

WHEN 'POPULAR' WAS 'RADICAL'

The mass circulation US press in the 1890s, emerging celebrity journalism, and popular tastes

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*The late nineteenth century American mass circulation press developed a style of 'new journalism' that gave rise to celebrity journalism. It is widely accepted that this new approach to reporting replaced news values with entertainment as a consequence of the need to cater to the tastes of a mass readership and this is seen to explain the incredible innovations that occurred in the press in the US at the time (Ponce de Leon; Roggenkamp; Tebbel; Turner; Schudson *Discovering the News*). This article questions this version of American press history by arguing that those papers also had to appeal to the politics of poor immigrants and the working class and that the conventions associated with celebrity overlapped and often coincided with a 'radical' populist campaigning style of reporting that was as important (and at times, more important) to building and sustaining mass readerships.*

KEYWORDS American mass circulation press; 'new journalism'; celebrity journalism; mass readership; radical politics; popular taste

Introduction

Many accounts of celebrity and stardom situate its emergence with the development of cinema (Barbas; Gabler; Hampton; MacCann; Schickel *The Stars*; Walker). But there is considerable evidence that the rise of celebrity is, in a period prior to the invention of film, intimately linked to the development of a mass circulation press in America. It is widely accepted for both cinema and the press that celebrity comes to dominate the media in question because those media were catering to public tastes. This assumption has been challenged in relation to the cinema by film historians (Allen; de Cordova), and the idea that the survival of British newspapers depends on their ability to cater to public tastes has been complicated by British studies in journalism (Curran 'The Impact of Advertising' and *Media Power*; Curran and Sparks; Curran, Douglas, and Whannel). But the view that celebrity journalism arose as a consequence of the need to cater to the tastes of a mass readership remains the accepted version of histories of the early American mass circulation press and is seen to explain the incredible innovations that occurred in the press in the US at the time (Ponce de Leon; Roggenkamp, 2005; Tebbel; Turner; Schudson *Discovering the News*). This article questions this version of American press history by examining the specific conditions that shaped the widest circulating newspapers of 1880s and 1890s. While it is undoubtedly the case that these newspapers (particularly those of Hearst and Pulitzer) developed new styles of journalism that helped to establish the conventions of celebrity journalism, this is not a full picture of their form and content. What is equally significant, and either overlooked or underplayed, is that those convention

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overlapped and often coincided with a 'radical' populist campaigning style of reporting that was as important (and at times, more important) to building and sustaining mass readerships. This paper will argue that the early mass circulation press in the US depended on at least partially articulating the radical politics of the nineteenth century urban working class and immigrant readers (although in an inconsistent and populist manner) as much as it did on innovations in styles of journalism and newspaper layout, in order to build mass readerships. This paper will also argue that the fortunes of newspapers, such as *The New York World*, the *San Francisco Examiner* and the *New York Morning Journal*, were not completely tied to circulation figures at any rate. The wider processes of industrialisation in urban centres in the US, the role of advertising and the intense competition wars between the biggest proprietors were also of enormous significance in the development of the mass circulation press.

New Journalism and the Cultural Politics of Celebrity

The late nineteenth century American press is credited with playing a central role in the early production, circulation and consumption of celebrity (Ponce de Leon). The mass circulation press at this time developed a style of journalism that inaugurated a new way of framing the famous. It developed many of the techniques of reporting that (while they may not have originated in relation to reporting fame) came to define celebrity journalism. Many of these conventions continue to sustain celebrity culture today and have migrated onto other media such as television and the Internet: the human interest story, the interview, sensationalist headlines and content and the focus on the private lives of public individuals (Schudson *The Power*, 48). It is widely accepted that these innovations were seen to popularise the press, as proprietors attempted to win mass readerships amongst the growing populations of American cities. The rise of celebrity journalism, which comes out of this new journalism, is seen as a response to catering to the tastes of these growing urban populations.

