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Discovering the *Arizona Republican* Newspaper, 1890-1900: Yellow Journalism in America's Territorial Press

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Yellow journalism is widely believed to have grown out of a circulation battle between Joseph Pulitzer and William Hearst in the 1890s. Most scholarship on its inception has been confined to newspapers in large Eastern cities. To date, little study of the period's journalism has investigated whether, and to what degree, elements of yellow journalism were practiced by newspapers in Western US states and territories. This examination of the *Arizona Republican* in the 1890s shows yellow journalism was not confined to the East where it was incubated; in territorial Arizona, yellow journalism flourished. Needing to attract readers in a competitive newspaper market with a growing population, the newspaper did so with large headlines, scurrilous reporting, attention-grabbing news, and illustrations. Beyond the Eastern United States, the same force which brought on yellow journalism—publishers' needs to attract huge readerships—fueled the practice on America's territorial frontier in the *Arizona Republican*.

“WAR IS AT LAST DECLARED” blared the headline that stretched halfway across the front page of the *Arizona Republican* on the morning of April 19, 1898.¹ The stack of eight sub headlines below explained that Congress reached the solemn decision to declare war on Spain at three o'clock that morning. Not as extravagant as the front pages of Eastern newspapers, but the headline splashed across the front page of the *Arizona Republican* more resembled a New York City yellow journal than it did a typical territorial newspaper. Like the sensational big-city yellow newspapers in the East, on this day the front page was almost entirely devoted to war news. In the months leading up to the war, the *Arizona Republican's* front page featured daily news of the conflict between the

US and Spain, and the editorial page carried daily local commentary on the “Cuban Problem.”

Yellow journalism is widely believed to have grown out of a circulation battle between Joseph Pulitzer, owner of the *New York World*, and William Hearst, when he bought the *New York Journal* in 1895.² Journalist Will Irwin, the author of a series of critical essays on American journalism published in 1911, places its roots even farther back in the 1880s.³ According to Irwin, who began his journalism career in the late 1890s, “the seeds of yellow journalism, so called for want of a better name, sprouted at St. Louis and San Francisco” before coming to “fruition in New York... during the early nineties.”⁴ Yellow journalism’s roots can be traced back even further to the penny press of the 1830s, when publishers leveraged improved printing technology, advertising revenue, sensationalism, and human interest stories to increase their circulation and profit by attracting working class readers. Media scholar Tim Wu calls the penny press publishers the original “attention merchants” who used increasingly outrageous spectacle to harvest and sell attention to advertisers.⁵ Rather than inventing, Pulitzer and Hearst expanded on the much-criticized strategies of the penny papers.⁶ With roots in the fertile soil of the penny papers, it is no surprise then that yellow journalism has largely been described in popular literature and in scholarship, especially early on, as the embodiment of the worst characteristics of journalism.⁷ It bore, though, both the best and the worst. Today’s attention merchants still employ sensationalism, exaggeration, and falsity, fostering public distrust of modern news outlets. However, some enduring strengths, investigative, civic, public, and activist journalism, also grew out of this fearless, energetic style of journalism.

When yellow journalism was first identified in the 1890s, it was described as a sensationalistic presentation of news, marked by support of the common folk, and designed to increase readership, attract advertisers, and boost profits.⁸ Competitive publishers working to increase circulation pushed these tactics further, even resorting to manufacturing news. Social psychologist Delos F. Wilcox explained that before yellow journalism took hold, a successful publishers knew where “hell was going to break out next,” but in the period of yellow journalism, “when hell shows no signs of eruption, the successful newspaper manager sends a reporter to ‘raise’ it.”⁹ This style of “new journalism” departed from the traditional—and what was described at the time as conservative—journalism practiced by newspapers such as the *New York Times*. Contemporaneously, the label “conservative” was often used to describe “non-yellow” newspapers that practiced a traditional style of journalism rather than referring to their political stance.¹⁰

The label “yellow” is often attributed to Hearst’s and Pulitzer’s battle over the *Yellow Kid* cartoon.¹¹ However, W. Joseph Campbell has shown the label “yellow” originated *after* the skirmish between the two publishers and was in reference to the “new journalism,” not specifically the cartoon.¹² Rather, it was invented as a broader slur used in a city-wide effort to “denigrate and marginalize” the so-called yellow journals of New York.¹³ The term “yellow journalism” was coined by Ervin Wardman, who printed the “pejorative” in the *New York Press* in 1897, to identify a sensational style of journalism that was being referred to at the time as the “new journalism.”¹⁴ Other critics, including those at competing conservative journals, quickly picked up the label and used it in scathing critiques of the *Journal* and the *World*.¹⁵ Hearst and his newspaper also robustly embraced the term yellow journalism. The *Journal* proclaimed and celebrated its yellowness, what Hearst called “journalism that acts.”¹⁶ The paper proudly printed “... the sun in heaven is yellow—the sun which is to this earth what the Journal is to American journalism.”¹⁷ While the term originated as an indictment of the “new journalism” practices, subsequent study has shown many modern journalistic practices, such as large headlines, photojournalism, and investigative, civic, public and activist journalism, all have roots in the yellow press of the late 1800s.¹⁸

Most scholarship has confined the study of yellow journalism and its inception to the newspapers of Pulitzer and Hearst in New York and those in other big cities in the East during the 1890s. To date, beyond the assertion that yellow journalism spread, study of the period has largely neglected to determine whether, and to what degree, elements of yellow journalism were practiced in distant locales in the West, where an important event was the conversion of US territories into the last states. Of interest is Arizona, the last continental US territory until it became the forty-eighth state in 1912. Its pre-statehood period was highlighted by the first editions of America’s last significant territorial newspaper which became Arizona’s dominant news publication. Known today as the *Arizona Republic*, it began in Phoenix as the *Arizona Republican* in 1890. Almost instantly, this newspaper rose in circulation and prominence—during the same period when other US newspapers likewise enlarged by adopting the practices of Pulitzer and Hearst.

