

Misinformation Newspaper



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Art in the News	3
Interview with Andrew Schragger	4
The Importance of Media Literacy	5
News in New Jersey	6
Interview with Steve Lewis	8
What is Real?	10
Journalism with John Koppish	12
Miss Information Advice Column	14
Crossword Puzzle	15
Game Answers	16
Artist Credits	17



Look out for these stars to see a featured art piece!

Art in the News



"Liberty Lifting justice" by Donald Swenson

The Misinformation Newspaper is a project in response to the Democracy Conversation Project (DCP) which was conducted by the New Jersey Council for Humanities. The DCP asked New Jersey citizens questions like "What is the biggest challenge facing democracy today?" and "What does it mean to be a good citizen?". Many of these answers had to do with news media, citing distrust of news stations and journalists, the rise of social media, and the constant threat of fake news and false reporting as major concerns. People included staying informed as an important part of being a good citizen.

This project aims to make navigating media less confusing, while also including art to help express the feelings that come with being an informed citizen. It is hoped that The Misinformation Newspaper will encourage people to engage with news media in a deeper and more meaningful way.

The Misinformation Newspaper is intended to be interactive and engaging and conversation about these topics is highly encouraged.

How do people currently engage with the news? Are journalists or news outlets required to be truthful? Who decides what the truth is? These are some of the many questions that were asked when creating this project, and the outcome of The Misinformation Newspaper is a start at answering some of these questions; including interviews with news professionals, artwork inspired by the news in America, interactive games, and more.

From artist Donald Swenson:

"Liberty Lifting Justice" was created in 2020 soon after the death of George Floyd. I'm not a political cartoonist, but the calls for police reform and the cries of racial injustice were weighing heavy on me. The artwork was my way of wrestling with these topics. It is important to speak up when an individual's basic human rights are jeopardized by the system put in place to protect them. This was my way of personifying those topics and saying that liberty and justice must walk together and when one falters the other must help it regain its footing.

Interview with Attorney Andrew Schragger

If we, as American citizens, have the right to free speech and free press, can we or the media just say whatever we want? What exactly do these laws mean when it comes to news media?

Watch this interview with New Jersey attorney Andrew Schragger to learn more about the concepts of censorship and the first amendment.



**"The first amendment is...the
first one for a reason."**

The Impact & Importance of Media Literacy

Reading entire articles or keeping up with news via TV or radio can be a challenge for many as a result of the decline in media literacy in adults in the United States. Media literacy is the ability to not only consume, but to understand media such as news articles, television news segments, political websites, and more. Literacy as a whole may actually be declining in the United States. In 2021 research showed that about 25% of all American adults have not read a book in over a year, which is three times more than it was in 1978. An article by Steven Mintz explores that this might have to do with increased distractibility – people have shorter attention spans now than they have in the past. Americans have shifted into reading and watching shorter form media and our attention spans as a whole have dropped.

Media literacy means being able to understand information and form their own opinions on different matters. One of the questions asked in the Democracy Conversation Project was "What does it mean to be a good citizen?" and many of the answers included being informed, fact checking, and seeking information. Literacy means people are able to stay informed to make decisions when it comes to voting and taking action in their community.

Illiteracy leads to higher incarceration rates, unemployment, low wages, and difficulty understanding systems designed to help people, such as health care and welfare programs. It costs the US government \$225 Billion dollars to fund programs like unemployment.



Investing in education and bolstering media literacy in children and adults is necessary for the betterment of American citizens. There is also research that shows that around a fifth of American adults struggle to read. One of the main culprits of this are literacy deserts. A literacy desert is an area where people have little to no access to literature or other types of reading. This might mean a neighborhood without a public library, or access to newspapers or even the internet. This lack of access restricts people from practicing reading, and over time they may lose the ability in part, or in whole. Being in a literacy desert can mean that people have to find more accessible ways to find their information. They may rely on short videos on the internet, social media, or podcasts

and radio stations for their information.