Indeed, one of the most detailed studies of the role of the press in the rise of celebrity suggests that although celebrity journalism did not mature until the 1920s, throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century newspapers developed the genre of celebrity journalism in an effort to 'meet the needs of new kinds of readers' (Ponce de Leon 6). For Charles Ponce de Leon, a turning point in celebrity journalism came in the 1890s 'when journalists began crafting new techniques and rhetorical strategies for depicting celebrities' which involved focussing on representing the 'real' lives of the famous in order to portray their 'human' side (Ponce de Leon 6). Not only does he suggest that it is pointless to lament these developments, as critics of celebrity culture do, but he also argues that celebrity journalism contributed to the process of the democratisation of modern culture by portraying new groups in society as famous and by concentrating on humanising them. This resulted in progressive empowerment of the common people residing in the shattering of 'greatness'. For Ponce De Leon, celebrity culture is:

a direct outgrowth of developments that most of us regard as progressive: the spread of a market economy and the rise of democratic, individualistic values. Throughout modern history these developments have steadily eroded all sources of authority, including the aura that formerly surrounded the "great" (Ponce De Leon 4).

While it is not universally accepted that all these values are progressive (or related), there is something appealing about the suggested demise of greatness, particularly as those critics who lament its downfall do so on distinctly elitist grounds (Boorstin). But the association of celebrity with the democratic demise of greatness ignores the hierarchy that structures the field of celebrity and fame (Dyer; Rojek). The world does not consider Dame Judi Dench and Katie Price on a par. But even those critics who bemoan the developments in culture that are seen to accompany the dominance of celebrity, still accept that it is a product of appealing to popular taste (Boorstin; Schickel *Common Fame*).

Most critics agree that there is a close relationship between the destruction of old forms of social hierarchy (based on nobility and a static social system), the rise of bourgeois democracy, and development of new forms of social recognition (including celebrity), rooted in a social system based on mobility and meritocracy. But few comment on the paradox at the heart of bourgeois society that introduced new forms of class and social hierarchy which place fetters on social mobility and the possibilities for the self (Goldmann). Chris Rojek's analysis of celebrity is one of the few that sees celebrity culture as shaped by the inherent contradictions of the new social order, where celebrity is seen as emerging from the revolutionary destruction of old forms of hierarchy *and* the unexpected development of new (bourgeois) forms of social hierarchy which simultaneously exclude the public from 'success' while inviting them to participate in myth of success. Thus, while celebrity may be the direct descendent of the 'revolt against tyranny', it is also part of a new social hierarchy and is indeed one of its key symbols (Rojek 14–29). The idea of 'greatness' persists even though its symbols may have altered, and celebrity plays a part in the continuation of an inequitable social hierarchy.

By the latter half of the nineteenth century there emerged certain ideas of 'knowing' about the famous that were forged in the context of this paradox; the idea that the famous were indeed great—or at least special, jostled with the view that fame was open to ordinary people. Many public individuals negotiated their way through this contradiction by laying claim to humble origins, including newspaper proprietors like Joseph Pulitzer. In doing so, the separation between the public and private life of the famous began to dissolve. This growing focus on the private lives of public figures develops into a growing tendency to attempt to reveal the 'real' person behind the image or performance. These discourses of revelation actually began earlier, in the theatre, with the memoirs of actors and actresses (Luckhurst and Moody). But celebrity journalism establishes conventions about how to represent public figures for a mass audience that did not exist in the early nineteenth century theatre, and provides a model for being interested in the well-known that is readily available to be taken up in the world of film later on, including the interest in the stars private lives, the revelation of their 'real' selves and the negotiation of the paradox of fame.