Toward fully assessing the advent of yellow journalism as a historical turning point, an important question is whether and to what degree its practice affected the territorial press. Because frontier newspapers are believed to have been small, primitive “news sheets,” grayed with small type, the idea editors used blaring headlines and flashy images is dismissed.¹⁹ However, coming at the same moment when yellow journalism

first was introduced, the *Arizona Republican's* rapid popularity in the 1890s suggests a newspaper that emulated those of Pulitzer and Hearst.

Here, in this close reading of the early days of the *Arizona Republican*, the question is addressed: To what extent, if any, was yellow journalism practiced in this territorial newspaper? This history first consists of background that establishes the practices that distinguished yellow journalism in the 1890s, then a close examination of the *Arizona Republican* digital archive from 1890 to 1900.²⁰ A page-by-page scan of the newspaper from 1890 to 1895 provided an understanding of the newspaper's early days before the advent of yellow journalism. Then a close examination was conducted of every preserved page from 1895 to 1899, during the peak years of yellow journalism. A further page-by-page scan of 1899 through 1900, when yellow journalism began to decline in the East, shows a similar decline in the *Arizona Republican*. Additionally, a page-by-page scan of the *Arizona Republican's* main competitors, the *Herald* and *Gazette*, from 1890 to 1900 revealed that the competition did not practice yellow journalism, at least not overtly. The *Herald* and *Gazette* were viewed on microfilm borrowed through the Interlibrary Loan System.

As will be seen, yellow journalism spread beyond Eastern US newspapers, where it was incubated; in territorial Arizona, yellow journalism flourished. The *Republican*, as it called itself, possessed printing technology comparable to that in the East. Needing to attract readers in a competitive newspaper market with a growing population, the newspaper did so with large headlines, scurrilous reporting, attention-grabbing news, and gratuitous illustrations. This study will show that yellow journalism thrived beyond the Eastern United States, where the same force which brought on yellow journalism—publishers' needs to attract huge readerships—fueled the practice on the US's territorial frontier in the *Arizona Republican*.

Background

A definition is required to understand how elements of yellow journalism were employed by the *Republican*. While there is no universal definition, most scholars agree on some general characteristics, which serve as the basis for a synthesized definition developed and used for this study. Wilcox was one of the first scholars to offer a definition in 1900, when he conducted a content analysis of 147 major US newspapers printed in 1898 and 1899.²¹ He found that compared to conservative competitors, yellow newspapers had larger circulations and cheaper prices, used headlines that extended across an entire front page, had an exaggerated emphasis on being "up-to-date," published more news of crime and vice, used illustrations, included want ads and medical advertisements, and practiced extensive self-promotion.

Wilcox, though, struggled with classifying newspapers as either “conservative” or “yellow,” which he acknowledged presented difficulties because he found conservative papers could have yellow traits.²² Wilcox noted having “considerable trouble in getting a quantitative test which would make the New York Journal yellow and the New York Evening Post conservative.”²³ He concluded it was “perhaps possible that a paper may be so sensationally conservative as to become almost yellow.”²⁴ Yellow journalism’s pervasiveness meant that regardless of a newspaper’s editorial stance or reputation for being “conservative,” it could still practice yellow tactics, such as sensationalism, to attract readers.

Some newspapers, widely perceived as non-yellow, “conservative” journals, displayed elements of yellow journalism.²⁵ Trevor D. Dryer discovered that New York City conservative and yellow newspapers had shared traits in high-profile murder trial coverage.²⁶ He found that both types of newspapers had a “shared narrative style; sympathy for the ‘wayward sinner’; and a keen interest in forensic evidence and science.”²⁷ Dryer determined the *New York Times*, considered the antithesis of yellow journalism, “shared many similar characteristics with its ‘yellow’ cousins, such as the *World*.”²⁸ The *Times* imitated many yellow elements in its murder trial coverage, including a focus on the “sinner and morality,” as well as an interest in new technology and investigative procedures, thus exhibiting a “predilection” to yellow journalism.²⁹ In yellow journalism’s “heyday” in the 1890s, newspapers that were not considered classically yellow exhibited characteristics of yellow journalism.³⁰

One characteristic commonly used to define yellow journalism was sensational coverage of the Spanish-American War, a conflict often blamed on the yellow press.³¹ Scholars have since argued that while the coverage was sensational, at times false, and affected public sentiment, yellow journalism did not precipitate the war.³² Mark Welter also makes an argument that “New York style journalism” did not start the war.³³ He bases this on the contention that yellow journalism did not spread to the Western press. Welter performed a case study of eight Minnesota newspapers to see if yellow journalism infiltrated newspapers across the nation, influenced public support, and caused the war.³⁴ A significant shortcoming of Welter’s study is that he does not apply any scholarly definitions of yellow journalism, only uses war coverage to define yellow journalism, and only analyzes Minnesota newspapers. Rather than measuring multiple characteristics of yellow journalism, Welter’s findings rely solely on the fact that the Minnesota newspapers did not cover the war as a news item as heavily or frequently as New York papers and did not editorially agree that the United States should go to war.³⁵ Additionally, Welter points out, the newspapers criticized the Eastern newspapers’ “yellow” war coverage.³⁶ Using the same criteria, Joseph Fry comes to a

similar conclusion about Nevada's press.³⁷ However, as shown above by Wilcox and Dryer, conservative newspapers, even with an anti-war editorial position, such as the Minnesota newspapers, could still display elements of yellow journalism.³⁸ Further, Welter overstates when he classifies the Minnesota newspapers as the "Western press," ignoring the thousands of papers in Western states and territories.³⁹

Wilcox and other scholars note that smaller newspapers across the country relied on stories disseminated, not only from New York papers such as the *World* and *Journal*, but also from the Associated Press, and other news services such as the Scripps-McRae syndicate, which were also criticized for excessive war coverage.⁴⁰ Welter, though, dismisses the influence these wire services may have played on subscribing newspapers.⁴¹ Regardless of whether newspapers in New York or newspapers nationwide, in fact, wielded much influence over the decision to go to war, many scholars agree the New York press and its yellow tactics did influence newspapers across the country then and with a lasting influence even today.⁴²

