

# Media of Yesteryear

## Bogart Quotes Pulitzer in "Deadline – USA"

By Eric Mink

Journalism wallows in one existential crisis after another. Take your pick: Internet technology is killing the news profession; the Great Recession is suffocating a business model already on life support; concentration of ownership is destroying media's vital competitive drive; the ethical vacuum around Fox News' success is sucking the lifeblood out of honorable news presentation.

How startling, then, to discover not only a measure of reassurance about all this, but also some genuine wisdom in a 58-year-old Hollywood movie. You can't find 1952's *Deadline – USA*. It is not out on home video, DVD or VHS. Amazon, Netflix, Blockbuster, Red Box – forget it.

Cable's Turner Classic Movies has a print in its archives. The movie, written and directed by Richard Brooks, doesn't turn up much, though it was replayed recently on TCM. Ethel Barrymore delivered a gleaming supporting performance in *Deadline – USA*, as Margaret Garrison, widow of the founder and owner of *The Day*, a great metropolitan newspaper in trouble. Garrison's distressed staff is led by managing editor Ed Hutcheson, played by an alternately sulking and furious Humphrey Bogart.

I managed to get hold of a reasonably decent copy last year and was stunned at how much I'd forgotten in the decades since I'd last seen it – years before I'd ever worked for a newspaper.

The film is littered, of course, with newsroom markers that would have given it authenticity in 1952 but are long dead: clacking typewriters and wire service teletype machines, pneumatic tubes coughing pasted-up stories from copy desks to

the composing room floor and back, headsets on re-write men taking phoned-in notes from reporters and turning them into finished stories.

There is also no shortage of familiar newsroom stereotypes – a “tough-broad” female reporter among them – fast talkers and, after hours, lots of alcohol at the local bar. There’s emotional pull in the movie’s two interlocking stories:

First, Garrison’s two daughters want to cash out their inheritance by selling *The Day* to a competitor who will shut it down. Their mother (Barrymore) doesn’t want to sell, but she’s outvoted.

At the same time, a well-connected hood is rigging elections, robbing the city blind and bumping off people with impunity. But he makes a big mistake when he has a snoopy reporter for *The Day* severely beaten up. That fires up Hutcheson, who also sees aggressive coverage as a way to generate enough public interest and pressure to kill the sale of the paper.

Bogart’s Hutcheson delivers most of the impassioned passages about the news profession and why it’s important. Remarkably, they still resonate today, notwithstanding the industry obits we see and read almost daily:

“*The Day* is more than a building,” Hutcheson says during a court hearing into the validity of the sales contract for the paper. “It’s people. It’s 1,500 men and women whose skill, heart, brains and experience make a great newspaper possible. We don’t own one stick of furniture in this company, but we, along with the 290,000 people who read this paper, have a vital interest in whether it lives or dies.”

People still hunger for the news, and society still needs it. The real threat to the news profession, then, lies with frightened corporate executives who lack a commitment to what they’re supposed to manage, and who lack the skill, sensitivity, intelligence and experience of the people who

work for them.

Early in the film, Hutcheson tries to shame Mrs. Garrison into defying her daughters. In the company's board room, Hutcheson invokes the newspaper's founding principles and points to a framed copy of its first edition hanging on the wall. Then he begins to recite, from memory, the statement published on the front page of that paper:

"This paper will fight for progress and reform, will never be satisfied merely with printing the news, will never be afraid to attack wrong, whether by predatory wealth or predatory poverty."

When I heard Bogart deliver those lines, an electrical jolt coursed through my spine. I had seen them before. I had read them before – at least, words very close to them. They have appeared on the editorial page of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, where I worked for 21 years, since they were uttered in 1907 by owner Joseph Pulitzer when he retired. They are affixed in hammered metal letters to the marble walls in the lobby of the Post building. The exact passage reads as follows:

"I know that my retirement will make no difference in its cardinal principles, that it will always fight for progress and reform, never tolerate injustice or corruption, always fight demagogues of all parties, never belong to any party, always oppose privileged classes and public plunderers, never lack sympathy with the 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."