Innovations and the Mass Circulation Press

The emerging (paradoxical) discourses on celebrity and their shaping by developing journalistic conventions also occur at a time of tremendous industrial and technical innovation in the newspaper industry in the US. Prior to the 1880s, most advances in newspaper publication emanated from Europe and Britain in particular, and newspapers in

the US borrowed techniques and bought equipment from Europe. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, the major innovations, both journalistic and technical, came out of the US (Weiner; Hutt; Tulloch). The 1880s and 1890s in America saw crucial innovations in journalism, newspaper layout, and in technological advances. By the 1890s, the US press was the first to be fully industrialised and routinised (Schudson *Discovering the News*). Alongside the advances in printing, both in terms of the quantity of paper that could go through the presses and the quality of the print, which enabled a substantial increase in page numbers for newspapers, there were huge developments in newspaper layout (Hutt 61). The multi-column line drawing and engraving and the advances in the quality of printing of images contributed a great deal to the styling of the personality in the press. For instance, using the latest Hoe Press which offered the highest quality of printing, William Randolph Hearst's first newspaper, the *San Francisco Examiner*, printed 22 line drawings to illustrate its front-page story about the wedding of Miss Hattie Crocker, the daughter of banker and railroad magnate Charles Crocker on 27 April 1887 (Nasaw 75).

The illustration of the lives of society figures, who like Crocker, are known for their social position, rather than achievement, feeds into the dichotomy between image and the 'real' person, which many commentators across the spectrum of the mass media consider to be a longstanding and central preoccupation in the culture of celebrity. The interview, the human interest story and the concentration on people, including the private lives of public figures all become established journalistic conventions in this period in the US (and, in a reverse move, are adopted by the British press some years later (Weiner; Hutt 67). It is perhaps unsurprising given the industrialisation of the press in the US in this period that celebrity journalism became 'remarkably uniform in form and content' (Ponce de Leon 7). The industrialisation and routinisation of the press produced new conventions in newsgathering and feature writing, such as a growing reliance on wire services and feature syndicates. This period also witnessed the emergence of newspaper chains and media empires (Ponce de Leon; Schudson *Discovering the News*; Tebbel; Baldasty)

The giants of the fin de siècle newspaper industry, particularly Pulitzer and Hearst, advanced the conventions of a style of journalism that came to be known both as the 'new journalism' and 'yellow journalism'. Both were keen to employ the latest methods and technology and to develop the innovations in style that began in embryonic form with James Gordon Bennett in the 1840s—the breaking up dense text with banner headlines and illustrations, and a tone that was, like Bennett's *New York Herald*, 'light and spicy' (Hutt 57). Bennett is said to have printed the first newspaper interview when in 1836, he put a story of a murdered prostitute, Helen Jewett, on the front page (Nelson). This caused a stir and had the impact he wanted—an early act of sensationalism. Although this first interview was not held with someone famous, but rather a local witness, the interview becomes an established method of reporting on the famous by the 1890s. Its ability to seemingly reveal the 'real' person and its potential for sensationalism establish it as an ideal mode for a journalism which is based on persons rather than events. Gordon Bennett's early sensationalism is seen to have been influential in the developing style of American popular mass newspapers and the men who ran them, particularly Joseph Pulitzer. But there was another aspect of his early popular journalism that influenced later newspaper proprietors, which receives less attention, and this was his populist, if ambiguous, radical stance on many issues of the day. His editorial style was in contrast

to the standard wordy style of the day; in a blunt and mocking tone he attacked the rich and powerful. According to John Tebbel, '[i]n New York, the war between the haves and the have-nots had already begun, and Bennett showed himself clearly as the friend of the have-nots' (97)