Kids are currently battling illiteracy in schools, but what research found when studying literacy was that the word doesn't just apply to reading anymore. While literacy used to just mean the ability to read, as well as to analyze and understand what we read, there are different forms of literacy now. Media literacy is just one of these things, but there is also civic literacy, coding literacy, financial literacy, and more. This means kids today will be more well rounded in the future, and these types of literacy should be encouraged alongside reading and media literacy.

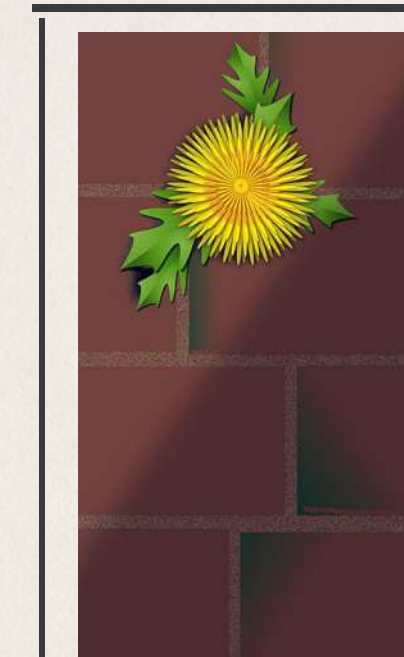
News in New Jersey: Information Media in the United States

“The News” has been around for centuries in all different parts of the world. Keeping people informed is an important part of society and living together. In fact, “The News”, meaning the intention distribution of information, was a large part of the establishment of the United States of America.

At the time of the American Revolution, many of the newspapers at the time were controlled by the British. By establishing newspapers of their own, the Americans were able to spread information about the Revolution with less interference from the British, though many of them were still suppressed and censored by the British government or even local government depending on where they landed politically.

Many daily local papers were for news relevant to residents such as deliveries or important events. One of the first recurring non-political newspapers in the country was The New England Courant made by James Franklin, older brother to Benjamin Franklin. This led Benjamin Franklin to creating the first newspaper chain from New England to the Carolinas in an effort to educate Americans on morality.

The paper was in print throughout the Revolution and the beginning of the United States, delivering messages from George Washington who was stationed in Morristown, NJ at the time, and rallied people against the British.



Artwork

"Persistence" by Mary Place

Based on work she started during the Covid-19 shut-down “Persistence” shows a bright yellow dandelion growing out through the brick. Originally intended to show hope coming through the darkness of the pandemic, Mary created this similar piece to demonstrate “truth emerging from the darkness of misinformation.”

In 1787 it became The Elizabeth Daily Journal, and remained so until the paper closed permanently in 1992 at 212 years old.

The Elizabeth Daily Journal covered many historical events over the course of its long history, some of which you can hear more about in the audio interview with John Koppish, a journalist from New Jersey, on page X. When it closed in 1992, it was the fourth oldest newspaper in the country. In 2016, a digitized database of Elizabeth Daily Journal articles from 1872 to 1924 became available at the Elizabeth Public Library.

News media has evolved more and more over time. Newspapers grew in size and reach, then the introduction of the radio in the early 1900s, and television a few decades later.

.Now the news comes in all forms – from online newspapers to print, TV to radio, social media like TikTok to YouTube and podcasts. These changes in the way news is delivered brings many improvements and challenges to being an informed citizen. Varied news sources means more diverse opinions being shared, different perspectives offered, and more opportunities to fact check. Having so many options for where and how to get information from the news can make it difficult to know what can be trusted, but it also means that news and information is more accessible to people.

With the evolution of news, there also came a rise in conversations about media ethics, government censorship, and reliability. In his interview, journalist John Koppish covers a bit about media ethics, and the interview with Andrew Schragger covers a bit about censorship.

Thinking about the history of the news in the US can help us understand the importance of widespread and accessible news outlets.

While there may be complications that come with this new age of information sharing online, we can also use it to our advantage. During the American Revolution newspapers were used to relay information, but it was also used as a call to action, a place for opinions to be shared. Today, we can use our news tools: social media, mass communication, and immediate access to information in similar ways.

