something new —maybe by minute 10, maybe by minute 17. If I'm impatient during a podcast, I know my students will be too, so I try to direct them to a few key time markers. Not all podcasts include transcripts. Choosing which to include in one's syllabus may be time consuming, but it's well worth it.

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Government and Failing Media Companies

Review by John-Erik Koslosky

Martha Minow, *Saving the News,* Oxford University Press, 2021, 256 pages, hardcover and ebook, $24.95. ISBN: 9780190948412

At the heart of Martha Minow's *Saving the News* is an intriguing question: Does American government have a constitutional obligation to help solve the problems plaguing American journalism?

Minow, a law professor and former dean of Harvard Law School, offers a compelling argument for why government may have that obligation, as the U.S. founders designed a democratic system that depended "on a citizenry informed by news in ways that are currently in severe jeopardy" (p. 100). Minow builds a case through historical examination of the press's role in U.S. democracy, the government's role in shaping and reshaping that press, and the courts' interpretations of those interventions.

At its title suggests, *Saving the News* offers solutions—wide-ranging and rooted in legal precedent. But media educators and their students may find even greater value in the sections of this book that lead into Minow's policy recommendations.

Saving the News is organized into four chapters. The first dives into the economic problems that have undermined the news industry and compromised the flow of reliable information to the public, such as the rise of the algorithm-based platforms with no commitment to journalistic principles and corporate consolidation that has displaced quality-minded owners. Minow examines the impact of these trends on U.S. communities and democratic governance.

The second and third chapters grapple with First Amendment history and the role of the news industry in maintaining American democracy. These sections detail historical government interventions designed to provide for a free press and how courts have interpreted the constitutionality of those efforts. Minow challenges the libertarian view of the First Amendment as a relatively new interpretation—one that's in conflict with two centuries of government policy enacted to help protect and strengthen the news media.

It's never been more important for students to understand how media economics and policy shape our news, and each of Minow's first three of chapters could serve as a primer for undergrads or graduate students in the area it covers. Readings may be appropriate for classes in media law and policy, media economics, public affairs journalism, or other media and journalism classes in which a historical understanding of the news industry or overview of today's challenging economic environment is appropriate.

The final chapter lays out Minow's plan to address the problem. Among the sweeping set of solutions Minow suggests: more heavily regulating large internet platforms and holding them financially liable for the spread of misinformation; requiring them to share a portion of their advertising revenue with news organizations; returning to a "fairness" demand for news producers, coupled with a new "awareness doctrine" that would demand accurate identification of news and opinion content that would better reflect today's media environment, in which users can be easily overwhelmed by information. Minow also recommends limits on media ownership, greater financial support for public and nonprofit media out-

lets, tax changes that target platforms and advertising based on the personalized information harvested by platforms, coupled with tax deductions that encourage donations to nonprofits and public media, and tax credits for subscribing to local newspapers.

Saving the News does not break new ground with its policy recommendations, but it's unlikely that was Minow's intent. In just over 140 pages of text, its four chapters cover immense ground, and do so in clear, easy-to-understand language. And that may be the book's greatest strength. As a whole, it offers a compelling argument for sweeping government interventions to help buttress and strengthen journalism and the First Amendment. But its parts may hold even greater value as educational materials, especially at the undergraduate level.

John-Erik Koslosky is an assistant professor of media and journalism at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania and advisor to The Voice, *the university's student-run newspaper. A current PhD candidate at Penn State, he was a news reporter and editor for two decades before joining academia. His research explores the economic influences over watchdog and investigative reporting.*

The Limitations of Imagination and Data

Reviewed by Theodora Ruhs

Jacob L. Nelson, *Imagined Audiences: How Journalists Perceive and Pursue the Public* (Hardcover, paperback and ebook versions). Oxford University Press, March 2021. ISBN 9780197542590.

As journalism rushes to embrace audience engagement as a savior for a struggling news industry, author Jacob L. Nelson draws attention to an overlooked limitation of this approach. In *Imagined Audiences: How Journalists Perceive and Pursue the Public,* he urges us to consider how much we actually know about news audiences versus what we imagine.

While the book title may suggest a dive into understanding news audiences and how to engage with them, Nelson's argument is that we can never fully understand our audience or how best to engage them. Audience data only takes us so far. As Nelson writes, "Audience measurement data show journalists *how* people behave but not *why*" (p. 5). But it seems the

current trends in audience engaged journalism assume the latter, with the expectation that these assumptions can help find a solution to the current crisis. If news organizations pin their hopes of economic recovery on engagement, Nelson contends, they may end up disappointed.

Nelson uses case studies of three Chicago organizations, the *Chicago Tribune, City Bureau,* and Hearken, a company offering news engagement tools to newsrooms, to reveal what journalists imagine as audience motivations. He shows how these organizations then use what they consider the best audience engagement approach to capitalize on those motivations. Nelson provides an effective model of engage-

ment approaches, what he names reception-oriented or production-oriented. The *Tribune* follows a reception-oriented approach, focusing on more quantifiable measures, such as time spent with content. In contrast, *City Bureau* and Hearken are pioneering production-oriented approaches, attempting to bring the audience into the production process. Unfortunately, because they are built on assumptions of audience motivations that are not truly knowable, neither approach can assure larger and more engaged audiences.

Nelson is not arguing against pursuing better engagement strategies, but rather doing so to better serve the public without expecting increased readership and revenue. He is particularly positive about the role production-oriented engagement can play in reaching and reporting on overlooked communities. At the same time, the book lays out numerous challenges to engaged journalism, some of which may be beyond the control of newsrooms, including competition for audience attention. He warns, "When those initiatives fail to deliver on goals that they never should have been expected to achieve in the first place, their failure can be interpreted as evidence that a more audience-focused form of journalism simply is not worth pursuing" (p. 150). As such, Nelson calls for scholars to work toward better understanding journalists' goals for pursuing engaged journalism, what methods are adopted in pursuit of those goals, and assumptions those goals and methods uncover.

There is room for further discussion at several points, such as the challenges faced by the *City Bu-reau* in gaining acceptance from certain communities. Nelson also hints at the ethical challenges of such an approach without fully exploring the implications. The same could be said about the role funding and publication models play in engagement approaches. For instance, *City Bureau* partners with other news publishers and receives grant funding. However, these points don't detract from the main argument and can be springboards for future discussion and research.

Imagined Audiences is a thought provoking and engaging read that fills an important gap in previous audience engagement and journalism practice research. This 232-page book is written in an accessible manner full of colorful quotes from journalists and clearly laid out reasoning. Nelson provides key historical context, situates his research in prior literature, and outlines his methodology in a way that is unlikely to overwhelm a non-academic reader. Nelson pitches his book to both scholars and practitioners, but it could also be a useful supplement to audience engagement, theory or qualitative methods courses.

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