

# *Asia Pacific Media Educator*

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*Issue 18*

2007

*Article 4*

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## Rolling Stone's coverage of the 1972 U.S. presidential election: A case study of narrative political journalism

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S. Dunn

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This paper examines Rolling Stone magazine's first extensive foray into political journalism during the presidential race between George McGovern and Richard Nixon. It examines the ways in which the magazine's reporters, especially Hunter S. Thompson and Timothy Crouse, used the techniques of narrative journalism to perform the relatively traditional journalistic task of covering an election. The Rolling Stone reporters' portrayals of their contemporaries in the mainstream press receive particular attention. This reportage represents one of the earliest and most comprehensive uses of the narrative approach to political journalism. It also represents an early example of "meta-coverage," identified by several scholars as the current tendency of media to focus coverage of politics on themselves and other media rather than on the campaign itself.

# Rolling Stone's Coverage of the 1972 U.S. Presidential Election: A Case Study of Narrative Political Journalism

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## Abstract

This paper examines *Rolling Stone* magazine's first extensive foray into political journalism during the presidential race between George McGovern and Richard Nixon. It examines the ways in which the magazine's reporters, especially Hunter S. Thompson and Timothy Crouse, used the techniques of narrative journalism to perform the relatively traditional journalistic task of covering an election. The *Rolling Stone* reporters' portrayals of their contemporaries in the mainstream press receive particular attention. This reportage represents one of the earliest and most comprehensive uses of the narrative approach to political journalism. It also represents an early example of "meta-coverage," identified by several scholars as the current tendency of media to focus coverage of politics on themselves and other media rather than on the campaign itself.

In late 1971, the staff of *Rolling Stone* magazine held a retreat at the Esalen Institute in California to discuss the possibility of covering the 1972 presidential election (Whitmer 1993:187). Since its founding in 1967, the magazine had built its reputation on innovative coverage of popular music, as well as coverage of, in the words of founder Jann Wenner, “the things and attitudes the music embraces.” (1967:2). From its base in San Francisco, the center of the late-1960s counter-culture, *Rolling Stone* was quickly becoming the authoritative music publication for the baby boomer generation. (Draper 1990). Political coverage, in the most general sense, was not foreign to the magazine. Articles about such issues as drug laws and racism had appeared in the magazine from the first issue. However, *Rolling Stone* had never reported on elections in any significant depth, and many members of the staff were hesitant to devote the resources necessary to offer full-scale coverage of a nationwide election.

Ultimately, *Rolling Stone* decided the investment was worth it, and the resulting coverage elevated the magazine to a new level of visibility. Additionally, the magazine's coverage, primarily provided by reporters Hunter S. Thompson and Timothy Crouse, has proven influential in both popular and scholarly analyses of political journalism. The purpose of this paper is to examine how *Rolling Stone's* coverage of the 1972 presidential election fits in with, and critically engaged, the coverage of the election by reporters from more traditional media outlets and to assess the pedagogical merits of the magazine's reporting for teaching narrative journalism. These aims will be achieved via a close examination of all articles about the election appearing in *Rolling Stone* from late 1971 through late 1972. These articles were collected by manually reviewing microfilm of each issue. Additionally, the published version of Thompson's letters (Thompson 2000) from that time period will be examined in order to give context to magazine articles.

This paper looks beyond the formal literary elements of Thompson's writings to examine how he saw himself as a reporter and how he positioned himself in relation to other reporters. It also looks at Crouse's observations of the press in more depth than previous scholars, who have cited Crouse in passing, with only short quotations, if any at all.

The present study analyzes the role Thompson, Crouse, and other *Rolling Stone* writers saw themselves playing in the election's coverage. The paper will begin with an analysis of *Rolling Stone's* criticisms of traditional media before progressing through signs of their solidarity with traditional media. The paper will conclude with recommendations for journalism educators who wish to use *Rolling Stone's* coverage of the 1972 election as a pedagogical tool for understanding narrative journalism and the relationship between non-traditional and traditional media in political reporting.