Journalism historian Frank Luther Mott's definition of yellow journalism, which goes beyond the popular notion of sensationalism, has since been widely accepted and used by scholars.⁴³ Mott acknowledges that yellow journalism was based on the "familiar aspects of sensationalism—crime news, scandal and gossip, divorces and sex, and stress upon the reporting of disasters and sports."⁴⁴ Additionally, though, Mott outlined five distinct techniques of yellow journalism: first, excessively large red or black scare-headlines that "screamed excitement"; second, the elaborate use of pictures that may be phony or lack significance; third, fraudulent reporting including faked interviews and stories, misleading headlines, and pseudo-science; fourth, publishing a Sunday supplement that included "colored comics and superficial articles"; and fifth, a "sympathy with the 'underdog'" and "campaigns against abuses suffered by the common people."⁴⁵

Yellow journalism has been difficult for scholars to define, in part because elements of it spread in "varying degrees" across the country.⁴⁶ Arguing that Wilcox's and Mott's definitions fall short, Campbell presents a "more encompassing" definition that identifies six defining tactics: one, the "frequent use of multi column headlines that sometimes stretch across the front page"; two, a front page featuring a variety of topics including "news of politics, war, international diplomacy, sports and society"; three, "bold and experimental" page layouts; four, the "generous and imaginative use of illustrations," including photographs, maps, and other graphic representations, often on the front page; five, a practice of relying on anonymous sources; and six, a penchant for self-promotion and calling attention to the paper's accomplishments, such as crusades.⁴⁷ Campbell

does not include a Sunday supplement in his definition as an important indicator of yellow journalism because many conservative journals also published these special supplements.⁴⁸

Common in academic definitions of yellow journalism is the use of sensational, manufactured, or fake news. Frontier newspapers frequently published outlandish and false stories that David Dary describes as exaggerated and “hyperbolized” rather than fake or sensational.⁴⁹ While Dary admits that it would be difficult for readers then or now to determine whether “hyperbolized” accounts in territorial newspapers are “fact or fiction,” he classifies the stories as “satire” and “exaggeration.”⁵⁰ The “hyperbolized” stories that Dary documents in frontier newspapers in the late 1800s are strikingly similar to the sensational stories that many outraged critics called hoaxes and fakes when reported in the yellow journals in the East. While conceding that at times territorial newspaper readers were confused by these fake stories, Paulette D. Kilmer describes them as “fairy-tales” that reflected social norms of the time.⁵¹ Both Dary and Kilmer agree the purpose of the “hyperbolized” stories—trained trout that saved a little girl from drowning, a horse that purposefully delivered three drunks to the police, and a stone that cured scorpion bites—was to increase readership.⁵² The humorous stories were an escape and “it was only natural for many newspaper editors to stretch the truth and spice up their columns to attract and entertain readers.”⁵³ Arguably, those who practiced yellow journalism in the East had the same goal in mind when publishing sensational, exaggerated, and untrue accounts. Whether the stories are called fairy tales, hyperbole or hoaxes, publishing what is essentially fake, exaggerated, or sensationalized news to gain readers is a classic characteristic of yellow journalism, whether practiced in the East or the Western frontier.

Beyond fake and sensational stories, advances in printing technology and cheaper newsprint propelled yellow journalism.⁵⁴ Improved work efficiencies and other advancements also contributed to its rapid emergence. Yellow journalism relied on graphic illustrations and was aided by new technologies which allowed broad distribution.⁵⁵ Along with the use of the telegraph to quickly disseminate news, yellow journalism benefited from advances in graphics that transformed the front page, cheaper newsprint that allowed newspapers to expand, newsroom technology such as typewriters and telephones, more college educated reporters, and enhanced delivery systems, including automobiles and trains.⁵⁶

The high cost of new technology presented an impediment for smaller papers to fully practice all elements of yellow journalism.⁵⁷ Large headlines, sensational illustrations, and an emphasis on crime and entertainment could be easily emulated. Other elements, though, including colored comics, enterprise reporting, and campaigns were beyond the capability, resources, and interest of most publishers.⁵⁸ Ted Curtis Smythe contends “the

‘journalism that acts’ required an expenditure of funds that most publishers did not have” and “a large population so that the cheap, rapidly printed newspaper, with large amounts of advertising, could be supported.”⁵⁹ Smaller newspapers may not have had the resources to fully practice yellow journalism, but that is not to say they did not practice it at all.

The definition of yellow journalism employed for this study is derived from a synthesis of the scholarly definitions detailed above. Many characteristics of yellow journalism are evident on a newspaper’s front page, including the large attention-grabbing headlines, images made possible with new technology, and modernized front-page layouts that changed frequently, unlike their static and staid predecessors. Publishers invested in new technology that allowed them to print larger newspapers faster, more frequently, and at a lower cost, which enabled bigger circulations. Coverage, especially on the front page, focused on topics beyond political fare that was often exaggerated, sensationalized and at times manufactured.⁶⁰ Yellow newspapers engaged in self-promotion and self-congratulation on the effectiveness of their advertisements, large circulations, adoption of new technology, and celebration of their support for the poor and working classes.

For this study the above definitions of yellow journalism have been synthesized into eight criteria.

- Large headlines across several columns or the entire front page, often with subheads;
- Dynamic, modernized front-page layout that includes the next criterion;
- Images, such as photos, illustrations, and comics;
- Use of new technologies that made possible swifter reporting, large circulations, bigger newspapers and the dynamic front page with images;
- An expanded definition of news to include reporting on topics such as crime, violence, disasters, sex, divorce, scandal, pseudoscience, sports, international diplomacy, and weather events;
- Fake, exaggerated, or sensationalized reporting, including the use of anonymous sources;
- Self-promotion and self-congratulation touting the newspaper’s accomplishments; and
- Support for the poor and working class, which often manifested in campaigns and support for causes.

