

## Page One: Inside the New York Times

Much ink—and much cybertime—has been spent describing the imminent demise of US newspapers as print media's audience and their advertising revenues have been lost to Internet sources, especially the "citizen journalist" and the news aggregators (like The Huffington Post). The facts are bad enough, even for the most prestigious journals like the "Great Gray Lady," The New York Times. A new documentary offers a comprehensive and illuminating look at what has befallen the mythic Times and speculates on what the future may bring.

"Page One: Inside The New York Times" was directed by Andrew Rossi and co-scripted by him and Karen Novack, who spent 14 months embedding themselves in the paper's own Media Desk and examining the state of the paper principally through the lens of that desk. Thus, the Times staffers who follow the media are seen assessing their own journal. It's not navel-gazing because the reporters/commentators are worthy, serious observers trained to call 'em the way they see 'em.

Featured among the media reporters is David Carr, a crusty truth-teller with a reprobate past (he is known for his memoir, "Night of the Gun," about his early cocaine addiction). He writes a Monday media column for the paper's business section and turns out to be a staunch defender of the paper's integrity and journalistic ethics. Coming from a guy with a scruffy appearance and a distinctive rasp for a voice, his words seem to take on added weight, perhaps because, as he himself sardonically says, "I've led a textured life."

Among other Times dramatis personae, Carr is nicely seconded by his own boss, Bruce Headlam, chief of the Media Desk, who offers a level-headed look at his paper's state and its current position in the national journalism spectrum. Also featured are Tim Arango, a thoughtful media reporter who, at the time of filming, takes on a correspondent's position in Baghdad, and Brian Stelter, a smart and perceptive young (now 25) ex-blogger who covers the television industry for the Times.

Bill Keller, Executive Editor of the paper since 2003, is also interviewed, presenting considered comments on the state of journalism and the future of the Times. Keller, who just announced his resignation from the job, addresses media speculators who see the paper's demise as a failing model that cannot be sustained in the news business. He admitted, though, that during his time the Times has had to move "from a transition to a revolution" in communications.

Its position, the film makes clear, has changed radically in the last decade or so, though most observers still would nominate the Times as our national paper of record. The film presents some highlights and lowlights of the paper's recent history, from the Pentagon Papers and Watergate through Jayson Blair's journalistic inventions to Judith Miller's misbegotten background pieces on Iraq. Such events are brought right up to date with the WikiLeaks exposure of 2010, in which the Times was one of the outlets selected to purvey the classified material for publication. That episode, however, also indicates to Keller how drastically the communications landscape has changed. Comparing the Pentagon Papers episode with the latest revelations, Keller notes: "WikiLeaks doesn't need us. Daniel Ellsberg did."

The film's title is personified in the "page one" sessions shown in the film, the mid-morning and afternoon meetings of all the top editors to decide what will make the front page, that daily definition of the newsworthy. These are very businesslike, intriguing snapshots of professional journalists sorting out what matters. While its scandals highlight the periodic vulnerability of the once vaunted Times, its resilience still comes through when it breaks a big story. A good example in the film is the Media Desk's coverage of the decline of the news giant Tribune Company under Chairman Sam Zell, a series that led to a CEO's resignation.

While Rossi and Novack focus significantly on the New York Times story in "Page One," they also raise larger questions about the future of print media generally. A collection of knowledgeable talking heads grapple with these media issues, among them David Remnick (editor of The New Yorker), Katrina vanden Heuvel (editor of The Nation), Paul Steiger (of the non-profit, investigative group ProPublica), and Nick Denton (of the blog collective service "Gawker").

The movie, like the Times' future, is open-ended. At its end, the prospect (since begun) is raised of garnering new revenue by charging regular online readers of the Times site. Only the "Times" will tell if our national paper of record will survive in its current form.

*(The film is rated "R" and runs 91 mins.)*

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