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## Previous Research

Thompson supplied coverage of the election in most of the bi-weekly issues of *Rolling Stone* during 1972. Crouse began the year covering George McGovern's campaign for the Democratic nomination. As McGovern surprised observers by becoming the Democratic nominee, Thompson befriended the South Dakota senator and became a fixture on the campaign trail (McKeen 1991). Crouse did not file as many articles, partly because of disagreements with Wenner, who wanted Thompson

to do most of the reporting (Draper 1990). However, Crouse would later use his reporting for *Rolling Stone* as the basis for his massively influential book about political reporters, *The Boys on the Bus* (1973/2003).

Thus far, scholarly research has done little to analyze the role Thompson and Crouse's reporting played in the history of political journalism. Thompson's work has mostly been analyzed as literature rather than journalism. Thompson was one of a group of writers in the 1960s and '70s who used literary conventions to write about non-fictional events, establishing a hybrid form known as "literary journalism," "narrative journalism," or "new journalism" (Chance and McKeen 2001; Wolfe 1973). Although his political reporting has received less critical attention than his more literary works like *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1971), his book based on his *Rolling Stone* coverage (Thompson 1973/1983) has been the subject of a few scholarly articles (Bruce-Novoa 1979; Hellmann 1979). These authors analyzed Thompson's use of formal literary elements such as stream of consciousness and hyperbole to comment on American society in ways that would not be possible in traditional journalism.

Crouse's work has not been widely elevated to the status of great literature. However, his book on the election has widely been cited as a significant influence on academic thought about the nature of political journalism.<sup>1</sup> A number of writers have cited Crouse to lend support to normative arguments about the dangers of a media system in which reporters from various outlets rely on each other for information rather than reporting the news independently (for example, Bray 1974; Grossman and Rourke 1976; Swanson 1997). All of these works used Crouse's book in roughly the same way: to support the assertion that American political journalists tend to run in packs, copying each others' work and rarely thinking independently.

In addition to its use in normative arguments, Crouse's book shows up frequently in literature reviews of social scientific studies of the interrelationship between media. One of the earliest such uses was by McCombs and Shaw (1976), who cited Crouse's observations as justification for incorporating intermedia influences into their theory of agenda setting. Scholars have since cited Crouse in a wide variety of studies on the media's role in politics. Despite the fact that Crouse's coverage of the 1972 election was clearly journalistic in nature, many of these studies have treated it as if it was an empirical research study. Some have explicitly called Crouse's book a "study" (Dyer and Nayman 1977, p. 443; Rothenbuhler 1996, p. 126), referred to his "findings" (Kristiansen, Fowlie, and Spencer 1982, p. 641), and called him a "scholar" (Merolla, Ramos, and Zechmeister 2007, p.35). Kendall (2005) framed an ethnographic study of political journalists in a presidential campaign as a replication of Crouse's work. Even when such explicit language was not used, most of these studies have cited Crouse alongside more rigorous academic studies without acknowledging that his work is journalistic rather than scientific (for exceptions, see Martindale 1984; Ostroff and Sandell 1989). This reinterpretation of Crouse's reporting as an academic case study is an indication both of the quality of his work and the dearth of previous academic research on the formation of media messages that existed in 1972.

While scholars have focused their attention of Thompson as a literary figure and Crouse as a quasi-social-scientist, no in-depth analysis has been done that treats the writers on their own terms, as journalists. Considering Thompson's stature as a major figure in American journalism history and Crouse's influence on both journalistic

practice and academic research, more research is needed on their coverage of the 1972 election, the most ambitious and in-depth reporting either writer ever did. This paper aims to begin that process.

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## Criticism of Traditional Media: Pack Journalism

Much of *Rolling Stone's* coverage of the election made it clear that the magazine's reporters saw their work as distinct from the political reporting provided by most American newspapers, magazines, and broadcast stations. *Rolling Stone* expressed this distinction by criticizing mainstream reporters' tendency toward pack journalism and showing how their reporters diverged from that tendency. They also criticized and problematized traditional journalistic norms, especially objectivity.