America’s Last Great Territorial Newspaper

The *Arizona Republican* was founded in Phoenix by Governor Lewis Wolfley and a group of Republican territorial officials.⁶¹ The first issue of

the *Republican* was printed May 19, 1890. The politicians maintained they wanted to run the newspaper as the “most modern up-to-date paper in the territory.”⁶² Rather than a party “mouthpiece” answering to “a boss,” it would be a professional, modern newspaper printing full six-thousand word Associated Press dispatches daily.⁶³ The *Republican* struggled until railroad owner Frank Murphy bought it in October 1896 and hired Charles C. Randolph to run the paper.⁶⁴ Randolph had worked for the previous seven years for the *New York Times’s* Washington, DC, bureau.⁶⁵ Before that, he owned a weekly paper in Brockport, New York, worked for the *Kansas City Journal*, and the *New York Times* in Albany.⁶⁶ Randolph left his position as editor in 1900, to become the *Republican’s* Washington, DC correspondent.⁶⁷

The population of Phoenix, known as the Valley, was 3,152 when it became the Territory’s capital in 1889.⁶⁸ At that time, the population of Maricopa County was 10,986.⁶⁹ Two papers, the *Gazette* and *Herald*, were already competing with other Arizona newspapers for readers and advertisers in Phoenix.⁷⁰ Advertising dollars were critical to a newspaper’s survival in the Arizona territory.⁷¹ Newspapers in Arizona received 64 percent of their revenue from advertisers in the 1880s, and that increased by 3 percent in the following decade.⁷²

The *Republican* struggled at first as all three papers fought for advertising in the Valley. Even so, the paper boasted of “phenomenal” circulation growth in the first three months.⁷³ Within nine months, as a cost-cutting measure, the newspaper eliminated its Monday edition.⁷⁴ Then on its first birthday the *Republican* reported it had doubled its competitors’ circulation in its first year.⁷⁵ While exact numbers are unclear, during Randolph’s tenure the *Republican’s* circulation grew from an estimated 4,300 in 1895 to 6,349 in 1899/1900, at least twice that of the *Herald* and as much as 2,100 higher than the *Gazette*.⁷⁶ Supporting the circulation growth was the territory’s population boom. From the 1890 census, Maricopa County’s population nearly doubled to 20,457 in 1900, and Phoenix grew 56 percent to 5,544.⁷⁷ While it is not clear that the *Republican’s* success can be attributed solely to its yellow tactics, the newspaper bought its non-yellow competitors, the *Herald* in 1899 and eventually the *Gazette* in 1930. A scan of the *Herald* and the *Gazette* during this period shows that they were not visibly yellow.

The Emergence of Yellow Journalism in the Arizona Territory

It did not take long before Randolph started the *Republican’s* trajectory toward yellow journalism. In his first year, Randolph instituted many changes, and the newspaper quickly began to resemble the publications of Pulitzer and Hearst.⁷⁸ In late 1896, he initiated a daily illustration on the

front page, started using multicolumn-width headlines with multiple sub-heads, took up causes and campaigns, and began society reports on gossip from the East. Simultaneously, he upgraded the newspaper's technology with new presses and rolls of paper; expanded its size, advertising, number of columns, and circulation; demanded cash payments for advertising rather than trade; required cash for subscriptions; printed extra editions; and included literary installments.⁷⁹ In addition to all this, the paper indulged in self-promotion and self-congratulation while skewering its competitors. Under Randolph's guidance, the newspaper continued featuring yellow content: printing crime, violence, disasters, international diplomacy, sports, trials, gossip and scandal, suicides, pseudo-science, and even occasional false stories on the front page. Along with these practices, Randolph, much like his counterparts in the East, would soon capitalize on the Spanish-American War.⁸⁰

The following year, 1897, was an exceptional passage in the newspaper's development. Randolph worked quickly to modernize and organize the *Republican*, demanding advertisers, and eventually subscribers, pay in cash. The *Republican* no longer accepted trade in exchange for advertising space and early in 1898 stopped accepting subscriptions on credit.⁸¹ He started printing Monday editions again and accommodated more advertising by increasing the eight-page paper from five to six columns, and then in 1898 to seven.⁸² Randolph also took up campaigns. The *Republican* was against lowering railroad rates; supported the gold standard; ran anti-silver editorials; supported tariffs to protect manufacturing, farming, and business; promoted Phoenix to people in the East; pushed for paving Phoenix streets as well as other city improvements; and advocated for a stable water source for the Valley.

Yellow Tactics Visible on the Front Page

Emulating yellow newspapers, Randolph abandoned the *Republican's* rigid and uniform front-page layout. The paper began displaying daily illustrations on the front page.⁸³ The front page featured a daily cartoon, across two columns at the top. At times, it was done locally, but most often the cartoon was taken from Eastern newspapers.⁸⁴ The local cartoons were among the most visible examples of Randolph's campaigns. Just as the "new journalism" used the editorial crusade for building circulation, so too did Randolph. He was unhappy with the unpaved streets in Phoenix, especially during floods.⁸⁵ The paper published numerous items on the benefits of paving.⁸⁶ After a summer flood, the paper published a mocking article titled "Shipping Intelligence."⁸⁷ In another period of flooding, a front-page cartoon showed the streets full of water, floating barrels, people bobbing about, and the caption "Municipal Natatorium Opened

Last Saturday.”⁸⁸ Another local cartoon depicted armed men shooting stray dogs in the Phoenix streets. The caption read “A Phoenix Dog Hunt Arranged by the Council for the Amusement of Eastern Tourists and Incidentally for the Destruction of Untagged Dogs.”⁸⁹ In addition, the paper printed several sarcastic articles lamenting the practice of openly shooting strays.⁹⁰ Eventually the city rounded up stray dogs and killed them out of public view.⁹¹

