

America's Free Press and Monopoly | Open Markets Institute

By Open Markets Institute

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“[Breaking the News: Free Speech & Democracy in the Age of Platform Monopoly](#)” was held by the Open Markets Institute and the Two Center for Journalism in Washington, DC on June 12, 2018. The event sought to address the challenges imposed by “platform monopolies” the “private corporations with centralized control over the flow of information and news between reporters and readers” upon news and journalism. A resulting discussion paper from the conference explores the ways in which American journalism has confronted technological change and corporate influence throughout history.

Americans have faced similar challenges before, with the rise of then-revolutionary new technologies such as the telegraph in the 19th century and of radio and television in the 20th Century. In each instance, we used government to ensure the independence and financial viability of the news media. Over the course of more than two centuries, Americans developed many regulatory and policy tools that can be of use to us today.

The purpose of this discussion paper is to reconnect us, at least briefly, with that past, to help us determine which tools to use to address today's challenges. What the paper shows, we believe, is that the history of American journalism is one of ceaseless private initiative and innovation, as individual citizens strive to figure out better ways and smarter business models to a) keep a check on government and private power, b) inform citizens, and specific communities within society, of the basic events and challenges of the day, and c) pay the costs of reporting, editing, and distributing the news.

What this discussion paper also shows is that, from even before the Declaration of Independence, Americans used government both to promote the building of technologically sophisticated infrastructures to distribute the news, and to directly address threats to the free press posed by either private monopolists or by government actors.

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