There is more to "The News" than just reading articles or watching segments for information. "The News" is a response to action as much as it's a call to one.

Artwork



"Don't Panic" by Heidi SanFilippo

A piece in response to the misleading and unreliable information regarding the Covid-19 vaccine. SanFilippo created this piece as "a statement as to how the media controls the information that we are exposed to".



"One on One" by Steve Lewis

Interview with artist Steve Lewis

Steve Lewis is an international artist responsible for three of the images used in The Misinformation Newspaper. The cover art "ART TITLE HERE" as well as "STATUE OF LIB ONE" and "One on One" featured at the top of this article are his works. Having lived and worked in both the US and Europe, Steve Lewis shares some of his experiences with media, politics, and art.

Would you consider yourself a political artist? If not, how would you describe your art?

I wouldn't consider myself a political artist, but I have made paintings that reflect my political views. Since 2013, I have returned to figurative painting,

which was a break from the non-objective abstract art that I had started making in the late 90s. These paintings have been narrative and focus mainly on Americana and coming of age. I typically combine hometown locations, family and friends, and memories of personal experiences to create individual and series of paintings.

The paintings often include multiple focal points within one scene and there seems to be a break or a change in the flow of a normal event, where a surprise or something unexpected takes place. They seem like frozen moments in time and are reminiscent of movie stills. Often, the viewer creates the beginning and end of the story in their mind.

I believe this engagement with the painting is as much the art as the painted piece. The paintings mean something different for each viewer depending on their personal experiences and I think this is very true for the political paintings as well.

What inspired the creation of the political pieces you have done?

The most politically active period for me personally started when I realized that Donald Trump was actually becoming a serious candidate for the Republican nomination as president in November of 2015. I began the production of new paintings expressing my fear of

Interview with artist Steve Lewis

such a person leading America. The artwork visually provokes the viewer to contemplate what the effects of Trump's presidency would mean. His attacks and shameless accusations had never before been seen during political debates. The thought of what his behavior might be like as president while with world leaders and how he would handle domestic and international situations was worrying. Unlike many others, I found those Republican debates alarming and not humorous at all. They should have rather sparked serious concern.

In 2016, I created three paintings that expressed my fear for what a President Trump might be like and how such a presidency would affect the world. One was made specifically for a Leipzig group exhibition called Change Your Culture and two others were painted for an international juried exhibition in Dresden called error: X. My intention was to create these paintings to bring attention to what I believed to be an event that would have major consequences on the world.

Being an international artist, how has living in Europe affected the way you interact with or view US news, and does that impact the art you make?

Having lived in Germany now for 30 years, I spent my adult life mostly relying on CNN for American and international news. It has been my go to source for

information on current events. Since the Trump presidency and the labeling of fake news, I have become more aware of the bias of CNN and began viewing German network news and the BBC news as

well. Having close contact with people who regularly watch Fox News has made me aware and concerned how everyone can find the news that supports their opinions. Cable news becomes more like entertainment rather than a source of information. The facts get lost or shaped to match the opinions of the viewers. The viewers get hooked and forget to form their own opinions. It is a difficult time to know what is the basic truth of current affairs and which sources we can trust to share unbiased information.

The impact on my art has been that I believe, it is important to tell personal stories, to visually capture important moments from our past, and share them in order to reconnect to our society. In America especially, there are too many topics and issues that have become politically charged and exploited to make political gains. We only focus on what people on the other side do wrong and never how either side attempts to make things right. There is a great deal of us versus them mentality all around. Most of the political paintings I have done are subtle. I believe they express an issue in a tactful manner that is not offensive but still making a point. The paintings should allow for discussion and offer imagery that sticks in the viewers mind for further contemplation.

Art can be interpreted in many ways. How do you feel about people walking away from your work with a different idea of what it means than you intended?