Extensive War Coverage Expands Circulation

Following the USS *Maine* disaster in February 1898, Randolph saw the coming war with Spain as an opportunity, and he was not alone.⁹² Like Hearst, but on a much smaller scale, Randolph geared up to cover the impending conflict. Increasing war coverage meant increased circulation and revenue.⁹³ Thus, like big-city yellow journals, he devoted less space to covering the “common people,” enlarged the paper’s printing presses, and bought roll paper to devote to war coverage.⁹⁴ It was evident from the self-congratulation on the editorial page that Randolph believed that vast war reporting was increasing readership.⁹⁵

Randolph further expanded the paper’s war content, doubling the telegraph service and arranging for special news reports.⁹⁶ To accommodate the growth, he would invest in new technology, including a Linotype machine, web perfecting press, and rolls of paper, to expand the paper’s size and circulation. In his effort to capitalize on the war, Randolph printed extra editions.⁹⁷ In the days following the war declaration, the *Republican* boasted twenty-five new subscriptions a day, and a month later a thousand new subscribers along with the need for a new printing press.⁹⁸

Flexible Front-Page Layout

Multicolumn headlines and bold front-page layouts were widely used yellow tactics. By the end of Randolph’s first year, the newspaper deviated from the usual single-column width headlines, which were common for territorial newspapers, to an occasional double-column width headline.⁹⁹ Beginning in October 1896, the newspaper featured the first double-column width headlines with several stacked sub headlines for stories covering Republican William McKinley’s presidential campaign.¹⁰⁰ Marking a turning point for the *Republican*, the newspaper again featured a double-column width headline, this one accompanied by six subheads, when the USS *Maine* exploded.¹⁰¹ Half the front page on this day was devoted to coverage of the *Maine*’s destruction, with more coverage on the back page. The rest of the front page had the typical fare, including a

story of a woman suing a man for breach of promise for not marrying her. In the following months leading up to the war, the larger multicolumn front-page headlines, characteristic of yellow journals, continued on the *Republican's* front page as the conflict with Spain dominated the newspaper in the months leading up to the war.

On April 19, 1898, for the first time, a large three-column width headline with eight subheads stated, "WAR IS AT LAST DECLARED."¹⁰² All but two columns of the front page and much of the editorial page were devoted to the conflict with Spain. Not entirely abandoning its usual yellow fare, the paper ran a front-page story on a court battle over water rights in the Valley that resulted in a "predictable" murder.¹⁰³ "The killing was the natural result of going after water with a shovel and a shotgun, which latter implement of irrigation has been extensively employed ... frequently with fatal results. It had been predicted in this case that the litigation ... would be attended by slaughter."¹⁰⁴ This edition also contained "Fashionable Fashions" and "Gossip of New York," along with additional war-related stories on the back page.

Just five days later, Randolph began enlarging his war coverage, routinely featuring a two-column width headline on both sides of the front page. This flexibility in front-page design layout, straying from the typically staid designs of most territorial newspapers, resembled the practices of the big-city yellow journals.¹⁰⁵ The headlines were often alarming, sensational and at times misleading.¹⁰⁶ In the weeks following the declaration of war, typically both the left and right side double-column headlines were war related, but at times the story on the right was a matter unrelated to the conflict. This routine front-page feature, showcasing stories with enlarged headlines, remained a front-page staple for the *Republican* well after the war ended.

The Self-Congratulatory *Arizona Republican*

After Randolph was hired, the *Republican* began routinely publishing editorial items about the newspaper's advertising effectiveness, circulation growth, expansive reach to all corners of the Territory, speed at delivering the latest news, and its extensive AP content. This type of self-promotion and self-congratulation is characteristic of a yellow journal.¹⁰⁷ Publishers on the Western frontier had to develop strategies to increase circulation.¹⁰⁸ "By the late 1890s, following the example of the New York City papers, promotion had become more sophisticated."¹⁰⁹ Even before the Spanish-American War began, the *Republican* was self-congratulatory. An item titled "Our Advertisers" stated that local businesses found the *Republican* to be "the best advertising medium."¹¹⁰ The article states those who did not advertise "sooner or later will be forced out of business by

their more progressive competitors,” adding “if you wish to see a picture of prosperity, gaze upon the *Republican*’s many and varied advertisements.”¹¹¹ Another promotion titled “Read The Republican” offered a free trial subscription for a month. It boasted that the newspaper “makes a specialty of mining news” and had recently reported on a “rich copper strike” that would likely be a “bonanza” for prospectors.¹¹² Saying it was likely to report “many more rich strikes very soon,” the promotion implied a reader, paying a subscription rate “lower than those of any other paper,” could get rich with the information provided in the *Republican*.¹¹³

The *Republican* became even more boastful. Randolph’s efforts to turn the paper into a professional, modern operation were paying off. In March, the paper announced it was meeting a growing demand with speedy new delivery to outlying areas by railroad bicycle.¹¹⁴ Proving the war coverage effective, in May an item titled “Our Rural Delivery” announced that circulation had increased more than “a thousand copies” in the month since the war started. The paper touted its excellent rural delivery, stating that by daybreak “rural residents who are anxious to read the latest war news ... find The Republican at their doors.” It went on to state that growing demand made a web perfecting press a “necessity” and that one would be installed in the near future, allowing “further enlargement of the paper.”¹¹⁵

Expanding Advertising and Upgrading Technology

In the months after the war started, the *Republican*, announced it had more advertising than ever and was “read in every portion of Arizona every day in the year.”¹¹⁶ The item stated that “it is emphatically ‘the people paper’” and has “no dull season.”¹¹⁷ In August, the paper declared it had secured advertising contracts with every “big dry goods merchant” in town and was read by nine out of ten newspaper readers in the Valley.¹¹⁸ That month, as the war came to a close, the *Republican* continued to taunt other area newspapers almost daily and encouraged readers to ask the postmaster which paper had the highest deliveries and paid the most for its mail service. It even stated that the *Republican* had double the circulation of all other Phoenix newspapers combined.¹¹⁹

