

## **The Importance of an Independent Press in Democratic Societies**

In September of 2015, Curt Guyette, an investigative journalist, went door to door in Flint, Michigan, distributing lead-testing kits to residents to prove that the town's water was dangerously contaminated. Guyette's findings, which showed dangerously high lead levels, was an important catalyst for the discovery of a disturbing story of government malfeasance: Flint's decision to switch from using water from Lake Huron to its heavily polluted river, in order to save money, had caused the poisoning of the city's children and lead to an outbreak of Legionnaire's disease. Had it not been for Guyette's belief in wielding journalism to improve peoples' lives, Flint's water crisis would likely have remained undiscovered (Clark).

Guyette's work as an independent reporter in discovering the Flint crisis is an exemplar of the civic role journalism plays in a democratic society. He executed with passion the responsibility of a journalist, to, as Justice Hugo Black stated in his opinion in *New York Times v. United States*, "bare the secrets of government and inform the people" (Friedersdorf). Media's role in a free society, whilst not necessarily in opposition to government, is to be a scrutinizing force ensuring that the people are being served justly and equitably. Guyette and others like him, by bringing much-needed light to the most egregious failings of the country's public servants, are valiantly doing their duty to the country as journalists.

Indeed, as Justice Black wrote, "expos[ing] deception in government...[is] precisely that which the Founders hoped and trusted [journalists] would do" (Friedersdorf). The Founding Fathers, as he suggested, envisioned the press and the government engaged in a grand civic symbiosis, in which journalism sustains itself by helping to highlight

government's failings and government improves itself using journalists' criticism.

Therefore the press is essential to the functioning of a free society, for without it the government would lack a true watchdog, an advocate for the people, and would descend into corruption and overreach. Lacking an independent media, injustice and dishonesty would fester obscenely within our borders.

It is the fundamental mission of journalism to find and bring to light the government's failings. If it fails to do so, if it is too friendly to the government, if the separation of press and state is weakened, the civic symbiosis which upholds democracies is abandoned. Journalists must therefore remain foremost servants of the people, not the government, and the government must ensure that journalism exists as a check on its power. For intrepid journalists around the country and around the world like Curt Guyette, journalism must remain a champion of the people and an engine for ensuring that government is in service to the populace. Only an independent media can allow once-invisible stories to be told and government to be made more just and transparent. Only an independent media can secure a more perfect world for all people.

## **Bibliography**

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