News: A Tale of Two Cities

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

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Abstract

It has been speculated that Americans don’t consume the news, and that the news we consume is primarily ethnocentric. On the other side of the equation lie Londoners, who are assumed to be avid news consumers and are very worldly. This year, I set out to see if this is really the case. Studying abroad at the London Center during the Spring 2010 semester gave me to opportunity to experience London news firsthand instead of researching it from afar. Growing up consuming news out of Chicago and going to school and studying the news in Muncie provided me a great background from which to base my comparative observations. I also sought out professional opinions. Finally, I looked into news consumption habits and preferences of British and U.S. citizens. I compiled all of my findings into a website showcasing the differences between British and U.S. news from many perspectives.
Acknowledgements

• I would like to thank Suzy Smith for advising me throughout this project. She helped me plan out how to perform my research while in London, stayed connected through my time abroad, and helped me find the best generator to make my website.

• I would also like to thank Lyndon Sly, my primary professor in London. Without his help and guidance I would never have the deep knowledge I acquired of London’s news media and how what Londoners consume affects their person.

• I would like to thank Steve Bell for putting me in contact with Robin Wiener. Without his help, I would not have been able to track down any news professional in London that would give me an interview.

• Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Joe Misiewicz for his constant support of my international reporting interests and for always pushing me in the right direction.
News: A Tale of Two Cities

For my thesis, I decided to take a comparative look at London v. Chicago/Midwestern news. The media is creating a world that is instantly connected. At the click of a mouse, you can immediately find out what is happening across the globe. However, America has a stigma for being somewhat withdrawn from the world stage. Because of this, I felt it would be valuable to know how the media works in a country that is perceived as being internationally connected, such as England, compared to our own country. I believed knowing not only how the news works, but also how people value the news in another country would provide even more insight into how the world views American news versus how Americans view it themselves.

The idea for the thesis was cemented when I decided I would be studying at the London Centre during spring semester 2010. I knew being immersed in the country would help me better observe news consumption habits as well as news content. I took it upon myself to note the differences between print and broadcast media in London versus that which I found in Chicago/Midwest.

I posted all my observations in an online blog. The blog did more than merely compare content, but also studied the difference between British and American news consumption habits. It helped that news was one of the topics we covered in our British Life and Culture class. We even had an assignment in which we dissected one of London’s newspapers and discovered which type of person would be a subscriber. This specific assignment, along with the class presentations, was extremely helpful in furthering my understanding of British news.

While abroad, I wanted to find a news professional who would be able to lend me some insight into the different processes that go into creating a newscast in London versus the United states. I was lucky enough to be put in contact with Robin
Wiener, ABC's London Deputy Bureau Chief. She has done extensive work for U.S. news media outlets as well as lived in London. I figured she'd be the perfect person to pull in for an expert opinion. I tried to get a true British expert opinion in person, but found it impossible to get an reply to any of my emails sent to news media sources. However, this missing element was fixed by placing a BBC4 special on the site, with attribution to the station as well as YouTube. The piece is a tongue-in-cheek video comparing British to American newscasters. While it is comedic, the insights are valid.

Not wanting to leave the analysis purely up to student critique and expert opinion, I sought the opinion of people who hadn't been a part of the news industry. I went out on the streets of Rye, England in search of people who could give me a perspective on British news consumption habits. Along the way, I found a broadcast technician who had worked for both ESPN in the U.S. and the BBC, among other stations, in England. He was able to give me some great insight into the broadcasting industry in general.

Finally I conducted two polls in hopes of getting a broader public view of London and U.S. news content and consumption habits. I also included questions on how they perceive the other country's news media and what they would change about the news. These results help solidify the presumptions made by each of the countries about how the other country consumes its news.

Because of all the different media I used to do my research, I decided the best way to present my thesis would be online. This way, viewers can choose how they want to consume the information and exactly how much they want to view/read. Video, print, informational graphics and photography pull the project together in a way that is visually interesting and intellectually compelling.
News: A Tale of Two Cities can be viewed here:

http://web.me.com/rasmussen.kim1/News__A_Tale_of_Two_Cities/Home.html

*Please note the underscores between the words News, A, Tale, of, Two and Cities. Without the underscores, the webpage won’t open.