

David Cay Johnston: Journalism a Bastion for 'Trust Fund Kids'

In a recent [Salon.com interview](#), investigative journalist and Pulitzer Prize winner [David Cay Johnston](#) declared that the real problem with today's journalism is not ideological bias or fake news. Instead, it's the myopia journalists suffer from as a result of attending elite prep schools, growing up with silver spoons in their mouths and living off of trust funds.

Take [Anderson Cooper](#). He was born into the super-wealthy Vanderbilt family. He attended Dalton prep school. With the support of his family, he travelled around Africa for several months between prep school and college. He attended and eventually graduated from Yale University, probably with no student debt. Cooper is definitely not your everyman.

Today's journalists, Johnston complains, come from "very comfortable circumstances," white collar families and backgrounds that differ drastically from those of their audience:

"There are some fellow reporters at The New York Times I worked with who are worth millions and millions of dollars. Their perspective on the world tended much more to be: 'The world is a pretty just place. Things seem to be going well,' which reasonably is their life experience, and that has absolutely turned people off. And they began making newspapers move up the income ladder and the wealth ladder in terms of readership, and lost sight of this mass audience they used to have. As a result, the coverage, and what newspapers defined as important, tended to be the concerns of the upper-middle class – people like me and you – and people above us economically, and not so much [those] who are

working in a factory or a cafeteria or the floor of a retail store. I think a lot of people are like, 'Yeah, this has nothing to do with me. I don't read the newspaper, it has nothing to do with me. Maybe I'll read the sports section.' Bad, long-term commercial decision."

While my inner Jacobin relishes this explanation, the more rational part of me rejects it as an instance of overbroad generalization, or at least an obsession with a few tokens, such as Anderson Cooper.

Just this past week another Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, [Jimmy Breslin](#), died. Breslin introduced a style of news reporting known as 'New Journalism,' which focuses on the ordinary or banal in everyday existence. [Michael O'Keefe of Newsday](#) explains:

“Breslin told stories of news events through the everyday people involved in them, whom he celebrated. He wrote about the man who dug President John F. Kennedy’s grave at Arlington National Cemetery, the police officers who drove John Lennon to Roosevelt Hospital after the former Beatle was shot outside the Dakota, his apartment building on West 72nd Street, and being with the parents of women shot by “Son of Sam” killer David Berkowitz as they read a letter he sent to Breslin.”

Now Johnston could still be correct. Today’s Trust Fund Kid Journalism could mark a shift away from Breslin’s New Journalism, occurring in the past 10 or 15 years.

However, the past decade gave rise to a phenomenon known as [‘citizen journalism,’](#) whereby anyone can document, report and analyze news stories, usually in online forums (such as Intellectual Takeout). Citizen Journalism weighs heavily against Johnston’s assessment. Rather than becoming more elitist, news reporting has, in point of fact, become more democratized, inviting journalists from varied backgrounds with multiple perspectives.

Should modern news reporting be directed more at the Volk, the average people, and less at the elite, or the upper middle class? Or has the democratization of the media through citizen journalism made this question moot?

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[Image Credit: CNN]