I would love to hear what everyone thinks of my paintings. When I have exhibitions or open studio visits, I actively engage with people to find out what they think or how they interpret the images I paint and the narratives I refer to. I do this subtly, by waiting to see if two people start to talk about a painting. Once I see a finger pointing to something in the composition, I feel it is a prime time to swoop into the discussion. I don't think I have heard many far-off interpretations. I have often heard many personal connections to the work that I would have never otherwise known, which allows the viewer and me to share a special moment that is often very touching. I believe if there have been instances where the viewer walks away with an interpretation that is not what I intended, at least the viewer was engaged. The narratives I present or focal points I create are to capture the viewer's interest and encourage them to ponder on the moment being viewed with all their own knowledge and personal experiences. When this happens, I feel my painting is successful.

What is Real?

A poem by Raheem Curry

How much
more can we
deal with
this
propaganda?
they think
everything
is black
and white
like a panda

What about the gray?

Misinformation
is being spread
like a wildfire
WE are expected
to accept it
and swing
and sway
as if we are
in a choir.

They are
Trying to
Take away
Independent
Though!

"I think, therefore I am."

Are we existing?

Can you see
that they are
bending
and
twisting
the
truth.

"Shut up! You are just a conspiracy theorist."

No.

I am speaking
for myself
and guiding
the youth
to be
free thinkers
to be people
who question
when things
are not
adding up.
To teach
them not
to be complacent
when they
deserve more
in their
cup.

I can no
control
the media.
I can control
how I perceive
it.

I can control
myself.

That is
a sort of
Wealth and
blessing
that can
not be
given,
nor can
it be
taken.

Some of the news may be fake, but I never will be.

Journalism with John Koppish

John Koppish is a 40 year veteran of the journalism industry from Elizabeth, New Jersey. He started his career with the Elizabeth Daily New Jersey Journal and has gone on to work internationally as well as for household names like The Wall Street Journal and Forbes Magazine.

In these interview clips John recounts his experiences as a journalist and shares his knowledge and opinions that he's gained throughout his career. You can listen to each piece of the interview and hear about the history of New Jersey journalism.



Meet John!

The Elizabeth Daily Journal

John worked for the Elizabeth Daily Journal, one of the very first newspapers in the country, dating all the way back to the Revolutionary War. It played its role in the revolution by spreading information to the colonies as they fought to gain their independence from the British, and remained a prominent newspaper until its closing in 1992.

When I first reached out and had a phone conversation with John, we talked about some of the historic figures that made use of that paper, including General George Washington. Some famous journalists and authors have written for the paper and it has covered some incredible moments throughout history.

The first question I asked John was about his time with the

Elizabeth Daily Journal, what he learned while he was there, and the parts of its history that stood out to him then and now. Here's what he had to say:



Media Ethics

Media ethics are an important part of journalism. As John spoke about the importance of neutrality to the Elizabeth Daily Journal, it led into the questions I had about being an ethical journalist. Ethics are defined as moral principles that guide a person's actions. When acting as a news reporter of any kind there are many things to consider in the vein of ethics.

John tackles some of the trickiest parts of this conversation such as writing about politics, anonymous

sources, credibility, the rise of social media, and more. Listen to this part of the interview here:



Pros & Cons of the Internet

There are pros and cons to everything, including journalism. While a lot of this conversation focused on the changes and downfalls of the way news media exists now, John also had some things to say about the positive aspects of the journalism industry today. This project is based on the concerns of citizens have about being able to trust the media, but it's important to talk about the things that we're already doing when it comes to the news. We are hearing from more voices now

than ever before, and there's more interaction with the news than in the past. John helps us explore the brighter side of US news media in this section of the interview:



Cautious Optimism from John Koppish

The distrust in the media and journalism industries can make it easy to not want to engage with any form of news, but it's important to know what's going on in your community, your country, and the world.

In this last part of the interview, John gives us a few words of encouragement about staying informed and trusting yourself when it comes to the media.



Fact vs Opinion

How well do you know the difference between fact and opinion?

Test your knowledge here with this short quiz!