The *Republican* was also self-congratulatory about its speedy and up-to-date news coverage. Yellow journals had a “general tendency to exaggerate the importance of being ‘up-to-date.’”¹²⁰ The newspaper routinely touted its extensive AP content, even before the war began. In early April, the *Republican* stated it was the only morning paper in Phoenix receiving AP dispatches “directly transmitted by telegraph” and printed “up to the moment of going to press.”¹²¹ Days before the war broke out,

the newspaper proclaimed the “excellence of The Republican’s telegraphic service.”¹²² The paper stated its AP dispatch from Washington, DC, was twenty-four hours ahead of the information local readers received if they subscribed to the *Los Angeles Times*. “The Republican gives the news of the world 24 hours in advance” of California newspapers.¹²³ Wilcox criticized the yellow press, writing, “we are so thoroughly up-to-date that we might about as well celebrate our funerals and see who can get to heaven first.”¹²⁴

Along with boasting of its up-to-date news, the *Republican* routinely boasted of its superior technology. A month after the war started, an item titled “It Leads” listed the paper’s new technology, stating it was the first in Arizona to introduce a folding machine and a Mergenthaler Linotype machine, to operate two Mergenthaler presses, and would soon be the only newspaper in the southwest, aside from Los Angeles and San Diego, operating a perfecting press.¹²⁵ The *Republican* boasted that it was “first in all things that go to make a first class newspaper.”¹²⁶ Just days before the war ended, a large parade through the city streets, complete with a band, escorted a new Mergenthaler press to the paper. The *Republican* declared it was now on par with “newspapers published in cities ten times larger.”¹²⁷ In the following days, an item titled “Keep it Dark,” announced delivery of a new engine to power the new press. It sarcastically stated “but for our unwillingness to excite the editors of the Gazette, Herald and Bladder, who are recovering from their attack of web perfecting press nausea, we might refer to the big engine that we bought expressly to operate the big press in our big press room.”¹²⁸ The paper promised not to “jar the nerves of our neighbors by any display of this modern machine.” It added the territory’s first ever load of roll paper was to arrive by train, “marking a new era in Arizona journalism.” Presumably tongue in cheek, it went on to say it would not refer to any of this because “it wouldn’t do for our neighbors to have two visits from the green eyed monster in a single week.”¹²⁹

Not only did Randolph expand and upgrade the *Republican’s* printing technology to cover the Spanish-American war, responding to growing demand from advertisers, he continued to modernize and expand advertising after the war ended. In New York’s yellow newspapers, rigid front-page designs were “a thing of the past by 1897,” and most were using a flexible eight column layout.¹³⁰ Although slightly behind the expansion of advertising and front-page redesign of the yellow journals in New York, at the end of 1898, Randolph added more room for advertising with a seventh column on each page.¹³¹ Beginning in January 1899, Randolph expanded the paper even more to sixteen pages.¹³² He was fulfilling the *Republican’s* original mission of being a modern paper and not a party mouthpiece.

Sensationalism, Fake News, and Pseudo-Science

One of many sensational murder trials the *Republican* covered, Cordelia Botkin's trial in San Francisco, exemplifies some of its yellow characteristics.¹³³ In late 1898, the paper published a series of front-page articles on Botkin's trial from the AP. Botkin was accused of murdering two people with arsenic-laced candy. The narrative style of the articles focused on the public's sympathy for Botkin, who was portrayed as the "wayward sinner," and the public's belief that she would surely be acquitted.¹³⁴

The articles also detailed the forensic science and investigative methods used in the case. The coverage focused on the defense's contention that the candy had been tainted during chemical analysis in the bungled investigation. When Botkin was finally convicted, the article was visually presented as the war stories had been. The subheads for the front-page double-column width headline stated it was a "Quick and Surprising" verdict with the jury saving the "Prisoner's Neck."¹³⁵ The narrative explained, in a sympathetic tone, that given the "verdict was unexpected," Botkin had maintained her composure and "kept herself well in hand when her fate was announced." Not until the courtroom was nearly cleared did Botkin "give evidences of a collapse" and "sank back half fainting, but speedily revived when given a glass of water."¹³⁶

Before and during Randolph's time, the *Republican* also followed the yellow practice of mixing pseudo-science in with other coverage.¹³⁷ Exaggerated, sensational, and even false accounts were not uncommon in the paper. One item stated that "excessive water drinking causes obesity."¹³⁸ Another purported a cure for sneezing, which included "soaking one's feet five or 10 minutes in a bowl of water as hot as the skin will stand coming into which a liberal dose of mustard has been stirred."¹³⁹ Then afterward take "a Dover's powder" and "you'll awake in the morning to find the villain gone."¹⁴⁰ Dover's powder, a malaria treatment, contained opium and quinine. A series of articles in 1898 explained that a Phoenix woman had been nearly frightened to death by a stone-throwing ghost and cited several witnesses to the events.¹⁴¹

On that same day, an article from the *Pall Mall Gazette* appeared titled "Making Modern Mummies."¹⁴² It explained how a Naples scientist, using a "series of baths ... to effectually prevent decomposition to the end of time," could preserve a dead body for its loved ones.¹⁴³ Another article explained cold weather forecast for the New Orleans area would "stamp out the dread disease" of yellow fever.¹⁴⁴ The paper printed an AP story from New York, reporting on the appearance of the ghost of a murdered man.¹⁴⁵ These stories of pseudo-science, hoax and exaggeration, whether called "fairy-tales" or "hyperbole" are evidence of yellow journalism in the *Republican*.¹⁴⁶