From 1907 to 1952 to 2010, the tools and techniques of news gathering and distribution have changed multiple times, and they'll change again. The way to gain the trust, loyalty and patronage of news consumers hasn't changed at all.

Eric Mink most recently was the op-ed editor of the Post-

Dispatch. He previously covered television and media for the Post and the New York Daily News. He now teaches film as an adjunct professor at Webster University in St. Louis. This column appeared earlier in the online magazine of TVWorth Watching.

## **The Radio Facsimile Never Caught On**

By Frank Absher

In the 1930's, radio was soaring in popularity. But in 1938, when St. Louis radio station managers were asked to predict radio's future, they got it all wrong.

The nation was on the tail end of the Depression, and 82 percent of households had radios. Television was still being developed. Radio's programming was part of what is now called its "Golden Age."

Here in St. Louis, in September of 1938, KMOX put local station owners and managers on the air in a roundtable discussion to talk about the business.

Merle Jones of KMOX was quick to note just how much radio contributed to the local economy. Just 10 years prior, he noted, the city's largest station employed 20 people. In a decade, the situation had changed dramatically. The smallest station employed 35 full-time workers and the largest had 120 full-timers and another 50-75 air staff members on call. KMOX had an annual payroll then of over \$400,000.

Local stations were also making a mark nationally. Hundreds of local programs were being run over the four major radio networks, which was seen as a way of promoting St. Louis as a progressive city.

So things were going well. But when they were asked about radio's future, none could foresee the coming world war and the part Edward R. Murrow and his peers would play in making

radio a necessity in every home in the nation. Instead, they focused on a new technical development: radio facsimile.

### **The Facsimile Experiment**

George Burbach of KSD said his station was ready to begin testing the new system of news delivery within the next 30 days. The system involved using radio waves to send special facsimile versions of the Post-Dispatch into the homes of subscribers.

Initially, Burbach said, testing would be limited to a few receivers in the city and county. The special radio receiver contained a clock but no frequency dial. Owners would set the clock to turn on the machine at a certain time in the very early morning hours, and the news would begin printing out. It was a slow process, requiring several minutes per page, but radio people and Post management were excited about the possibilities.

For the paper, it meant readers would receive their copy in the morning, which would compete with the Globe-Democrat. For radio stations, it meant respectability that up to that point had been called into question.

That's because the so-called "Press-Radio War," which pitted newspapers against radio stations, had shut radio out of many aspects of the news delivery business. Newspaper owners had successfully banned broadcasters from the Congressional press galleries and had forbidden the Associated Press from selling its service to radio stations.

If radio could provide a printed news summary, it could get around many restrictions.

William West, then-manager of WTMV, said his station had already applied for a facsimile license and was planning to apply for a license for television as soon as possible.

Facsimile news officially began in St. Louis December 7, 1938. In that world premier, 15 homes received a special, abbreviated edition of the day's Post-Dispatch, with the transmission beginning at 2:00 a.m. and usually taking around two hours to complete.

But the "wow factor" of facsimile was limited, and the system never really caught on. The "experiment" died after two years. By that time, all ears were tuned to the live reports from Europe, describing a developing war. The U.S. didn't want to be a part of it, but many citizens still had relatives living in Europe, and live reports on radio trumped newspaper reports. In 1941, after Pearl Harbor, all technical development in broadcasting was suspended and radio became an even stronger medium in the dissemination of news.

### **Sydney Schanberg and his Reporting: How the Weak are Treated**

By George Salamon

There was a time when you could say with a straight face that "journalism is the first draft of history." Today it is, quite often, the last word in gossip, ideological spinning and personal attacks. And that is why a journalist the caliber of Sydney Schanberg may be a journalism anachronism, but a noble one worth revering.

Half a century ago The New York Times hired the 25-year-old Schanberg, f

resh from two years with the US Army. Twenty-six years later, after he had won the Pulitzer Prize for his reporting on the fall of Phnom Penh in 1975, Schanberg clashed with his bosses over what he wrote about New York City and had his column taken away, causing him to quit.

