



City Research Online

City, University of London Institutional Repository

Citation: Hellmueller, L. (2023). News After Trump: Journalism's Crisis of Relevance in a Changed Media Culture, by Matt Carlson, Sue Robinson, and Seth Lewis. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, doi: 10.1177/10776990231155926

This is the accepted version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version.

Permanent repository link: <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/30108/>

Link to published version: <https://doi.org/10.1177/10776990231155926>

Copyright: City Research Online aims to make research outputs of City, University of London available to a wider audience. Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the author(s) and/or copyright holders. URLs from City Research Online may be freely distributed and linked to.

Reuse: Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge. Provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

City Research Online:

<http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/>

publications@city.ac.uk

News after Trump: Journalism's Crisis of Relevance in a Changed Media Culture. Matt Carlson, Sue Robinson, & Seth Lewis. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2021. 288 pp. \$19.9 Paperback.

Reviewed by: Lea Hellmueller, Department of Journalism, School of Communication and Creativity, City University of London, London, United Kingdom

“What is clear is that Trump absorbs attention” (p. 45) and this book is no exception. Yet, what the book does brilliantly is to constructively use our attention to provide a way forward, offering ideas in how to rebuild trust in journalism—beyond Trump.

News after Trump offers an autopsy of what the Trump presidency meant for the future of journalism. The authors, Matt Carlson—Professor in the Hubbard School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Minnesota, Sue Robinson—Helen Firstbrook Franklin Professor of Journalism at the University of Wisconsin, and Seth Lewis—Professor and Shirley Papé Chair in Emerging Media at the University of Oregon—devote much attention to *how* the former president attacked journalists and *why* this strategy has been so politically effective (p. 13). The book offers an appraisal of Trump’s continuous and insulting assaults on the press directed at the institutional level (e.g., fake news establishment) and the personal level given that, particularly for journalists of color working under the Trump administration, his attacks often were deeply personal and frightening.

The ritualized attacks on the media remind readers that journalism’s relevance cannot be taken for granted. Instead, Carlson, Robinson and Lewis argue for a broad perspective that locates journalism within a “media culture” (p. 4) including changing technologies, infrastructures, and institutions of media and the meanings that arise around how these are understood. “To question journalism’s relevance is to look broadly at the media culture and ask how shifts taking place at all levels of media consumption and production affect the institutional practices of news” (p. 7). Ultimately, what we gain from foregrounding journalistic relevance is greater recognition that journalists do not control the conditions in which they operate.

Without a doubt, one of these conditions was Trump’s calling out journalists as the “enemy of the people” and later changing the rules of White House coverage. That is where the book starts off. The first three chapters discuss the current media and political contexts (chapter 1) and look back at the Trump campaign with a focus on what Trump’s attacks on journalism looked like (chapter 2) including the four years of Trump presidency when the attacks on the press became even more extreme and central to his maintenance of power (chapter 3). The next chapters turn its focus on the news and the journalists behind the headlines; journalists who did not ignore Trump’s constant badgering. In chapters 4 and 5 the authors aim to refocus the news media toward a more “pro-democracy and pro-connection stance”: Chapter 4 centers around the press reclaiming a story of relevance (chapter 4) by focusing on community relationship to build trust with groups they have long ignored (p. 23). Chapter 5 outlines ways to confront Trump’s lies and racism.

The conclusion is probably the most important contribution. It is the one chapter that takes us *beyond* Trump to think about the future of news and journalism. Two ways forward are discussed: a recommitment to objectivity-based news that accentuates journalistic professionalism (p. 189). Yet, the authors note the flaws of such a path as decades of journalism research have shown that such a way forward embracing objectivity avoids “offending the white majority audience at the expense of exposing the systemic racism that affects non-white communities” (Lowery, 2020; p. 192). The second way forward – the moral voice – argues that “journalists need to be reinserted back into the public that they represent through their work” (p. 194). The moral voice includes standing up for democratic norms and broadly shared values for social good aiming to provide more perspective on any single issue and recognizes that the world appears differently to different people.

The authors’ reflection on the standard path forward (objectivity) reminds the reader that while the norm of objectivity has certainly been under scrutiny it still carries normative value in US journalism but has neither been as central nor similarly understood in Continental European media systems, which have, always been more ideologically heterogeneous (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). This begs the question: what are some global implications of *News after Trump*? While the book explicitly focuses on an essential US case, implications are felt globally. For example, the rise of right-wing and populist politics. Contrary to their nationalist policies, these populist movements appear internationally aligned in their discursive strategies and attacks against news media, which is “particularly devoted to delegitimizing the very basis of traditional journalism” (Reese, 2021, p. 39). *News after Trump* offers important lessons for journalists confronted with populist politics and when covering officials who intentionally spread lies and hate.

Finally, there certainly lies a challenge to write about history as it unfolds (p. 21). The immediacy of the present time can hinder a necessary distance to offer an adequate perspective considering various consequences. Yet, the authors argue that the “gravity of the moment makes it all the more important to jump in and begin unraveling these forces to propose a way forward” (p. 21). From that perspective, the book can be read as a proposal and invitation to have us start thinking about *News after Trump*. It is an important wake-up call that now is the time to reinvent and reimagine how to rebuild trust in journalism.

References

Hallin, D., & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing Media System. Three Models of Media and Politics*. Cambridge University Press.

Lowery, Wesley. “A reckoning over objectivity, led by black journalists”. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/23/opinion/objectivity-black-journalists-coronavirus.html>