Joseph Pulitzer, more than any of his contemporaries, is said to have refined the techniques of sensational journalism pioneered by Gordon Bennett thirty to forty years earlier, but he brought them up to date to fit a modern America of cities and factories. He innovated the use of bolder and darker headlines, shorter paragraphs, cross heads, an increase use of illustrations, all aimed at drawing interest from the literate but uneducated working classes and the newly or partially literate growing immigrant population. The intention was to make the paper easier to read, livelier and more engaging. In 1889, Pulitzer ran a two-column headline in the *World* for the first time, and by the late 1890s, in competition with Hearst, large, multi-column and screaming headlines were the norm (Schudson *Discovering the News*, 96). Unlike other papers, Pulitzer did not rely on local police court news, but got reporters to hunt out stories. He was also the first to regularly take scandal stories and sensational reports from wire services.¹ He also mounted stunts which gave him lively front page news: Nellie Bly racing around a globe against the fictional rival Philleas Fogg, or Henry Stanley searching for and finding a Dr. Livingstone in 'darkest Africa'. He also introduced a daily sports page, daily pictures, short stories and poetry. Of enormous significance, discussed below, he initiated the practice of selling advertising space on the basis of actual circulation and sold it at fixed prices (Juergens 20). He also abandoned the traditional penalties for advertisers who used illustrations or broke the column rules (Schudson *Discovering the News*, 93).

Indeed, Pulitzer developed a number of techniques, from newspaper style, to journalistic style, to story topic in order to reach a wide audience. Important among these innovations were those which became the key components in celebrity journalism; the human interest story, the gossip column and the interview. Adopting these conventions, according to one of Pulitzer's biographers, was part of his plans to 'publish a newspaper for the millions rather than the thousands [which] meant that it would be a sensational paper, tapping hitherto untapped audiences, and appealing to a lowest common denominator in taste and literacy' (Juergens 17). But it is hard to tell exactly who the *New York World's* readers were, and Schudson suggests that the *World* may have been read by many of the well to do middle classes, particularly women and the new respectable commuting classes. Overcrowding and improved urban transport meant that the middle classes moved to the suburbs, taking horse drawn omnibuses into work in the city each day for the first time. Both Schudson (*Discovering the News*) and Juergens suggest that this had an impact on newspapers. Commuters now had free hands, but small type face and dense text were hard to read on bumpy horse-drawn transport, which made the large headlines and illustrations of Pulitzer's paper attractive to a middle-class commuter. Pulitzer even reduced the size of his paper and put all of the key information of the story into a lead paragraph in order to cater to the new commuter. Pulitzer himself hints at it cross class appeal of his paper when the paper reports mischievously:

Matthew Arnold tells the Chicago reporters that our newspapers contain too much about the woman who married the skeleton and the woman who turned out to be a man and all that sort of thing, you know, with racy head-lines. Still he says he laughs at the racy

way in which these sensational and trivial things are written about. Like everybody else, Matthew buys and reads the newspapers that are racy (*World* Jan 24, 4).

It is Matthew Arnold who later in 1887 coins the term 'new journalism' directly in relation to the style of journalism associated with Pulitzer. While he concedes that it is 'full of ability', he concludes that it's 'one great fault is that it is *feather-brained*' (Arnold 638). These sparring words bring to mind Bourdieu's analysis of the dynamics of the field of culture in which the economically dominant bourgeoisie vie with the intellectual elite in order to establish their own values as more legitimate. Pulitzer pulls on those arguments most available to those whose motive is profit and a large audience—populism and the claim to speak on behalf of the ordinary man. Arnold's well known disdain for the 'mob' made him a suitable if easy target in a country forged against the values of the British aristocracy. However it is worth keeping in mind the possibility of a cross class readership for the new dailies when we consider just whose tastes are said to be catered to.

But there is another aspect to Pulitzer's *New York World* which was as important, if not more so, in attracting a working class and immigrant audience, and this was a radical popular stance on most of the issues of interest to workers and immigrants. His papers held crusades on behalf of immigrants, workers, tenement dwellers, low-to-middle-income tax payers. He declared that the *World* was, 'dedicated to the cause of the people' (Turner 103). Soon after he took over the paper in 1883, he published a 10 point list of '*World* doctrines':

1. Tax luxuries
2. Tax inheritances
3. Tax large incomes
4. End monopolies
5. Tax privileged corporations
6. A tariff for revenue
7. Reform the civil service
9. Punish corrupt office –holders
10. Punish employers who coerce their employees in elections.

