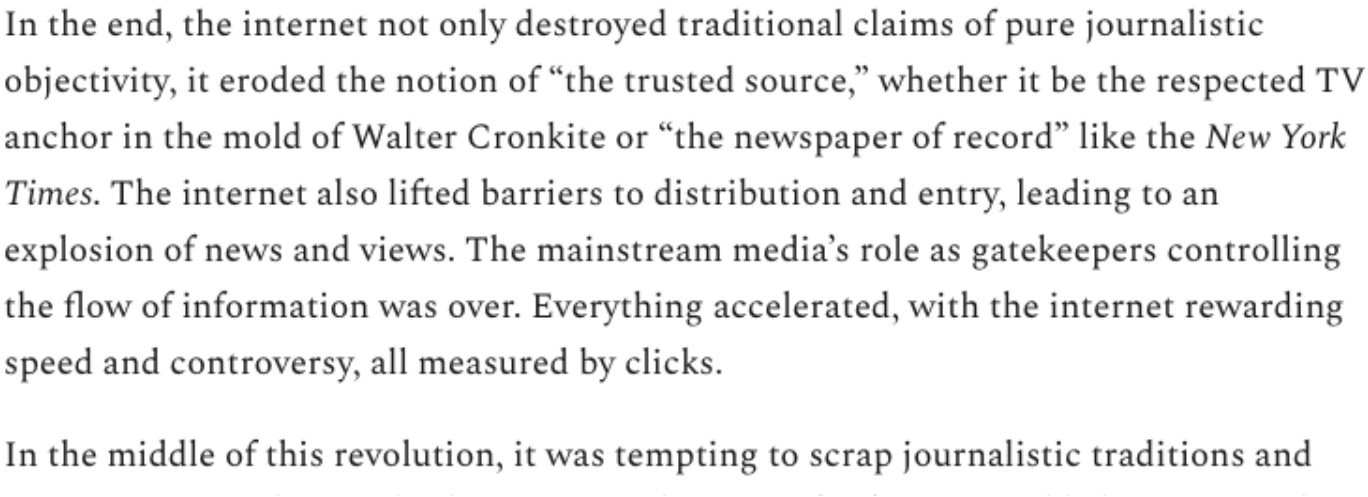
Twitter Thread by Jeff Jarvis

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Oh, my. Former FT Editor @lionelbarber defends bothsideism, impartiality, objectivity and other recent journalistic tradition.

In it, @lionelbarber laments the loss of trust in Walter Cronkite; "newspaper of record." That was trust imagined by the institution & limited to white privilege & power. Now, on the net, we hear people never included in the institution, who never trusted it. See: #BLM, #metoo



In the end, the internet not only destroyed traditional claims of pure journalistic objectivity, it eroded the notion of "the trusted source," whether it be the respected TV anchor in the mold of Walter Cronkite or "the newspaper of record" like the *New York Times*. The internet also lifted barriers to distribution and entry, leading to an explosion of news and views. The mainstream media's role as gatekeepers controlling the flow of information was over. Everything accelerated, with the internet rewarding speed and controversy, all measured by clicks.

In the middle of this revolution, it was tempting to scrap journalistic traditions and

Barber quotes @WesleyLowery, which is good, but misses his point: that these institutional notions of objectivity, impartiality, trust were fictions those in power told themselves because they had the power to do so. It was journalism's fatal tautology. 3/

The bothsideism Barber defends was an invention, too, aimed at securing power journalism's hold on its claims of objectivity, &c. Of course, I advocate completeness, fairness, accuracy, openness. But then I advocate judgment. 4/

One irony of the age is that journalists are demanding that platforms make judgments that journalists themselves--like Barber--refuse to make. That is not onesideism. It is a sin of journalistic omission. What do I mean by that? 5/

Journalists were afraid to judge Trump's sanity, his lying, his criminality, his competence, his character. Bothsideism & objectivity led to hiring Hugh Hewitt or having Kellyanne booked on air. 6/