The newspaper also was a domain for scandal and gossip. Stories of divorce, broken engagements, domestic violence, and numerous suicides were all typical front-page fare for the *Republican* through the 1890s. An AP article from New York reported a 19-year-old Newark man sold his “pretty” 18-year-old wife to another man on installment payments.¹⁴⁷ He accepted a three dollar down payment and “the remaining \$2 is to be paid later on.”¹⁴⁸ In another front-page AP story a “comely young widow” sued a Missouri man for \$30,000 for breach of promise because he married her sister instead.¹⁴⁹ On the same day, a large front-page headline and four subheads from the *Saint Louis Post-Dispatch* announced a woman sold her husband to another woman for the “extravagant sum of four thousand dollars.”¹⁵⁰ The sub headlines stated that “John Truitt is a luxury ... which a woman had been searching for.” After making the deal with the other woman, “who declares she loves the man more than his wife does,” Mrs. Truitt “attempted to take her life by swallowing a dose of morphine.”¹⁵¹ Also from Saint Louis was a front-page story titled “Must Marry” in which a father gave “his four beautiful daughters ... a queer ultimatum” that they must marry or leave his home.¹⁵² The daughters decided to “leave home and work for a living rather than be forced into matrimony.”¹⁵³

In its early days from 1890 until the time Randolph took over in 1896, the *Republican* looked very much like a typical territorial newspaper, with small type, single column width headlines, and few images. In early 1899, the *Republican* began to look more like its old self. Nationwide, yellow journalism had begun to decline, and that decline in the *Republican* was reflected on the front page. Starting in late January 1899, just before Randolph’s departure, the newspaper returned to single-column width headlines until December, when the only large headline of the year was an announcement for a carnival and parade stretching across three columns on the front page.¹⁵⁴ Because there is no archive of Randolph’s papers, it is impossible to know how much the rise and decline of yellow practices in the *Republican* can be attributed to him. The newspaper stopped featuring front-page images, and, outside of advertising, used few images until 1900. Only half the year’s editions were preserved for 1900, but what remains shows that aside from political cartoons, the newspaper printed far fewer front-page images. The only large headlines that appeared in the editions preserved from 1900 was one three-column width headline about a fire and two about the presidential nominations, several two-column width headlines printed in December, and a splashy November front-page declaring “VICTORY! VICTORY! VICTORY!” when President McKinley was re-elected in a landslide.¹⁵⁵

Conclusion

In this time of upheaval for journalism, with near record-level mistrust in news media, shrinking newsrooms, and increasing news deserts, a full understanding of how—and to what extent—journalism has evolved to this point is critical to navigate the present and take on the future.¹⁵⁶ Current discussions about threats to journalism are also discussions about threats to democracy. In popular thought and scholarship, yellow journalism is generally understood through Hearst's and Pulitzer's circulation war. The grandiose excesses of their epic battle obscure a nuanced understanding of yellow journalism and its contributions to journalism and to the public good. Examining Western newspapers, such as this exploration of the *Republican*, illuminates the varying degrees to which yellow journalism was practiced beyond the East.

Like the penny press “attention merchants” before, yellow tactics were designed to gain readers, boost circulation, and produce more advertising revenue.¹⁵⁷ At its core, yellow journalism was a money-making scheme, emulated because the techniques stimulated circulation.¹⁵⁸ Entertaining, sensationalized news allowed newspapers, such as the *Republican*, to succeed in the attention economy.¹⁵⁹ The attention merchants' scramble for eyeballs is a race to the bottom, as more outrageous tactics are used until the overtaxed audience rejects them.¹⁶⁰ The cycle repeats itself as new attention-harvesting innovations enter the media landscape.¹⁶¹ The worst of yellow journalism faded in the early 1900s when journalism began to professionalize and adopt ethics codes, at least in part as a response to public criticism and distrust.

A critique of yellow journalism in 1911 described it as a mixture of “evil” and “virtue,” noting that the sensationalism enticed new readers to pick up newspapers and exposed them to “instructive” ideas with which they would not have otherwise engaged.¹⁶² This echoes Pulitzer's sentiment that the tactics lured readers to important editorial messages.¹⁶³ Yellow journalism also “proved a fearless and efficient instrument for the exposure of public wrongdoing.”¹⁶⁴ Despite the negative connotations of the label, yellow newspapers championed the common, working-class person contributing to public good through campaigns.¹⁶⁵ Muckraking, the forerunner to investigative journalism, was born out of yellow journalism.¹⁶⁶ Additionally, civic, public, and activist journalism have been traced back to the muckraking that yellow journalism produced.¹⁶⁷

Many modern journalistic practices are rooted in the “new journalism” and yellow journalism of the 1800s.¹⁶⁸ However, nearly 130 years later, the epithet has not lost its sting. It conjures up the worst of journalism, persisting today as a way to criticize journalism and point to its “power and lurking malevolence.”¹⁶⁹ The pejorative, while at times deserved, lives on as a taken-for-granted, commonsensical shortcut, an automatic and dismissive insult that forecloses a more nuanced understanding of yellow journalism's complexity

and a discussion of journalism's shortcomings. Modern concerns about the quality of journalism, and the threat that bad journalism presents to democracy, echo concerns of the late 1800s.¹⁷⁰ What gets lost is a constructive discussion about journalism's future in this democracy and that all of journalism "suffers indirectly" from misapprehensions of yellow journalism.¹⁷¹

Because journalism is powerful, and necessary to democracy, because yellow practices persist today, because yellow journalism can be a force of both good and bad, because it is used as a dismissive insult that ignores complexities and nuance, it requires a more thorough understanding. Thus, understanding yellow journalism's manifestation in the *Republican* is a step toward a fuller understanding of its role in the origins and development of modern journalism.

While this research was limited to the *Republican*, it illuminates the need for further study of other newspapers beyond Eastern states. This paper provides a starting place, a "plausibility probe," for scholars to examine yellow journalism more fully in the American West.¹⁷² The *Republican* abounded in visible features of yellow journalism. It did not have the resources nor the population to indulge in yellow practices on the grand scale of Pulitzer's *World* or Hearst's *Journal*; however, what was seen here of America's territorial press affirms the unexplored but often repeated contention that newspapers across the country practiced "varying degrees" of yellow journalism.¹⁷³ This is illustrated on the pages of the *Arizona Republican*.