(*World* May 17, 4)

Expressing the politics of the poor and adopting a radical stance on key issues of the day was an absolutely essential part of catering to public taste. The sensationalist stories reported in the *World* often dug at the rich, the powerful and the corrupt. These were reported as moral tales with figures of power and influence often depicted as Manichean-style villains. For example, during the first two months of 1890, the *World* ran an almost daily story about New York aqueduct workers who had not been paid. The stories sympathise deeply with the plight of the workers and the union action they were taking; 'Not So Happy New for Them' ran the headline on page 2 on 2 January 1890. The following day a story paints a picture of 'unscrupulous' subcontractors and a city government unwilling to take responsibility. Two days later the paper interviewed one of the workers and his wife on the hardships they and their children had faced over the holiday period. Throughout the 1880s, his paper campaigned for the eight-hour day for workers. On 1 May 1890, the paper ran a headline, 'The Day Must Come' and most of the paper was given

over to accounts of international trade union actions. The next day the front page had a headline that ran the width of the paper 'Labor Emancipation Day' (2 May 1890).

On the issue of a rapid transit system for New York, the paper campaigned against trust involvement and ran a smear campaign against the Republican politician presenting the bill, James W. Husted, whose proposals included makeshift elevated roads and selling corporate concessions along Brooklyn Bridge: 'It is impossible not to suspect a corrupt and colossal job in any bill for rapid transit brought forward under the auspices of James W Husted'. What follows is a contrasting proposal for a system in which roads are 'built underground' and a long discussion of the man's corrupt dealings with Trust firms. (*World* Jan 7, 3). The paper relished its exposés of corrupt officials and politicians. It is interesting that the exposé style of reporting, which comes to be a central plank in celebrity journalism, begins life from a very different tradition. Pulitzer's sensationalism hooked into a tradition of muck-racking that came from the radical press in Britain in the 1830s, a press whose radical agenda far surpassed that of the commercial press in the US 40–50 years later. Pulitzer's paper was deeply contradictory in its address to these concerns and it was a populist rather than political voice which did not consistently express the politics of the working class. The paper was dominated by murder, stories of the famous and sport. Nevertheless Pulitzer adopts the grammar (rather than the vocabulary) of the radical press in his exposés of the powerful and corrupt and his paper speaks directly to the concerns of the working class, at least until the turn of the century. Hence, voicing the concerns of the poor and working class is one of the ambiguities when thinking about how the cultural politics of celebrity are expressed.

Where Pulitzer went, others followed. In particular, Pulitzer's arch rival, William Randolph Hearst poached Pulitzer's approach to the news. Even before he moved his operations to New York, Hearst had adopted many of Pulitzer's techniques for the *San Francisco Examiner* and turned his father's failing newspaper into a highly successful one, dramatically increasing its circulation and profits. Crime stories ran on the front pages regularly. He increased the paper's coverage of crime stories from 10% to 24% of space. Like Pulitzer, he treated crimes as morality plays, inserting his journalists into the stories as heroes exposing crimes and police blunders.

But just as in the case of Pulitzer, newspaper content based on sensationalism and human interest was not enough to ensure the loyalty of a large working-class readership. Hearst also had to appeal to the politics of the poor. For instance, the *Examiner* also supported Samuel Gompers's call for the eight-hour day enthusiastically and volubly and Hearst encouraged writer Ambrose Bierce and chief editor Arthur McEwen to insult whom they chose (Nasaw 76). Of course, the mark of Hearst's populism was its ambiguity. While his paper championed the causes of the working class, poor and immigrant population, it was also often racist in its pro-labour stance (Nasaw 80).²

When Hearst moved from San Francisco to New York and bought the ailing *Morning Journal* and its German language version in 1895, he was following a path already tread by Pulitzer in 1883 when he moved from St Louis to take on the *New York World*. Hearst's move to New York saw the beginning of an intense newspaper war with Pulitzer. Hearst brought his most famous reporters from San Francisco to New York; Winifred Black, Homer Davenport the illustrator and cartoonist, and lead sports writer, Charlie Dryden. He kept the price at a penny thus starting a price war with Pulitzer and the *Sun's* proprietor,