Each of these statements is either a fact or an opinion. Choose the answer you think is correct.

Advice with Miss Information



Dear Miss Information,

How do I get my kids to stop listening to the fake news on social media? They refuse to watch the news with me in the morning, saying it's all lies. I thought the news was supposed to be factual, but they think I'm being brainwashed. As if they aren't! What can I say to them to change their mind?

A Worried Mother

Dear Worried Mother,

This is a question a lot of parents have as our children start to form their own opinions. It sounds like your kids are turning to sources on platforms they're comfortable with. Social Media has become a place for people to interact with each other and has given us a better real time account of things happening around us. You're right though, a lot of this news can be misleading! When information comes quickly, there's not always time to fact check, and sometimes pieces of the story are still missing.

The form in which we obtain information is not the important part, it's the reliability of the information. Talk to your kids about why they trust social media over TV news, and tell them what it is about TV news that you trust. You may be surprised to

find just how similar these mediums can be!

Best of luck on this new journey in journalism.

Miss Information

Dear Miss Information,

I keep seeing all these conspiracy theories in the news and it worries me. I don't know what's real anymore and I don't know if I can trust that the media isn't hiding important information from me. How can I be a good citizen if I'm not fully and honestly informed of everything going on in our country?

A Citizen

Dear Citizen,

This is a very common fear, and unfortunately a realistic one. It is impossible to be informed on everything all the time! I prioritize the issues that are important to me and affect my community and those around me. I also try to keep up with news about things that may not affect me directly, but may change the country at large. You may miss things and find yourself in conversations where you don't know what people are talking about or you don't fully understand and that's okay! Those moments are opportunities for you to learn about causes that are important to the people in your life, as well as to see other perspectives.

Another piece of advice I'd like to give you is to vary your news sources. Read, watch, and listen to news from more than one perspective. This will give you a more well rounded understanding of what's going on, and it may help you see that some news outlets omit certain information that others don't. Having multiple sources is always good practice!

You're doing great, Citizen! That's the important part. Remember, no one

is perfect and all we can do is try our best.

Warmly,
Miss Information

Dear Miss Information,

I've been trying to understand the news from different perspectives and have started watching both right and left leaning news channels. Sometimes it feels like the information about the same topic is the complete opposite on one channel from the other. How am I supposed to know who is telling the truth?

A Learner

Dear Learner,

What a fantastic question! Watching news channels with opposing views is a great way to understand all sides of an argument before determining your own point of view. It does get confusing though, you're right. By watching two channels with opposing views, the conflicts you may be seeing are mostly in the opinion parts of the story. Being able to tell the difference between fact and opinion may take some practice. Try to look at a news story for the facts of what happened. Did a politician definitely do or say something or is it something one side or the other is speculating on? Is there proof that an event took place, such as photos or video? Can those photos or videos be verified?

It's hard sometimes, to look deeply into an issue, because it takes time. I would suggest looking for a news station that stays as unbiased as possible keeping opinion to a minimum. It may take some time for you to find one that works for you but they are out there!

You're doing a great job!

