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Martin, Christopher R. *No Longer Newsworthy: How the Mainstream Media Abandoned the Middle Class*. Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 2019. \$27.95 (hardback).

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A casual reader who skims the opening chapters of Christopher Martin's *No Longer Newsworthy: How the Mainstream Media Abandoned the Middle Class* might pigeonhole the book as an anti-Trump rant.

That would be a mistake.

Get past the opening chapter and you'll find a detailed argument about how the demise of labor reporting speaks to something systemically troubling with U.S. journalism, a disconnect between the newsroom and the working class. Martin documents how U.S. news media have substituted covering labor as a beat to covering consumer-oriented stories that minimize the voice and struggles of average workers. Martin shows how major newspapers increasingly pursued an affluent and elite audience to attract lucrative advertisers and how news coverage shifted towards this elite audience at the expense of average workers. "Focus on such audiences means that news organizations have written working-class readers out of their business plan," Martin writes.¹ With these alienated readers, it's little surprise that newspaper readership has declined. "Mainstream journalism needs to rethink its conception of the audience and to correct its error a half-century ago in deciding to concentrate 'on the upper half of the market' and ignore 'the less desirable customers'," Martin writes.²

Extending the argument further, Martin provocatively asserts that the U.S. media's decision to ignore the working class contributes to economic and political division in the U.S. Simply put, Martin contends the demise of labor reporting is toxic to the nation's democracy. Journalism, Martin argues, needs to re-engage with covering the concerns of

workers if it is to fulfill its normative role as a watchdog in society. "If journalism is essential to democracy, it should be part of the process: not just selecting a small, desirable audience but also making a public audience out of the entire community, state and/or nation," Martin writes.³

Martin builds his argument with case studies of plant shutdowns, showing how worker concerns were distorted or missing in media coverage. His opening case study examines Indiana-based Carrier Corp., its plans in 2016 to move 1,100 jobs to Mexico and the involvement of Donald Trump to "save" U.S. jobs from going abroad. Martin recounts a now familiar critique of media coverage – the Trump intervention saved some 730 jobs, not 1,100 – yet conservative media such as *Fox News* portrayed Trump as a savior.

Meanwhile, an estimated 2,400 manufacturing jobs shipped from Indiana to Mexico in 2016 that weren't touched by the president-elect's intervention. Many major media offered superficial reporting of the case, portraying Carrier workers as white and working-class men, playing into the notion the Carrier workers were a microcosm of Trump's voter base. In fact, 60 percent of the affected Carrier workers were African American and about half were female. Martin asserts the media was more interested in the political implications of the Carrier case rather than the underlying issues, a finding that aligns with my examination of the savings and loan crisis coverage and that of others who examined the 2008 financial crisis.

Another compelling case study involves the 2012 shutdown of Hostess Brands, maker of the Twinkie snack cakes. Broadcast news coverage emphasized a

¹ Martin, Christopher R. 2019. *No Longer Newsworthy: How the Mainstream Media Abandoned the Middle Class*. Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 69.

² Martin, *No Longer Newsworthy*, 203.

³ Martin, *No Longer Newsworthy*, 204.

trivial consumer narrative – Twinkies would no longer be on store shelves – rather than a more complex story involving underfunded pensions, revolving-door turnover in senior management and two bankruptcy filings. There was little attention to the cost-cutting by private equity owners or the \$110 million in concessions Hostess’ unions made to keep the company afloat. “The stories rarely got past the consumer hook,” he writes.⁴

The case studies are backed by important historical chapters examining the rise and fall of labor reporting in the U.S. One compelling chapter documented how newspapers, ranging from *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, to the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, explicitly pursued a mostly white, educated upper middle-class audience. This was based on advertisements these newspapers placed in the trade journal *Editor & Publisher* as a way to woo potential national advertisers by boasting of their “quality demographics.” Martin argued this was part of a larger trend where media companies consigned “working-class people and their communities to

obscurity – a class-based redlining of the news audience.”⁵

These are important contributions to the ongoing project to improve journalism, particularly business journalism. Yet Martin’s book suffers from a few curious digressions in the first two chapters, such a section tracing the author’s political evolution. A critique of *Fox News* as a Trump mouthpiece adds little new to the conversation. Fortunately, these problems largely are absent in the excellent chapters that follow.

This book would be an important complement to undergraduate and graduate journalism history courses to help students critically examine media and culture. It would be useful for advanced reporting students in broadcast or multimedia as a tool to gain critical thinking skills and a broader view of what constitutes competent business journalism.

Most of all, this book should be read by beat reporters and editors around the country as a cautionary tale of past media failures and an inspiration to do better with the next story.

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⁴ Martin, *No Longer Newsworthy*, 194.

⁵ Martin, *No Longer Newsworthy*, 6.