Charles Dana both of whose papers were sold at 2 cents. Pulitzer himself had pursued this strategy in the 1880s. On 7 November 1895 Hearst published his first issue of the *New York Journal*. Heart's biographer comments that the 'news was pedestrian, but the illustrations were spectacular'. (Nasaw 100) Next day the front page carried a story of the marriage of magazine artist Charles Dana Gibson (the creator of the Gibson Girls) with high quality illustrations of Gibson and his bride.

The newly launched *Journal* was filled with spectacular illustrations and bold headlines. Crimes stories and human interest stories were joined by society gossip columns. Articles began appearing about the home life and leisure activities of sportsmen like John L. Sullivan and actresses like Lillie Langtree, and of prominent businesspeople and politicians such as Carnegie and Depew. The formula of the *Journal* was identical to the *World*—a front page with large headlined stories about New York society and articles about terrifying crimes against ordinary folk, often perpetuated at the hands of the monopolies that owned New York's municipal services. Crucially, in a burgeoning city dominated by private service monopolies, the paper called for municipal ownership of gas, electricity, transport, ice and housing.

Like Pulitzer in the 1880s and James Gordon Bennett in the 1840s Hearst aimed to make his stories engrossing and entertaining, and he did this by illustrating stories with dramatic line drawings and mould-slashing headlines. However, in order to compete with Pulitzer's paper he had to try to establish himself—just as Pulitzer had done—as a champion of the people. In the 1880s and 1890s he surrounded himself with left wing figures such as the future Socialist Party candidate Charles Edward Russell, social activist novelists Jack London and Upton Sinclair, Socialists and Socialist sympathisers like Robert Huner, Morris Hillquit and David Graham Phillips, all of whom wrote for his publications. Despite his own drive to monopoly, Hearst was openly anti-trust in his papers. He was against corporate monopolies and vertically and horizontally integrated enterprises. Hearst's paper reflected the anger of the growing working-class population of New York and he directed his tirades against the huge corporations that were getting bigger each day.

The early conventions of celebrity journalism emerge at a time and in a press that was pro-labour and ant-trust in its outlook. This was a central component to the mass taste that the papers were catering to. At the birth of the modern daily press, the papers of Hearst and Pulitzer had to be lively, easy to read, accessible, entertaining, *and* had to cover political issues in a way sympathetic to the concerns of workers, immigrants and the poor, in order to attract a mass audience. To insist that the commercial papers of Pulitzer, Hearst and others attracted a mass working class audience by removing politics and replacing it with entertainment is to ignore the vocal political stances central to the content of these papers. Both papers, and their competitors, carried radical populist political topics *and* entertainment topics and sometimes, as in the case of many sensational stories, they were one and the same thing.

The Press, Advertising and the Decline of Print Radicalism

Michael Schudson suggests that to answer the question of why the new journalism of Pulitzer and Hearst helped boost circulation we have to remember how closely

