



Journalism's Roving Eye: A History of American Foreign Reporting

John Maxwell Hamilton

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In all of journalism, nowhere are the stakes higher than in foreign news-gathering. For media owners, it is the most difficult type of reporting to finance; for editors, the hardest to oversee. Correspondents, roaming large swaths of the planet, must acquire expertise that home-based reporters take for granted -- facility with the local language, for instance, or an understanding of local cultures. Adding further to the challenges, they must put news of the world in context for an audience with little experience and often limited interest in foreign affairs -- a task made all the more daunting because of the consequence to national security.

In *Journalism's Roving Eye*, John Maxwell Hamilton -- a historian and former foreign correspondent -- provides a sweeping and definitive history of American foreign news reporting from its inception to the present day and chronicles the economic and technological advances that have influenced overseas coverage, as well as the cavalcade of colorful personalities who shaped readers' perceptions of the world across two centuries.

From the colonial era -- when newspaper printers hustled down to wharfs to collect mail and periodicals from incoming ships -- to the ongoing multimedia press coverage of the Iraq War, Hamilton explores journalism's constant -- and not always successful -- efforts at "dishing the foreign news," as James Gordon Bennett put it in the mid-nineteenth century to describe his approach in the *New York Herald*. He details the highly partisan coverage of the French Revolution, the early emergence of "special correspondents" and the challenges of organizing their efforts, the profound impact of the non-yellow press in the run-up to the Spanish-American War, the increasingly sophisticated machinery of propaganda and censorship that surfaced during World War I, and the "golden age" of foreign correspondence during the interwar period, when outlets for foreign news swelled and a large number of experienced, independent journalists circled the globe. From the Nazis' intimidation of reporters to the ways in which American popular opinion shaped coverage of Communist revolution and the Vietnam War, Hamilton covers every aspect of delivering foreign news to American doorsteps.

Along the way, Hamilton singles out a fascinating cast of characters, among them Victor Lawson, the overlooked proprietor of the *Chicago Daily News*, who pioneered the concept of a foreign news service geared to American interests; Henry Morton Stanley, one of the first reporters to generate news on his own with his 1871 expedition to East Africa to "find Livingstone"; and Jack Belden, a forgotten brooding figure who exemplified the best in combat reporting. Hamilton details the experiences of correspondents, editors, owners, publishers, and network executives, as well as the political leaders who made the news and the technicians who invented ways to transmit it. Their stories bring the narrative to life in arresting detail and make this an indispensable book for anyone wanting to understand the evolution of foreign news-gathering.

Amid the steep drop in the number of correspondents stationed abroad and the recent decline of the newspaper industry, many fear that foreign reporting will soon no longer exist. But as Hamilton shows in this magisterial work, traditional correspondence survives alongside a new type of reporting. *Journalism's Roving Eye* offers a keen understanding of the vicissitudes in foreign news, an understanding imperative to better seeing what lies ahead.

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Penny Laughlin:

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