Describing that event in The Village Voice, Pete Hamill called the paper's treatment of Schanberg "unspeakably shabby." Today, Schanberg is less harsh: "They didn't behave like

Menschen," he says with a chuckle, using the Yiddish word for "human beings."

The treatment of human beings, especially of the weak by those with power, has been at the core of Schanberg's reporting. For three decades after the end of World War II, his kind of reporting was praised and imitated. After his departure from the Times, he told a Washington University audience in St. Louis, in September 1985, that the Times now "shifts with fashion," casting aside reporters who are outsiders, those who ignore and defy popular politics and fashions.

### **Reporting From Cambodia**

In a dispatch filed in December, 1974, he related how a departing American ambassador in Cambodia told a news conference that the war "had lost all meaning." Schanberg's next sentence laconically added: "No meaning has been discovered in the year since."

The dispatch continued: "The war has already killed and wounded at least 600,000 people and turned more than half the population of seven million into weary, hungry refugees."

One survivor testified decades later: "The ordinary people sometimes literally shit in their pants when the big bombs and shells came. Their minds just froze up and they would wander around mute for three or four days . . . Sometimes the bombs fell and hit little children, and their fathers were all for the Khmer Rouge."

The U.S. dropped 2.7 million tons of bombs on Cambodia, more than we unloaded on Japan in World War II. (Cambodia is about the size of Missouri). The Communist-led insurgents, or Khmer Rouge, numbered 4,000 in 1970. Three years later, their ranks had swelled to 60,000.

Schanberg reported on the suffering of the helpless. In January 1975, as the Khmer Rouge was tightening its net around

the capital he wrote, "every 15 minutes or so a shell screams down and explodes... and another half dozen people are killed or wounded . . . bodies are everywhere.'"

Schanberg got out of Cambodia, as did the family of his friend, interpreter and photographer, Dith Pran. But Pran spent more than three years in Pol Pot's labor/reeducation/concentration camps before the Vietnamese invasion at the end of 1978 overthrew the murderous Khmer Rouge regime. Pran escaped to Thailand and then to the United States, where he landed a job with the Times. Schanberg had written about him in the paper's magazine in 1980 and the story inspired the 1984 movie, *The Killing Fields*.

### **"Afflict The Comfortable"**

That's what newspapers are supposed to do, "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable." Crusading papers, tough editors, and tenacious reporters did a lot of that, and their muckraking helped expose serious problems. But when Schanberg returned from Cambodia, much of his paper's readership was no longer in the mood for big causes. The movements of the 1960's – for women's liberation, civil rights and nuclear disarmament – had played themselves out. The engineers of the disaster in Southeast Asia were gone from the corridors of power.

It was "Morning again in America," as President Reagan proclaimed. It sounded, to quite a few of his fellow citizens, like "it was money again in America." And the race to grab as big a share of it as possible was on. But what about those trampled in the stampede? Like the Cambodians, trampled in the big powers' war for more, they were mostly ignored or forgotten. But not by Schanberg. As the newly appointed metropolitan editor, he focused on "the homeless, the injured, the casualties of the indifference and greed of big builders, bankers and other pillars of the Establishment," as Pete Hamill summed it up.



Anthony Lukas coined the term “Afghanistanization” in journalism, which allows reporters to focus on corruption and evil and suffering far away, but not close to home. The paper’s then Executive Editor, A.M. Rosenthal, wanted more coverage of the “golden people, the sparkling people,” Schanberg says. “He liked to hang out with them. I wanted to write about what was hidden underneath the city’s system. I fought with him almost daily.” Rosenthal is reported to have called Schanberg “St. Francis” and referred to him as the paper’s “resident Commie.”

Schanberg went to Rosenthal and told him he didn’t relish the daily battles and that he didn’t want to be metropolitan editor any longer. They gave him the op-ed column, “New York.” Schanberg says: “I still don’t know why they did it. What did they think I was going to write about?”