intertwined are the histories of newspapers and the history of cities (Schudson *Discovering the News*, 97). The latter quarter of the nineteenth century was a time of tumultuous change; 46% of the population were either immigrants or their parents were. The populations of the cities grew enormously, old certainties and old communities disappeared and new ways of living developed—what Schudson calls the 'changing web of social relations' (Schudson *Discovering the News*, 102). Society had become more oriented on consumption with the advent of department stores, the growth of consumer goods, and the growth of popular mass entertainment such as vaudeville, the amusement park, the matinee, and at the very end of the nineteenth century, the beginnings of film. All of this reflected in the topics and styles of new journalism (Ponce de Leon). But this is not the full picture of this period of American history. The upheavals that mark this time also sent out ripples and waves of social criticism and labour activism. There was wide scale opposition to the burgeoning monopoly enterprises. Radical ideas were wide spread; working-class organisations had large memberships which sustained an emerging radical press as well as a pro-labour commercial press. The Knights of Labour had a steady membership of 100,000 in the nineteenth century and their *Journal* (1889–1917) must have had a circulation to reflect that figure (Conlin). There were a number of other leftwing newspapers at the time³ but the leftwing paper with the highest reported circulation was *Appeal to Reason* whose circulation had reached 100,000 at the end of the nineteenth century and after 1910 its circulation list topped 500,000 (Shore 148). Compared to the commercial press, this is no small figure whose average circulation in the period was between 370,000 and 380,000. According to Joseph Conlin the radical press had a movement to relate to and it looked outward, unlike a later period after 1919 when it became inward looking and sectarian (Conlin). The radical press was a response to the wide scale oppositional feeling that swept through these growing cities.

Both the radical press and the commercial press were undermined by the financial reliance of newspapers on advertising. Newspapers could not make a profit on subscription sales alone. The commercial press (and sections of the radical press) relied on advertising revenue and this occurred at a time when advertising itself was becoming an industry with independent mechanisms. The total revenue derived by newspaper publishers from advertising rose from 44% in 1879 to 49% in 1889 to 56% in 1904 to 70% in 1929. More than once, Hearst saw his revenues plunge when advertisers pulled out of his paper—usually when he took stands that made the advertisers nervous, like his German-friendly stance in the First World War (Nasaw 158). But, unlike smaller papers, Hearst had a huge fortune at his disposal and by the turn of the century has spent 8 million dollars of his family's fortune upgrading equipment and subsidising newspaper revenue, when sales and advertising revenue dropped. The radical press certainly could not sustain itself in this way. Even with this fortune at his disposal, Hearst had to borrow huge sums of money from American banks to sustain his media empire. This is because the pressure from advertising occurred at a time of huge competition between the dailies which resulted in increased expenditure on new technology and regular price wars, which pushed down revenue further. The logic of monopoly capitalism was playing itself out in the newly industrialised newspaper industry, just as it was in the newly burgeoning entertainment industries, and it was this economic logic that resulted in 'chain journalism', devoid of political content, rather than serving popular taste.

The combination of intense competition, reliance on advertising revenue and the expense of new machinery and new technology brought even the most commercial, most sensational papers to breaking point and by 1931, Pulitzer's *World* sank for good. Even Hearst's media empire had been under threat for some time. By 1923 Hearst was so overdrawn to Chase National Bank that he was asked to take his account elsewhere. Hearst needed to come up with \$1m to pay-off loans and no other bank would give him credit. (Nasaw 317). Under this kind of financial pressure, Hearst dropped any pretence of radicalism in order to secure the aid of American big business. Hearst does a political u-turn on the issue of monopoly trusts in this context, not to please his readers, but to please big business. Hearst's stance on the Californian Hetchy Hetchy Aqueduct illustrates the point. The proposed aqueduct in the valley north-west of Yosemite could supply the city with abundant water and hydroelectric power for decades. Progressives, including the publisher of Hearst's *San Francisco Call*, John Francis Neyland, wanted the aqueduct to be municipally owned, in line with Hearst's previously well known stance. They were opposed by big business and bankers, led by Fleishhacker, a board member of several of the transit and power trusts, who hoped to have it under private trust control. The paper had been attacking Fleishhacker for months. But now Hearst needed to borrow money from the bankers and businesses that Fleishhacker represented, there was a marked change in editorial policy. He instructed Neyland to discontinue the criticism and 'quarrelling' for fear of losing the respect of 'enterprises' (Nasaw 318). This change in instructions on editorial politics coincided with Hearst's decision to sell small-denomination bonds to the public to raise money. Hearst needed bankers and brokers as underwriters and he needed Fleishhacker to sell his bonds. In return, Fleishhacker needed Hearst's papers to promote his plans for Hetch Hetchy.

