

## Guardian of the American Will

On July 15, 2018, President Donald Trump famously tweeted, “much of our news media is indeed the enemy of the people.”<sup>1</sup> Trump’s harsh rebuke, in fact, was expected by the Founding Fathers. In 1791, when Congress ratified the First Amendment, the nation’s right to a free press, it forever ensured democracy in American society. Since then, the press’s role in preserving the true will of the American people remains critical to democracy. Today, “America’s Fourth Estate” fulfills this role by educating the masses and keeping the government in check. Moving forward, however, it must address partisan reporting, which hinders expression of the American will.

When the American people are educated via the media, the general public has greater ability to influence Capitol Hill. The media (or press) is the means through which these masses are informed about global, national, and local issues. In the past decade, the media has become increasingly accessible through its digitization, and as of June 2018, roughly 93% of American adults receive some type of news through online media.<sup>2</sup> With increased knowledge via readily available news, the American masses are able to more actively understand key issues and hold leaders accountable for their actions through elections and protest. The “Me Too” movement, a nationwide campaign against sexual misconduct, is a modern example of the result of this mass education.<sup>3</sup> Truly, the resignation of U.S. Representative John Conyer on December 5, 2017, in response to overwhelming allegations of sexual harassment exhibited the power of the American masses.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> William P. Davis, “‘Enemy of the People’: Trump Breaks Out This Phrase During Moments of Peak Criticism,” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 19 July 2018, [www.nytimes.com/2018/07/19/business/media/trump-media-enemy-of-the-people.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/19/business/media/trump-media-enemy-of-the-people.html).

<sup>2</sup> “Trends and Facts on Online News,” *Journalism.org*, Pew Research Center, 6 June 2018, [www.journalism.org/fact-sheet/digital-news/](http://www.journalism.org/fact-sheet/digital-news/).

<sup>3</sup> “History & Vision,” *Me Too Movement*, Me Too Movement, [metoomvmt.org/about/#history](http://metoomvmt.org/about/#history).

<sup>4</sup> Davis Richardson, “Battered by Sexual Harassment Allegations, John Conyers Resigns From Congress,” *Observer*, Observer, 5 Dec. 2017, [observer.com/2017/12/battered-by-sexual-harassment-allegations-john-conyers-resigns-from-congress/](http://observer.com/2017/12/battered-by-sexual-harassment-allegations-john-conyers-resigns-from-congress/).

Moreover, as an unsilenceable defender of democracy, the press is also the means through which government corruption is scrutinized and challenged by the people. Like the Founding Fathers hoped, whistleblowing, in particular, has played a key role in preserving the will of the American people by keeping the government transparent and earnest. When Mark Felt famously leaked information to the Washington Post about the 1970s Watergate scandal, he played a key role in the downfall of an administration with a concealed history of illegal activity.<sup>5</sup> Surely, as one of many anti-corruption journalists, Felt's success portrays the watchdog nature of the media in modern-day America.

Finally, the Fourth Estate must remain vigilant moving forwards in an age of hyperpolarized public discourse that impedes expression of the true American will. Current social divisions over controversial topics were recently exploited by Russian meddling in American social media during the 2016 US Presidential election.<sup>6</sup> Today, these rifts are only further exacerbated by the biased political agendas of many mainstream American news broadcasters, who fail to provide audiences with a broad range of political views. The subsequent narrow-mindedness of the American people is evidenced by the minimal overlap in sources that conservatives and liberals each turn to.<sup>7</sup> Thus, to remedy the close-minded political nature of America, independent, honest, and nonpartisan reporting must be endorsed and welcomed. Truly, to foster a democracy that expresses an educated, rational, and united American will, willingness to listen *must* be the first step.

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<sup>5</sup> "Mark Felt," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 14 Dec. 2018, [www.britannica.com/biography/Mark-Felt](http://www.britannica.com/biography/Mark-Felt).

<sup>6</sup> Tom McCarthy, "How Russia Used Social Media to Divide Americans," *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 14 Oct. 2017, [www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/oct/14/russia-us-politics-social-media-facebook](http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/oct/14/russia-us-politics-social-media-facebook).

<sup>7</sup> Amy Mitchell et al., "Political Polarization & Media Habits," *Journalism.org*, Pew Research Center, 26 Apr. 2018, [www.journalism.org/2014/10/21/political-polarization-media-habits/](http://www.journalism.org/2014/10/21/political-polarization-media-habits/).

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