Endnotes

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8. Elizabeth L. Banks, "American 'Yellow Journalism'; Lydia Kingsmill Commander, "The Significance of Yellow Journalism," *The Arena* 34 (August 1905): 150–55; Irwin, *American Newspaper*; Delos F. Wilcox, "The American Newspaper: A Study in Social Psychology," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 16, no. 1 (July 1900): 56–92.
9. Wilcox, "The American Newspaper," 81.
10. Campbell, *Puncturing the Myths*; Irwin, *American Newspaper*; Wilcox, "The American Newspaper." The term conservative is used in this paper to describe newspapers that were not yellow. Contemporaneous critiques of journalism, such as those written by Irwin and Wilcox, typically described newspapers as either yellow journals or conservative (non-yellow) journals. Conservative newspapers, for example the *New York Times*, were positioned as traditional journalism competing with the sensational practices of yellow newspapers such as the *Journal and World*.
11. Banks, "American 'Yellow Journalism,'" 328; Campbell, *Puncturing the Myths*, 25; Emery, *The Press and America*, 422; Mott, *American Journalism*, 525–26; David R. Spencer, *The Yellow Journalism: The Press and America's Emergence as a World Power* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 214.
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14. Campbell, *Puncturing the Myths*.
15. Campbell, *Puncturing the Myths*, 32–33; Mott, *American Journalism*.
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36. Welter, "Cuban Crisis in Minnesota," 722.
37. Joseph A. Fry, "Silver and Sentiment: The Nevada Press and the Coming of the Spanish-American War," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (1977): 223-39.
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39. Welter, "Cuban Crisis in Minnesota," 722.
40. Emery, *The Press and America*, 433; Mott, *American Journalism*, 533; Wilcox, "The American Newspaper," 86; Wilkerson, *Public Opinion*, 5.
41. Welter, "Cuban Crisis in Minnesota," 722.
42. Campbell, *Puncturing the Myths*, 13, 186; Spencer, *The Yellow Journalism*, xii.
43. Mott, *American Journalism*, 539.
44. Mott, *American Journalism*, 539.
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46. Campbell, *Puncturing the Myths*, 5.
47. Campbell, *Puncturing the Myths*, 7-8.
48. Campbell, 155-56. The Sunday supplement is an element thought to be synonymous with yellow journalism. See Mott, *American Journalism*, 539. While the *Arizona Republican* did print a Sunday edition, it did not routinely print a supplement. On Sundays, the newspaper occasionally offered a part two; while not in color, it provided content similar to that in a Sunday supplement. Most newspapers during this period that were considered conservative offered a Sunday supplement like their yellow competitors. A Sunday supplement, however, is not necessarily a defining feature of yellow journalism. See Campbell, *Puncturing the Myths*, 156.
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72. Cloud, *Business of Newspapers*, 70-71.
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74. *Arizona Republican*, February 8, 1891.
75. *Arizona Republican*, May 19, 1891.
76. When Randolph started running the *Republican* in 1896, Rowell's rated the paper and its competitors, the *Gazette* and *Herald*, "JKL" an estimated circulation of less than a thousand. See Rowell's *American Newspaper Directory* (New York: Printers' Ink Publishing Company, 1891-1900); The *Herald* had an estimated 3,500 in 1896 dropping to 2,788 in 1899 when it was bought by the *Republican*. The *Gazette* was listed in Ayer's at an estimated 2,700 in 1895 growing to an estimated 4,200 by 1899/1900. See "N.W. Ayer & Son's American Newspaper Annual and Directory" (Philadelphia, PA: N. W. Ayer & Son, 1890-1900).
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78. Zarbin, *All The Time*, 40-41.
79. Zarbin, *All The Time*, 39-48.
80. Zarbin, *All The Time*, 43.
81. Zarbin, *All The Time*, 40; "CASH INSTEAD OF CREDIT," *Arizona Republican*, March 20, 1898.

82. Zarbin, *All The Time*, 42, 45; *The Arizona Republican*, December 11, 1898.
83. "Abandoning the Resorts," *Arizona Republican*, September 11, 1897.
84. "Abandoning the Resorts." It is unknown how early in 1897 the *Arizona Republican* made the change to its front-page layout and first started using daily illustrations because editions from the first eight months were not preserved. However, the paper stopped using the routine, centered, daily cartoons late in 1897, but did continue to use various illustrations for stories, particularly those about the Spanish-American War.
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101. "The Maine's Burial," *Arizona Republican*, February 17, 1898.
102. "War Is at Last Declared."
103. "A Fatal Quarrel," *Arizona Republican*, April 19, 1898.
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110. "Our Advertisers," *Arizona Republican*, November 11, 1897.
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112. "Read The Republican," *Arizona Republican*, March 2, 1898.
113. "Read The Republican."
114. "OUR SPECIAL DELIVERY," *Arizona Republican*, March 12, 1898.
115. "Our Rural Delivery."
116. "Our Advertisers."
117. "Our Big Day," *Arizona Republican*, August 2, 1898.
118. "GOT THEM ALL," *Arizona Republican*, August 15, 1898; "PROFITABLE ADVERTISING," *Arizona Republican*, August 16, 1898.
119. "At the Top," *Arizona Republican*, August 21, 1898.
120. Wilcox, "The American Newspaper," 88.
121. *Arizona Republican*, April 1, 1898.
122. "24 Hours Ahead," *Arizona Republican*, April 10, 1898.
123. "24 Hours Ahead."
124. Wilcox, "The American Newspaper," 88.
125. "It Leads," *Arizona Republican*, May 19, 1898.
126. "It Leads."
127. "Our Big Day."
128. "Keep It Dark," *Arizona Republican*, August 5, 1898.
129. "Keep It Dark."
130. Spencer, *The Yellow Journalism*, 79.
131. *Arizona Republican*, December 11, 1898.
132. *Arizona Republican*, January 1, 1899.
133. "Botkin Convicted," *Arizona Republican*, December 31, 1898.
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141. "Frightened to Sickness," *Arizona Republican*, September 25, 1898.
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145. "Ghost of Murdered Man," *Arizona Republican*, December 5, 1898.
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