Journalists were and are also afraid of judging the systemic racism and inequity in society's other institutions. How, after COVID, George Floyd, Trum, & 2020 can that continue? To not report on & call out these ills is journalistic malpractice. 7/

To seek out the "other side" regarding racism, inequity, and crime--hallmarks of Trump's reign--is to amplify these ills, to normalize them. Thus, The Times tells us a Nazi wears khakis & goes to Panera just like real people. That, too, is journalistic malpractice. 8/

Says Barber: "But reporting—reflecting what other people think or say—does not amount to an endorsement of a particular point of view." If Zuckerberg or @jack said that, media would draw and quarter them. Journalism? Oh, that's our job. 9/

Reflecting "what other people think or say" without necessary context--judgment--merely amplifies their thoughts, regularizing lies & racism. Note that I want the same thing from both journalists & platforms: judgment. Both are allergic to it, but one demands it of the other. 10/

Barber is a damned good editor, wicked smart, impeccably informed. Same for his old paper. But we need to discuss journalism's shibboleths and failures in the same breath without relying on the kinds of obvious tactics he lists. 11/

This old journalism failed America and Britain. The evidence: Liars & their lies took over both nations. Now is the time for us in journalism to examine that failure with brutal honesty and to imagine a new journalism that will not fail our societies again. We must learn. 12/

So consider all this another side to Barber's ringing of the bells in journalism's church tower. Consider it my bothsideism. 13/

This is where the journalists says: I am not like you. I saw that the president of the United States was mad, bad, and dangerous. But my professional speciality is in muting that judgment for the sake of a fair hearing -- of madness, badness, and danger. 14/

> Trump's aggression repelled me. But later, the tables were turned. We, the journalists, got to write our story. Most commentators considered the newly inaugurated president to be mad, bad and dangerous. They would have preferred our full-page interview to conclude with words to that effect. With hindsight—and bearing in mind Trump's brazen efforts to overturn a legitimate presidential election—I have sympathy for their views. But I believed then, and I believe now, that good journalism required that the president get a fair hearing.

To be clear, I, too, am asking for reporting to back up those judgments. I have been dying for journalists to talk with psychiatrists to diagnose Trump's madness but our field ignored it instead. Why? Fairness? Balance? This, I believe, as our greatest malpractice. 15/

Here, Barber accuses journalists who enter into dialog with the public, now possible on social media, of seeking fame. Odd thing for famous editors to say. To "muddle personal views" could also be called openness and transparency, which some

also call journalistic virtues. 16/

> To be sure, my commitment to “bothsidesism” became harder to defend in the Digital Age. Traditional journalistic lines between facts and opinion were blurring, alongside the rise of information giants like Facebook that deemed themselves mere platforms but were de facto publishers, making decisions through their algorithms about what information hundreds of millions of people saw every day. Journalists were also sending mixed messages. Most still asserted their profession’s neutrality, yet many became so eager to develop their own brands (as measured by number of Twitter followers) that they were more willing to muddle personal views and reporting.

It's not just the diversity in our newsrooms. It is the quality of our coverage, the fact that we did not report what happened to Black Americans every day until #LivingWhileBlack showed us and did not report on murderous inequity in health care until COVID showed us. /17

