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## Journalism's Greatest Hits: Two Lists of a Century's Top Stories

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Sometime, somewhere, some anthropologist must have explored that tribal ritual: the greatest-hits list. These lists date back at least to the seven wonders of the ancient world. They reflect the importance of some area of tribal endeavor -- monumental architecture, say, or rock-and-roll. And they establish hierarchies; how better to show your pre-eminence in the pecking order than to rank everyone else?

Journalists, trained to make their value judgments in neat pyramid style, most important facts first, could hardly be expected to resist the millennial listing urge. If Modern Library can cause a stir with its list of 100 best novels and the Rock-and-Roll Hall of Fame can take abuse for its top 500, why shouldn't journalists share in the fun?

So, within four days of each other, come two 100-best-of-the-century lists of journalists, by journalists, for journalists. One, done under the aegis of the Freedom Forum's Newseum, came out last week and ranks the best news stories of the century. (It can be found at [www.newseum.org](http://www.newseum.org).) The second, under the aegis of New York University's journalism department, ranks the best works of 20th-century American journalism.

Listing, of course, involves its own ritual behavior. First, members of the tribe read the list. Then they attack it. Like this: The Newseum's 67 judges collectively put the discovery of the Nazi death camps at No. 7, behind the Wright Brothers' first flight (No. 4). The massacres in Armenia, Cambodia and Rwanda don't appear. Neither does the Iranian revolution or anything connected to religion -- unless you consider Communism its own kind of religion.

The N.Y.U. list, compiled by 36 judges, is a little harder to kvetch about. It focuses less on events than craftsmanship.

In some ways, the two lists converge: the No. 1 news event on the Newseum's list is the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima; the No. 1 work of journalism on

N.Y.U.'s list is John Hersey's "Hiroshima." The 1940's and 1960's dominate both lists. Events of those years held 39 of the 100 spots on the Newseum's list. N.Y.U.'s list included 43 works of journalism that were published in those decades.

But in the end, the difference between the two lists parallels the difference between a great headline and a wonderfully turned piece of writing. Both take skill and thought, spiced with arbitrariness and whimsy. But it's hard to linger over headlines.

The N.Y.U. list includes events that were important mostly because of who was watching. The documentary film maker Frederick Wiseman's "Titicut Follies," (1967, No. 56) about the dehumanization of inmates in an institution for the criminally insane, speaks as eloquently about the bizarre cruelty of indifference as other journalists have spoken about the bizarre cruelty of war.

"This kind of list is needed in journalism," said [Mitchell Stephens](#), the chairman of the N.Y.U. department. "People have their own lists of the best novels or the best songs. But journalism doesn't get thought of that way. Nobody thinks of journalism in terms of decades or centuries."

Jeff Greenfield of CNN, one of the judges, said: "The cliché of journalism is that it is a first rough draft of history. This makes you go back and look at what journalistic works endure and why."

Some of the works show off muscular reporting, the kind that moves history -- the Watergate reporting of Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein of *The Washington Post* (1973, No. 3) or Seymour Hersh's account of the My Lai massacre (1969, No. 12) for *Dispatch News Service*. Some show the arc of history: a troika of works cover the rise and fall of Soviet Communism, from John Reed's "Ten Days That Shook The World" (1919, No. 7) to Harrison Salisbury's Moscow correspondence for *The New York Times* (1949-54, No. 52)) to David Remnick's book "Lenin's Tomb." (1993, No. 57).

And some are windows on the passions that animated an era, from Ida Tarbell's "History of the Standard Oil Company" (1902-1904, No. 5) to John Steinbeck's reporting on Okie migrant camps in California (1936, No. 31) to Hannah Arendt's coverage of the Eichmann trial (1963, No. 20). Other works helped ignite passions, like Huynh Cong Ut's photograph of a naked, napalmed girl in Vietnam (1972, No. 41).

And all are windows on the values of the 16 women and 21 men who sat in judgment, from Stanley Crouch of *The Daily News* to Mary McGrory of *The Washington Post* to Dorothy Rabinowitz of *The Wall Street Journal*. For Mr. Stephens, the final value of the list is what it says about the role of the craft in making people see themselves. "You can see the 20th century understanding itself through its journalism," he said.

That said, here's the final tribal ritual, the agate-type list that starts all the arguments:

Chart: "The J List"

What were the top works of journalism this century? It's debatable. Here is one list of the top 10 compiled by 36 judges working under the aegis of New York University's journalism department.