One of the longest-lasting criticisms of the media provided by *Rolling Stone* was Crouse's accusation that reporters engaged in "pack journalism." Political reporters generally followed one candidate for long stretches of time, even for an entire election cycle. All of the reporters following the same candidate eventually formed a pack, meaning that,

trapped on one bus, they eat, drink, gamble and trade information with the same bunch of colleagues week after week, and soon all their stories begin to sound the same. All the stories come from the same handout, the same pool report, or the same speech by the candidate, and the 'pack' dynamic insures that almost all the reporters will take the same approach to the story. (Crouse 1972c, p. 48)

According to Crouse, the independent newsgathering function of reporters was being supplanted by a communal reliance on official sources and conventional wisdom.

Although he did not use the term "pack journalism," Thompson noted the same phenomenon when he described what a "downer" it was to return from reporting trips and try to catch up on the political coverage in the major newspapers. He described the redundancy he found in the newspapers, as "the Post will have a story about Muskie making a speech in Iowa. The Star will say the same thing, and the Journal will say nothing at all." He described his longing for the occasional story that differed from the norm, such as when

"the Times might have enough room on the jump page to include a line or two that says something like: 'When he finished his speech, Muskie burst into tears and seized his campaign manager by the side of the neck. They grappled briefly, but the struggle was kicked apart by an oriental woman who seemed to be in control. (Thompson 1972c, p. 12; 1983, p. 92).

Crouse illustrated the process of pack journalism with an anecdote about the press corps covering a debate between Democratic primary candidates George McGovern and Hubert Humphrey. In this case, Associated Press reporter Walter Mears's "way with a lead makes him a leader of the pack." The debate ended and Mears lamented, "How can they stop? They didn't come to a lead yet." Almost immediately, reporters from other news outlets approached Mears asking, "Walter, Walter, what's our lead?" Mears eventually decided to lead with McGovern and Humphrey's statements that neither would consider making conservative Democrat George Wallace his vice-

presidential running mate. This worked as a lead because “it meant he could get both Humphrey and McGovern into the first paragraph, both stating a position that they hadn’t flatly declared before then.” Meanwhile, reporters from *The New York Times* went with a lead “saying the debate was inconclusive” and promptly received a call from an editor asking why they had not led with the candidates’ statements about Wallace like the AP had. In this case, *The New York Times* convinced their editors to keep their original lead, but in the end “half the men in the press room,” including reporters for NBC and CBS, followed Mears and led their stories with the quotes about Wallace (Crouse 1972c, p. 50).

One of the clearest examples of pack journalism was cited by both Crouse and Thompson. During the Democratic convention, the McGovern campaign purposely lost a parliamentary vote to avoid addressing a procedural issue that would have come up had they won the vote by a slim margin.<sup>2</sup> Thompson argued that “less than a dozen of the five thousand ‘media’ sleuths accredited to the convention knew exactly what was happening, at the time” (1972b, p. 35). He then quoted McGovern strategist Rick Stearns as saying that *New York Times* reporter Johnny Apple filed a story calling the vote a victory for McGovern, but Apple’s editor, Abe Rosenthal, refused to run the story because legendary reporter Walter Cronkite had reported on television network CBS that the vote was a major defeat for McGovern. According to this report, Apple, who bragged to Crouse, “Nobody [at *The New York Times*] has as much authority as I do. I can do virtually any story I want to do” (1972c, p. 52), was overruled by his editor because his story conflicted with the version of events provided by the widely-respected Cronkite.<sup>3</sup>

Crouse saw pack journalism as just as much of a “downer” as Thompson did. He described it as “a condition that causes much of American political journalism to be shallow, obvious, pointless and boring beyond description.” He argued that the pack mentality deterred reporters from seeking out interesting or revealing information about the candidates because it created an expectation that their reporting must match the reporting of others. To support this proposition, Crouse quoted former *Newsweek* reporter Karl Fleming, “who was rumored to be a formidable critic of pack journalism.” Fleming told Crouse that when a reporter tried to break from the pack,

the first goddam thing that happens is, they pick up the phone and call this guy and say, ‘Hey, if this is such a hot story, how come AP or The Washington Post doesn’t have it?’ ... The editors don’t want scoops. Their abiding interest is in making sure that nobody else has got anything that they don’t have – not getting something that nobody else has. (Crouse 1972c, pp. 48-49).

