**Selected extracts from We the Media by Dan Gillmor**

“We freeze some moments in time. Every culture has its frozen moments, events so important and personal that they transcend the normal flow of news.

Americans of a certain age, for example, know precisely where they were and what they were doing when they learned that President Franklin D. Roosevelt died. Another generation has absolute clarity of John F. Kennedy’s assassination. And no one who was older than a baby on September 11, 2001, will ever forget hearing about, or seeing, airplanes exploding into skyscrapers.

In 1945, people gathered around radios for the immediate news, and stayed with the radio to hear more about their fallen leader and about the man who took his place. Newspapers printed extra editions and filled their columns with detail for days and weeks afterward. Magazines stepped back from the breaking news and offered perspective.

Something similar happened in 1963, but with a newer medium. The immediate news of Kennedy’s death came for most via television; I’m old enough to remember that heart- breaking moment when Walter Cronkite put on his horn- rimmed glasses to glance at a message from Dallas and then, blinking back tears, told his viewers that their leader was gone. As in the earlier time, newspapers and magazines pulled out all the stops to add detail and context.

September 11, 2001, followed a similarly grim pattern. We watched—again and again—the awful events. Consumers of

We the media

News learned the *what* about the attacks, thanks to the televi- sion networks that showed the horror so graphically. Then we learned some of the *how* and *why* as print publications and thoughtful broadcasters worked to bring depth to events that defied mere words. Journalists did some of their finest work and made me proud to be one of them.

But something else, something profound, was happening this time around: news was being produced by regular people who had something to say and show, and not solely by the “official” news organizations that had traditionally decided how the first draft of history would look. This time, the first draft of history was being written, in part, by the former audience. It was possible—it was inevitable—because of new publishing tools available on the Internet.

Another kind of reporting emerged during those appalling hours and days. Via emails, mailing lists, chat groups, personal web journals — all nonstandard news sources — we received valuable context that the major American media couldn’t, or wouldn’t, provide.

We were witnessing—and in many cases were part of—the future of news.”

“This book is about journalism’s transformation from a 20th century mass-media structure to something profoundly more grassroots and democratic. It’s a story, first, of evolutionary change. Humans have always told each other stories, and each new era of progress has led to an expansion of storytelling.

This is also a story of a modern revolution, however, because technology has given us a communications toolkit that allows anyone to become a journalist at little cost and, in theory, with global reach. Nothing like this has ever been remotely possible before.”

“In the 20th century, making the news was almost entirely the province of journalists; the people we covered, or “news- makers”; and the legions of public relations and marketing people who manipulated everyone. “

“Tomorrow’s news reporting and production will be more of a conversation, or a seminar. The lines will blur between producers and consumers, changing the role of both in ways we’re only beginning to grasp now. The communication network itself will be a medium for everyone’s voice, not just the few who can afford to buy multimillion-dollar printing presses, launch satellites, or win the government’s permission to squat on the public’s airwaves.”

“We can’t afford more of the same. We can’t afford to treat the news solely as a commodity, largely controlled by big institutions. We can’t afford, as a society, to limit our choices.”

*Journalists*

We will learn we are part of something new, that our readers/listeners/viewers are becoming part of the process. I take it for granted, for example, that my readers know more than I do—and this is a liberating, not threatening, fact of journalistic life. Every reporter on every beat should embrace this. We will use the tools of grassroots journalism or be consigned to history. Our core values, including accu- racy and fairness, will remain important, and we’ll still be gatekeepers in some ways, but our ability to shape larger conversations—and to provide context—will be at least as important as our ability to gather facts and report them.

*Newsmakers*

The rich and powerful are discovering new vulnerabilities, as Nacchio learned. Moreover, when anyone can be a jour- nalist, many talented people will try—and they’ll find things the professionals miss. Politicians and business people are learning this every day. But newsmakers also have new ways to get out their message, using the same technologies the grassroots adopts. Howard Dean’s presidential cam- paign failed, but his methods will be studied and emulated because of the way his campaign used new tools to engage his supporters in a conversation. The people at the edges of the communications and social networks can be a news- maker’s harshest, most effective critics. But they can also be the most fervent and valuable allies, offering ideas to each other and to the newsmaker as well.

*The former audience*

Once mere consumers of news, the audience is learning how to get a better, timelier report. It’s also learning how to join the process of journalism, helping to create a massive con- versation and, in some cases, doing a better job than the professionals. For example, Glenn Reynolds, a.k.a. “Insta- pundit,” is not just one of the most popular webloggers; he has amassed considerable influence in the process. Some grassroots journalists will become professionals. In the end, we’ll have more voices and more options.

**Final Thoughts from Dan Gillmor**

“The rise of the citizen journalist will help us listen. The ability of anyone to make the news will give new voice to people who’ve felt voiceless—and whose words we need to hear. They are showing all of us—citizen, journalist, newsmaker—new ways of talking, of learning.

In the end, they may help spark a renaissance of the notion, now threatened, of a truly informed citizenry. Self-government demands no less, and we’ll all benefit if we do it right.

Let’s have this conversation, for everyone’s sake.”