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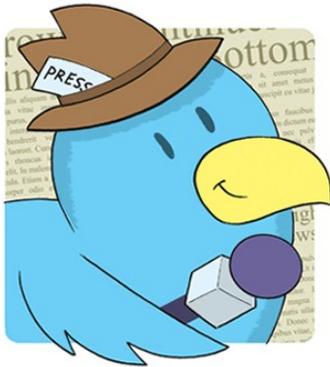
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Newsroom

Dean Logan on 'Who is a Journalist?'

In the wake of Twitter-driven Middle East uprisings, Dean David A. Logan chats with ProJo columnist Ed Fitzpatrick on the topic, 'Who is a journalist?'

From the Providence Journal: "[Who is a journalist?](#)" by Ed Fitzpatrick.



February 17, 2011: Lawyers must graduate from law school, pass the bar exam and obtain a law license. So, with the possible exception of Rep. Leo Medina, it's clear who is a lawyer and who is not. Same with doctors.

But who qualifies for the title of journalist? From Egypt to WikiLeaks, from the governor's talk-radio ban to the ACORN scandal, that question keeps popping up. So **let's delve into it with some help from David A. Logan, the Roger Williams University School of Law dean who has written extensively about First Amendment matters.**

Logan said "citizen journalists" led the way in breaking news about the protests in Egypt, using camera phones to show the world what was happening in Tahrir Square.

"Egypt shows that the availability of relatively cheap, very portable and decentralized sources of information can effectively bypass traditional media and get information that the government wants to repress out in the open," **Logan said.** "The best argument for conventional media isn't that it gets the news faster, because that's demonstrably not true. It's the exercise of editorial judgment."



In a Jan. 30 article, New York Times editor Bill Keller explained how the Times showed better judgment than WikiLeaks in deciding which information to disclose. “I would hesitate to describe what WikiLeaks does as journalism,” Keller wrote. But, he said, “It is chilling to contemplate the possible government prosecution of WikiLeaks for making secrets public.”

A State Department spokesman has declared that WikiLeaks’s Julian Assange is not a journalist. But do we want the government deciding who qualifies as a bona fide journalist? My guess is many critics wouldn’t make that cut, undercutting the media’s crucial watchdog role.

“Nothing in law requires the media to be responsible or balanced,” **Logan said**. “The central understanding of free speech in the Colonial era was rejection of the government censor and the power to impose prior restraints on publication.”

Governor Chafee has temporarily banned administration employees from talk-radio shows during state work time, saying such shows are “more entertainment than journalism.” He might be right, but it’s another example of government deciding who qualifies as a journalist.

Let’s also consider James O’Keefe III, the conservative activist who posed as a pimp and released selectively edited videos showing ACORN employees advising him on his supposedly illicit business. O’Keefe, who was later charged with trying to tamper with a senator’s telephones, was lauded by conservatives for “investigative journalism.”

“This is journalism? No,” Miami Herald columnist Leonard Pitts Jr. wrote. “Journalism is hours on the phone nailing down the facts or pleading for the interview. Journalism is obsessing over nit-picky questions of fairness and context. Journalism is trying to get the story, and get it right.”

I think Pitts’ brand of journalism will always hold the greatest value. But as **Logan noted**, today we don’t have any one Walter Cronkite figure that we all trust to bring us the news. The media are more fragmented and partisan, and anyone with a cell phone might break the next big story. So, for both better and worse, that’s the way it is.

For full article, click [here](#).