

Who Will Save the News? | The Nation

By Anya Schiffrin

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Reliable information is clearly needed [to fight misinformation], but journalists find themselves in a difficult position. Although they have been classified as essential workers, tens of thousands have been laid off or furloughed around the world. News audiences have risen dramatically in 2020, but sharply declining revenue in previous years—particularly from advertising—has crippled many newsrooms. Now the economic effects of the pandemic have set the stage for what some are calling a media extinction event.

This is true in the United States, where things are so bad that the Poynter Institute, a nonprofit journalism school and research organization, says it's updating its job loss tracker almost every day. As of this writing, the institute reports that 18 local newspapers have merged, at least 1,500 newsroom staffers have been permanently laid off, a minimum of 20 publications have suspended their print editions, and at least 30 local newsrooms have closed. (Also, journalists of color are often the most likely to be laid off, as The Washington Post reported in May.) But the crumbling of news organizations is not confined to the United States; it is happening all over the world. As the Botswanan journalist Ntibinyane Ntibinyane warned in April, many African newspapers might not survive the pandemic, and the same is true in countries as diverse as Bolivia, Brazil, India, Liberia, the Philippines, and the United Kingdom.

The desperate situation that the media finds itself in—and that we all face with it as a result—is the focus of Victor Pickard's new book, *Democracy Without Journalism? Confronting the Misinformation Society*. Written before the pandemic hit, the book is all the more relevant in a world transformed by Covid-19. Among other things, it offers a critical examination of US media history, arguing that at crucial moments, a market-centered understanding of the media has undermined the public good that news outlets provide. Yet the book also offers us an important reminder that it is not too late to right this wrong by creating what Pickard calls "a permanent public news media shielded from the market." The "current crisis," he

says, “offers opportunities for reasserting the public service mission of the press.”

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