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Letters from the Editor: Lessons on Journalism and Life

William F. Woo

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Letters from the Editor: Lessons on Journalism and Life William F. Woo

William F. Woo, born in China, was the first person outside the Pulitzer family to edit the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and the first Asian American to edit a major American newspaper. After forty years in the newsroom, Woo embarked on a second career in 1996 teaching journalism at Stanford University, where he wrote weekly informal essays to his students in the same personal style that characterized his columns for the *Post-Dispatch*. Each made a philosophical point about journalism and society and their delicate relationship over the last half of the twentieth century.

Woo was revered as both a writer and a reporter, and this volume collects some of the best of those essays to the next generation of journalists on their craft's high purpose. As inspiration for students from someone who knew the ropes, it distills the essence of the values that define independent journalism while offering them invaluable food for thought about their future professions.

The essays touch on a wide range of subjects. Woo reflects on journalism as a public trust, requiring the publication of stories that give readers a better understanding of society and equip them to change it for the better. He also ponders print journalism conducted in the face of broadcast and online competition along with the transformation of newspapers from privately owned to publicly traded companies. Here too are personal reflections on the Pulitzer family's impact on journalism and on the tensions between a journalist's personal and professional life, as well as the conflicts posed by political advocacy versus free speech or a reporter's expertise versus a newspaper's credibility.

Woo's idealistic spirit conveys the virtues of his era's newspaper journalism to the next generation of journalists—and most likely to the next generation of news media as well. Even as new students of journalism have an eye on an electronic future, Woo's essays come straight from a newsman's heart and soul to remind them of values worth preserving.

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