Proudly,
Miss Information

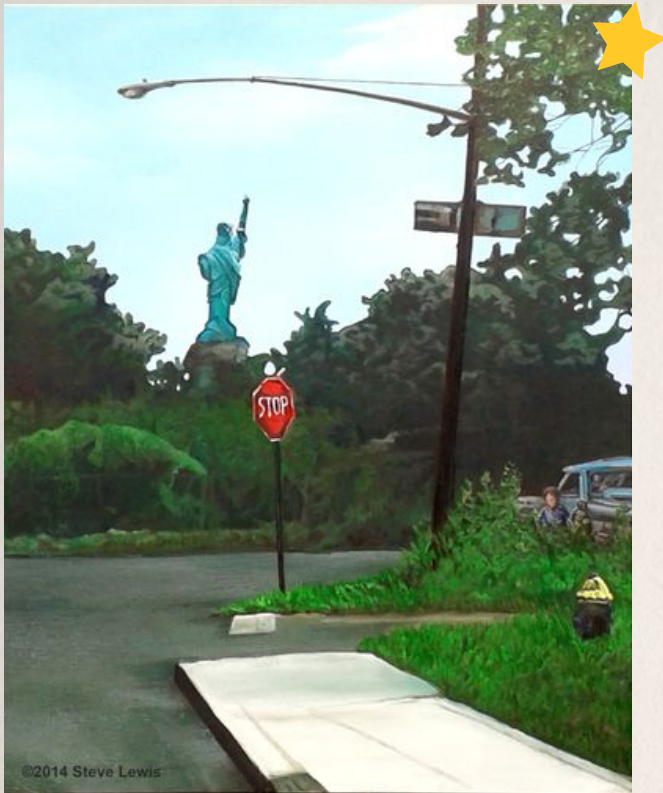
Crossword Puzzle

Across

4. inhabitant of a city or town, especially one entitled to its privileges or franchises
5. a native or naturalized member of a state or nation who owes allegiance to its government and is entitled to its protection (distinguished from alien).
8. a system of moral principles.
9. the act of supervising the manners or morality of others
10. information, ideas, or rumors deliberately spread widely to help or harm a person, group, movement, institution, nation, etc
11. the means of communication, as radio and television, newspapers, magazines, and the internet, that reach or influence people widely

Down

1. an unlawful, harmful, or evil plan formulated in secret by two or more persons
2. action or speech on behalf of a person, group, business house, state, or the like by an agent, or deputy
3. amendment individuals must be free to express their opinions, ideas, and beliefs without fear of censorship or government reprisal
6. deliberate spreading of such information, rumors, etc
7. the lack of creativity, or of a sense of personal responsibility, that is sometimes characteristic of group interaction



Dead End Liberty by Steve Lewis

Quiz Answers

Joe Biden is the President of the United States - FACT

The US should spend more money on education -
OPINION

You must be 18 years old or older to vote - FACT

The US gained independence in 1776 - FACT

Student loans should be forgiven - OPINION

Social media is the reason for today's political
climate - OPINION

Crossword Answers

4. inhabitant of a city or town, especially one
entitled to its privileges or franchises - CITIZEN

5. a native or naturalized member of a state or
nation who owes allegiance to its government
and is entitled to its protection (distinguished
from alien) - CITIZEN

8. a system of moral principles - ETHICS

9. the act of supervising the manners or morality
of others - CENSORSHIP

10. information, ideas, or rumors deliberately
spread widely to help or harm a person, group,
movement, institution, nation, etc -
PROPAGANDA

11. the means of communication, as radio and
television, newspapers, magazines, and the
internet, that reach or influence people widely -
MEDIA

1. an unlawful, harmful, or evil plan formulated in
secret by two or more persons - CONSPIRACY

2. action or speech on behalf of a person, group,
business house, state, or the like by an agent, or
deputy - REPRESENTATION

3. individuals must be free to express their
opinions, ideas, and beliefs without fear of
censorship or government reprisal - FIRST
[AMENDMENT]

6. deliberate spreading of such information,
rumors, etc - LIE

7. the lack of creativity, or of a sense of personal
responsibility, that is sometimes characteristic of
group interaction - GROUP [THINK]

★ Artist & Interviewee Credits ★

Donald Swenson
"Liberty Lifting Justice"
Painting
Page 3

Heidi SanFilippo
"Don't Panic"
Digital Art
Page 7

Steve Lewis
"State of America 1"
Painting
Cover

"One on One"
Painting
Page 8

Artist Interview
Page 9

"Dead End Liberty"
Painting
Page 16

Raheem Curry
"What is Real?"
Poem
Page 10 & 11

Mary Place
"Persistence"
Digital Art
Page 6

John Koppish
Journalist
Interview
Page 12 & 13

A huge thank you to all the artists & interviewees that participated in
The Misinformation Newspaper!

**NEW JERSEY COUNCIL
FOR THE
HUMANITIES**

Visualizing Democracy

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