In his columns, from 1981 to 1985, he wrote about how unfair the distribution of state aid was to school districts in poor areas. He told about how builders in NYC were allowed to ignore safety codes: “Developers abhor sidewalk sheds as they do all safety requirements that might delay the completion or opening of their buildings,” he wrote in May of 1983. Pedestrians could get killed. And as he did so often in his foreign reporting, he plunked in why that was so: “It’s got something to do with money.”

### **Stepping On Big Toes**

In one interview, Schanberg explained that the Times had no qualms about dealing with subjects like corruption in a place like the Philippines. But in his columns, he was dealing with other kinds of corruption as well, “corruption of the spirit and of behavior . . . We get a little more skittish about it locally than we do overseas.”

And why is that? “The closer you may step on toes, the closer the toes get to the headquarters of the journalistic

organization, the more loudly are the protests registered and the more loudly are they heard." Schanberg, the bosses decided, had "dirtyed his own nest."

His next nests were Newsday, and then the Village Voice. He did good work for both, including solid media criticism for the Voice. He continued to focus on topics that make many of today's publishers and editors uncomfortable. For him, good reporting is finding what's underneath. A great example for him is the Boston Globe's investigative series on sexual abuse by Catholic priests, for which the paper won a Pulitzer Prize in 2003. "And they did that in one of the most Catholic towns in America," he adds. "That took guts."

Schanberg, at 76, is still dealing with topics no mainstream papers want to touch. He wrote lengthy articles on the POWs left behind in Vietnam. Penthouse, The American Conservative (launched by Pat Buchanan), and Nation Institute (teamed with The Nation) ran with the stories, but Schanberg's former employer and other major dailies turned him down. He recently published a book titled, "Beyond The Killing Fields," a compilation of his wartime reporting and the issue of POW's.

Writing about the unwillingness of the big media to print the POW story, Boston University professor of history Andrew Bacevich observed: "The feeble public response elicited by Sydney Schanberg's reporting on the fate of American POWs testifies to our steely determination to ignore whatever we find unwelcome or inconvenient."

Schanberg tried to put a dent into that determination in his 26 years as a Times man and in his work after that. It got him a Pulitzer and it killed his column. The times and the Times have changed, but Schanberg has remained true to his calling.

George Salamon, who interviewed Schanberg for this story, taught college German literature and held writing positions at the St. Louis Business Journal and General Dynamics.

## Ed Moose Dies

By Joe Pollock

Ed Moose fell in love with the saloon business in Gaslight Square, married it in San Francisco and became that city's premier host to athletes and journalists, bon vivants of all ages, social standing and economic position and, basically, anyone who liked to drink, eat and talk. Moose died Aug. 12 in San Francisco, where he had lived since leaving St. Louis in 1961.

According to the San Francisco Chronicle, Moose, 81, suffered a fractured ankle in June, and after several surgeries, developed a staph infection. Mary Etta Presti Moose, also a St. Louisan and his wife of 45 years, survives. The Beacon ran a nice reminiscence by Judith Robinson from an old feature story; the Post-Dispatch, its loyalty to St. Louisans and its institutional memory about a split-second long, ignored the event.

Moose, a tall, husky (some called him fat), pink-cheeked guy who never seemed to forget a face or a name, personified hospitality to thousands of customers at the Washington Square Bar & Grill. Moose worked at several jobs in St. Louis, including the St. Louis University alumni office, in a couple of city hall positions and as a social worker.

On a business trip to San Francisco, Moose discovered advantages – good weather and better saloons – so he relocated.

St. Louis reporters who knew Moose and Deitsch from the Gaslight Square days, would visit on their travels, and San Francisco reporters joined them. Herb Caen, Stan Delaplane, Ron Fimrite, Charles McCabe and other famed West Coast bylines hung out there.

Moose and Deitsch sold the Washington Square Bar & Grill in

1990 and ostensibly retired. But three years later, Moose saw a property across Washington Park from the Washbag and opened it as Moose's. Deitsch was an inactive partner who still kept his regular seat at the bar until he died in 2002.

Moose's drew a media crowd, including Tom Brokaw, Walter Cronkite, Daniel Schorr and many others. Moose sold it in 2005. On the day after he died, the Washbag posted a closing notice.