1. Journalist -- John Hersey

Title or subject -- "Hiroshima"

Publisher -- New Yorker

2. Journalist -- Rachel Carson

Title or subject -- "Silent Spring"

Publisher -- Book

3. Journalist -- Bob Woodward, Carl Bernstein

Title or subject -- Investigation of the Watergate break in

Publisher -- Washington Post

4. Journalist -- Edward R. Murrow

Title or subject -- Battle of Britain

Publisher -- CBS radio

5. Journalist -- Ida Tarbell

Title or subject -- "The History of the Standard Oil Company"

Publisher -- McClure's magazine

6. Journalist -- Lincoln Steffens

Title or subject -- "The Shame of the Cities"

Publisher -- McClure's

7. Journalist -- John Reed

Title or subject -- "Ten Days That Shook the World"

Publisher -- Book

8. Journalist -- H. L. Mencken

Title or subject -- Scopes "monkey" trial

Publisher -- Baltimore Sun

9. Journalist -- Ernie Pyle

Title or subject -- Reports from Europe and the Pacific during World War II

Publisher -- Scripps-Howard newspapers

10. Journalist -- Edward R. Murrow, Fred Friendly

Title or subject -- Investigation of Sen. Joseph McCarthy

Publisher -- CBS (pg. C1)

More of American Journalism's Top 100

11. Edward R. Murrow, David Lowe and Fred Friendly. CBS Reports television documentary "Harvest of Shame." 1960
12. Seymour Hersh. Investigation of massacre committed by American soldiers at My Lai in Vietnam. For Dispatch News Service. 1969
13. The New York Times. Publication of the Pentagon Papers. 1971
14. James Agee and Walker Evans. "Let Us Now Praise Famous Men." Book. 1941
15. W. E. B. DuBois. "The Souls of Black Folk." Collected articles. 1903
16. I. F. Stone. I.F. Stone's Weekly. 1953-67
17. Henry Hampton. "Eyes on the Prize." Documentary. 1987
18. Tom Wolfe. "The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test." Book. 1968
19. Norman Mailer. "The Armies of the Night." Book. 1968
20. Hannah Arendt. "Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil." Collected articles. 1963
21. William Shirer. "Berlin Diary: The Journal of a Foreign Correspondent, 1939-1941." Collected articles. 1941
22. Truman Capote. "In Cold Blood: A True Account of a Multiple Murder and Its Consequences." Book. 1965
23. Joan Didion. "Slouching Towards Bethlehem." Collected articles. 1968
24. Tom Wolfe. "The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby." Collected articles. 1965
25. Michael Herr. "Dispatches." Book. 1977
26. Theodore White. "The Making of the President: 1960." Book. 1961
27. Robert Capa. Ten photographs from D-Day. 1944
28. J. Anthony Lukas. "Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families." Book. 1985
29. Richard Harding Davis. Coverage of German march into Belgium. For the Wheeler

Syndicate and magazines. 1914

30. Dorothy Thompson. Reports on the rise of Hitler in *Cosmopolitan* and *Saturday Evening Post*. 1931-34
31. John Steinbeck. Reports on Okie migrant camp life for *The San Francisco News*. 1936
32. A. J. Liebling. "The Road Back to Paris." Collected articles. 1944
33. Ernest Hemingway. Reports on the Spanish Civil War in *The New Republic*. 1937-38
34. Martha Gellhorn. "The Face of War." Collected articles. 1959
35. James Baldwin. "The Fire Next Time." Book. 1963
36. Joseph Mitchell. "Up in the Old Hotel and Other Stories." Collection of much older articles. 1992
37. Betty Friedan. "The Feminine Mystique." Book. 1963
38. Ralph Nader. "Unsafe at Any Speed: The Designed-In Dangers of the American Automobile." Book. 1965
39. Herblock (Herbert Block). Cartoons on "McCarthyism." In *The Washington Post*. 1950
40. James Baldwin. "Letter from the South: Nobody Knows My Name." In *The Partisan Review*. 1959
41. Huynh Cong Ut. Photograph of a burning girl running from a napalm attack. For *The Associated Press*. 1972
42. Pauline Kael. "Trash, Art, and the Movies." In *Harper's*. 1969
43. Gay Talese. "Fame and Obscurity: Portraits by Gay Talese." Collected articles. 1970
44. Randy Shilts. Reports on AIDS for *The San Francisco Chronicle*. 1981-85
45. Janet Flanner (Genet). "Paris Journals" chronicling Paris's emergence from the Occupation. In *The New Yorker*. 1944-45