As Hearst's biographer puts it:

It was more difficult now for Hearst to engage in the virulent populist trust-busting, anti-big business, anti-capital rhetoric that had defined his newspapers' editorial policy since the 1880s. Without the cooperation of bankers in New York and San Francisco, the Hearst empire would long ago have collapsed and he knew it. Hearst tempered his rhetoric to court the favour of bankers when he was in debt, but because he had long before begun to identify the national interests and the interests of big business with the Hearst interests. If the free flow of capital—from bankers to business—was good for the Hearst empire, then it was also good for the nation (Nasaw 320).

What was true for business was also true for politics. By 1924 he forbade his editors and reporters to criticise Republicans for being too close to big business. Hearst's media empire, which had attracted large readerships with an upstart tone and a radical stance on monopoly capitalism, had become a pillar of big business and the populist radicalism of the youthful Hearst papers evaporated as his media empire expanded, not because his readers no longer wanted these politics or unexpectedly became enamoured of trusts who exploited their cities resources, but because Hearst aligned his interests with big business and the logic of capitalism. With the removal of the overt political content of his publications, the Hearst empire now concentrated entirely on entertainment values.

Despite its large circulation, the radical press couldn't compete with the Hearst's wealth. But that does not mean that these ideas were not popular. Instead the opposite is

true. Radical ideas were so popular in the latter half of the nineteenth century that mainstream commercial presses had to adopt such a tone to attract a working-class audience. Also, if the radical press could not survive the industrialisation of the press in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, neither could most of the commercial press. With the process of industrialisation of the press in the late nineteenth century came the drive to monopoly that characterised all of the growing industries of the time. The first years of the twentieth century were a time of frenzied mergers and acquisitions in the newspaper industry which led to a contraction of the numbers of papers as large players in the field bought out their smaller rivals and either merged them with existing papers or closed them down. For instance, between 1910 and 1930 the number of morning daily papers dropped from 500 to 388 (Tebbel 222). Hearst was a major player in this consolidation process. Hearst bought up and closed down 18 newspapers between 1918 and 1928 (Tebbel 222). In fact, by 1940 of the 42 newspapers that Hearst bought or established only 14 were allowed to survive (Tebbel 242). The contraction of the newspaper market in the US had less to do with failing to cater to popular taste and more to do with monopoly driven economic imperatives of a newly industrialised sector, which despite circulation figures, relied on advertising revenue to survive.

Conclusion

The manner in which the genres of celebrity journalism came to characterise the 'chain journalism' (Tebbel 31) of the twentieth century is not simply a result of catering to popular taste. The conventions of nineteenth century 'new journalism' from which celebrity journalism grew, occurred in a wider context and were conventions that were also part of a radical (if populist) muck-raking tradition. However inconsistently expressed, populist radical politics were an important element in the development of the style and content of early mass circulation daily newspapers and their desire to build mass audiences. These two genres of reporting developed together and often overlapped in forms and conventions. The processes of industrialisation, the drive to monopoly and the importance of advertising revenues put the radical and commercial press under impossible pressure and both shrank in an atmosphere of mergers and acquisitions. By the early twentieth century the radical politics disappeared from the commercial press as the few proprietors who flourished in the age of 'chain journalism' themselves became more dependent on banking, advertising and big business and their editors pursued the depoliticised conventions of reporting that remained.

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Notes

1. Intense competition between Pulitzer and Hearst prompted Pulitzer to try to carve Hearst out of the syndicate that controlled access to wire services, see Nasaw (110).

2. For instance, Hearst offered to sponsor a labour train to bring white workers to replace Chinese ones. But, interestingly, no workers took it up and nothing came of it. See Nasaw for a full account of this episode 80–1.
3. Some of the best known were: the *New Nation* (1891–1894); the *American Fabian* (1895–1900); *The Socialist Crusader* and the *Social Democratic Herald*, (1898–1902), *The Challenge* (1900–1901); *International Socialist Review* (1900–1918).

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