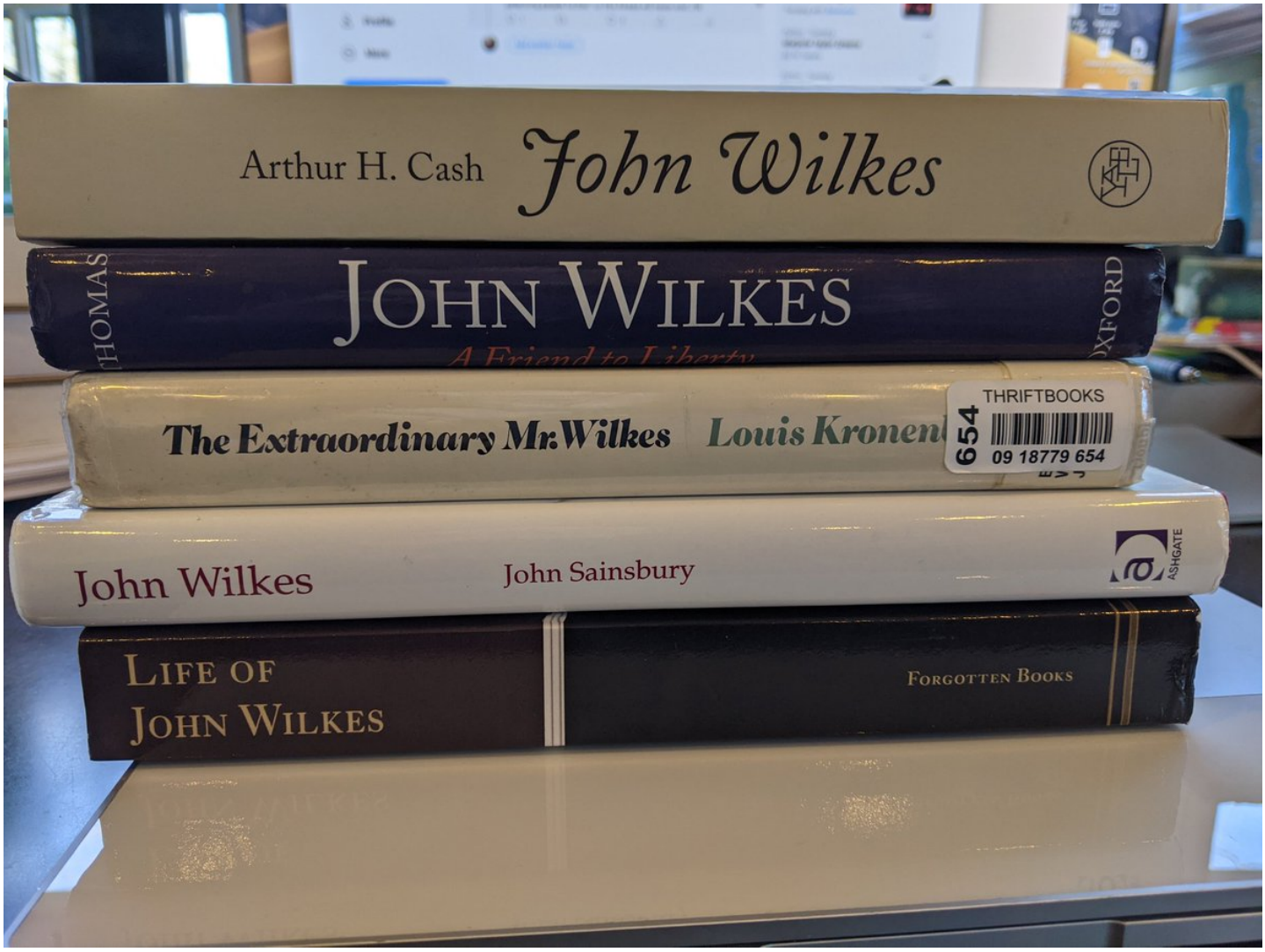
> One consequence of the free-for-all on social media is that news organizations are held to account as rarely before. This can be good: The #MeToo movement and Black Lives Matter, for example, has forced editors to think harder about the stories they commission, and to answer for the diversity in their newsrooms in terms of gender balance and ethnicity.

Confessing our chronic sin regarding diversity in newsrooms is only a first, tiny step. Fixing it is a next step. Acknowledging the resulting failures in journalistic coverage is the next big step necessary before fixing that. /18

And don't get me started on viewing treatment of James Bennet and Bari Weis as "intolerance and censorship" and "activist journalism [that] risks polarizing people further" or this thread will never end. /19

But now I'm going to leave you to write a piece of a chapter about John Wilkes, a journalist who would make modern editors' blood curdle but whom they have to thank for so much of the freedom of the press they enjoy today. /fin /maybe

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