46. Neil Sheehan. "A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam." Book. 1988
47. A. J. Liebling. "The Wayward Pressman." Collected articles. 1947
48. Tom Wolfe. "The Right Stuff." Book. 1979
49. Murray Kempton. "America Comes of Middle Age: Columns 1950-1962." Collected articles. 1963
50. Murray Kempton. "Part of Our Time: Some Ruins and Monuments of the Thirties." Book. 1955
51. Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele. "America: What Went Wrong?" Series in The Philadelphia Inquirer. 1991
52. Taylor Branch. "Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63." Book. 1988
53. Harrison Salisbury. Reporting from the Soviet Union for The New York Times. 1949-54
54. John McPhee. "The John McPhee Reader." Collected articles. 1976
55. ABC. Live television broadcast of Army-McCarthy hearings. 1954
56. Frederick Wiseman. "Titicut Follies." Documentary. 1967
57. David Remnick. "Lenin's Tomb: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire." Book. 1993
58. Richard Ben Cramer. "What It Takes: The Way to the White House." Book. 1992
59. Jonathan Schell. "The Fate of the Earth." Book. 1982
60. Russell Baker. "Francs and Beans." In The New York Times. 1975
61. Homer Bigart. Account of being over Japan in a bomber when World War II came to an end. In The New York Herald-Tribune. 1945
62. Ben Hecht. "1,001 Afternoons in Chicago." Collected articles. 1922
63. Walter Cronkite. CBS television documentary on Vietnam. 1968
64. Walter Lippmann. Early essays for The New Republic. 1914

65. Margaret Bourke-White. Photographs following the defeat of Germany. For Life magazine. 1945
66. Lillian Ross. "Reporting." Collected articles. 1964
67. Nicholas Lemann. "The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America." Book. 1991
68. Joe Rosenthal. Photograph of Marines raising an American flag on Mount Suribachi on the island of Iwo Jima. For The Associated Press. 1945
69. Hodding Carter Jr. "Go for Broke." Editorial in Carter's Delta Democrat-Times (Greenville, Miss.). 1945
70. The New Yorker. "The New Yorker Book of War Pieces." Collected articles. 1947
71. Meyer Berger. Report on the murderer Howard Unruh. In The New York Times. 1949
72. Norman Mailer. "The Executioner's Song." Book. 1979
73. Robert Capa. Spanish Civil War photos for Life. 1936
74. Susan Sontag. Notes on 'Camp. In The Partisan Review. 1964
75. Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein. "All the President's Men." Book. 1974
76. John Hersey. "Here To Stay." Collected articles. 1963
77. A. J. Liebling. "The Earl of Louisiana." Book. 1961
78. Mike Davis. "City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles." Book. 1990
79. Melissa Fay Greene. "Praying for Sheetrock." Book. 1991
80. J. Anthony Lukas. "The Two Worlds of Linda Fitzpatrick." In The New York Times. 1967
81. Herbert Bayard Swope. "Klan Exposed." In The New York World. 1921
82. William Allen White. "To an Anxious Friend." In The Emporia (Kan.) Gazette. 1922
83. Edward R. Murrow. Report of the liberation of Buchenwald for CBS radio. 1945
84. Joseph Mitchell. "McSorley's Wonderful Saloon." Collected articles. 1943

85. Lillian Ross. "Picture." Book. 1952
86. Earl Brown. Series of articles on race for Harper's and Life magazines. 1942-44
87. Greil Marcus. "Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock 'n' Roll Music." Book. 1975
88. Morley Safer. Report for CBS television on atrocities committed by American soldiers on the hamlet of Cam Ne in Vietnam. 1965
89. Ted Poston. Coverage of the "Little Scottsboro" trial. In The New York Post. 1949
90. Leon Dash. "Rosa Lee's Story." Series in The Washington Post. 1994
91. Jane Kramer. "Europeans." Collected articles. 1988
92. Eddie Adams and Vo Suu. Associated Press photograph and NBC television footage of a Saigon execution. 1968
93. Grantland Rice. "Notre Dame's 'Four Horsemen'." In The New York Herald-Tribune. 1924
94. Jane Kramer. "The Politics of Memory: Looking for Germany in the New Germany." Collected articles. 1996
95. Frank McCourt. "Angela's Ashes." Book. 1996
96. Vincent Sheean. "Personal History." Book. 1935
97. W. E. B. DuBois. Columns on race during his tenure as editor of The Crisis. 1910-34
98. Damon Runyon. Crime reporting in The New York American. 1926
99. Joe McGinniss. "The Selling of the President 1968." Book. 1969
100. Hunter S. Thompson. "Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail." Book. 1973