What is News? How Journalism got its start

- Julius Caesar posted reports of government activities in the *Acta Diurna*.
- In China, the Tang dynasty (618-906 A.D.) published a gazette to inform court officials of its activities.
- Handwritten newsletters circulated by merchants in early 16th century Europe.
- Reports on Anglo-Scottish wars.
- Adventure, travel, crime, disasters, trade, business and “strange novelties and marvelous things.”
Beginning of modern journalism

- Popular journalism in the 1800s was written for the newly literate working class featured stories about fires, burglaries, accidents, humor and human interest.
- Called penny papers
- Benjamin Day’s “New York Sun,” 1833
- James Gordon Bennett’s “Herald” in New York
  Featured commercial and political news
  Formula: news for “the merchant and man of learning, as well as the mechanic and man of labor.”
Joseph Pulitzer

New York and St. Louis

Commanded his staff in 1883:

“Always fight for progress and reform, never tolerate injustice or corruption, always fight demagogues of all, never belong to any party, always oppose privileged classes and public plunderers, never lack sympathy with poor, always remain devoted to the public welfare, never be satisfied with merely printing news, always be drastically independent, never be afraid to attack wrong, whether by predatory plutocracy or predatory poverty.”
William Randolph Hearst

- Publishing King
- Reporters made up stories during the Spanish-Cuban war to compete with Pulitzer’s newspapers.
- Battle Over “Citizen Kane” by Orson Welles
Current Definition of News

In times of crisis, most Americans ask:
- Is the world safe?
- Are my home and family safe?
- If they are safe, then what has happened in the last 24 hours to make them better off?
- Is my pocketbook safe?
More

In times of world crisis, news turns inward

- Religious issues (liberals, moderates, same sex marriage, etc.)
- Gun control (Connecticut, Colorado, Arizona, California, Florida, etc.)
- Child abuse (Catholic churches, coaches, etc.)
- Corporate crime, financial, economic crisis
- Celebrity News (sports figures, Hollywood figures, reality TV stars, etc.)
- Domestic news becomes important
News Values

- **Timeliness** – events that are immediate, recent.
- **Impact** – events that are likely to affect many people.
- **Prominence** – Events involving well-known people or institutions. The more prominent, the bigger the story.
- **Proximity** – Events that are geographically or emotionally close to people interest them.
News Values

Conflict – Strife, antagonism and warfare have provided the basis of stories since early peoples drew pictures on their cave walls of their confrontations with the beasts that surrounded them.

* Involves ordinary people confronting the challenges of daily life.
* Journalism provides a forum for discussion of the conflicts that divide people and groups, and this peaceful debate makes conflict resolution possible.
News Values

- The Unusual – Events that deviate sharply from the expected, that depart considerably from the experiences of everyday life make news.

- Currency – Occasionally, a situation long simmering will suddenly emerge as the subject of discussion and attention. Journalists have the ability to draw attention to a situation and make it newsworthy.
News Values

Necessity – The journalist has discovered something he or she feels is necessary to disclose.
News is Relative

Economic Pressures – The media are a business, a profit-seeking enterprise. When times are good, newspaper staffs are large and the coverage is broad. When times are bad, staffs are cut and news and events aren’t covered.

Owners’ politics determine newspaper coverage. Some are cautious, unwilling to dig into news that is controversial; some adhere to reporting the truth even if it may hurt financially.
Media Chains

50 years ago, families owned almost all the daily newspapers, some large, some small. Today, most newspapers are owned by groups called chains.

“The biggest threat to a free press and the circulation of ideas is the steady absorption of newspapers, television and radio stations, networks and other vehicles of information into corporations that turn knowledge into profit – but are not equally committed to inquiry or debate or to the First Amendment.”

– Reuven Frank, former head of NBC News
Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.
Other News Considerations

- Audience – what is important to a particular audience.
- Demographics – Age, race, gender, geography, income, ethnicity of a location.
YOU, the Journalist

Impersonal and objective as journalists would like to make the determinants of news, journalism is based on selection, and choice is a highly personal affair. It derives from the journalist’s professional background, his or her education and the intangible influences of family, friends and colleagues.