In addition to the control campaigns exercised over the information that got to the press, Thompson noted an element of self-censorship among reporters. In discussing Edmund Muskie’s failing primary campaign, Thompson reported, “In recent weeks the truth has been so painful that some journalists have gone out of their way to give the poor bastards a break and not flay them in print any more than absolutely necessary” (1972f, p. 32). Crouse noted that the tendency to self-censor was especially strong among reporters for wire services. Wire reporters were compelled to write stories that were “bland, dry, and overly cautious” because “the larger the audience, the more inoffensive and inconclusive the article must be.” Because of this institutional expectation, “many of the wire guys are repositories of information they can never convey.” Crouse specifically singled out Pye Chamberlain, a reporter for

United Press International, who “can tell you about a prominent congressman’s battle to overcome his addiction to speed, or about Humphrey’s habit of popping 25 One-A-Day vitamins with a shot of bourbon when he needs some fast energy. But Pye can’t tell his audience” (1972c, pp. 49-50).

To Crouse and Thompson, pack journalism was a dangerous practice that cheapened political reporting. The *Rolling Stone* reporters sought to avoid this approach to journalism so they could provide an alternative voice.

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## Rolling Stone Breaks from the Pack

In the Introduction to his book on the 1972 election, Thompson contrasted his approach to covering the election with the approach taken by most reporters. He noted that reporters “wind up knowing a lot of things [they] can’t print, or which [they] can only say without even hinting at where they came from.” By contrast, Thompson recollected, “I was determined to avoid this kind of trap. Unlike most other correspondents, I could afford to burn all my bridges behind me – because I was only there for a year, and the last thing I cared about was establishing long-term connections on Capitol Hill” (1983, pp. 17-18). To the extent that pack journalism was a reaction to institutional needs, such as source protection and competition between media outlets, Thompson believed that his status outside of traditional media institutions would protect him from the pack mentality.

The *Rolling Stone* reporters demonstrated their belief that they were immune from the temptation to engage in pack journalism by explicitly reporting things that other journalists kept to themselves. On one occasion before the California primary, Thompson received unsubstantiated information involving

a very strange tale about Hubert Humphrey keeping a private plane on standby at a nearby landing strip, ready to take off at any moment for Vegas and return the same night with a big bag of cash, which would then be rushed to Humphrey headquarters at the Beverly Hilton and used to finance a bare-knuckle media blitz against McGovern during the last days of the campaign.

Thompson attempted to get confirmation for the story from McGovern campaign director Frank Mankiewicz and got the reply, “Listen, you could cause us a lot of trouble printing a thing like that. [The Humphrey campaign would] know where it came from, and they’d jerk our man [inside the Humphrey campaign] right out” (1972a, pp. 39-40; 1983, pp. 229-230).

Thompson did not kill the story as Mankiewicz requested. Instead, he printed a complete account of first hearing the rumor at a strip club, his cryptic exchange with Mankiewicz, his subsequent debate with himself over whether or not to print the story, and Mankiewicz’s ultimately successful appeal for him to delay printing the story until after the California primary. While other journalists may have felt obliged to ignore the story in order to maintain good relations with the McGovern campaign, Thompson felt no such obligation. In fact, he used Mankiewicz’s attempt to stop the story as his only corroborating evidence for its accuracy. He never verified with any certainty that Humphrey had a plan to fly to Vegas before printing the story, nor did he ever report that he had such evidence. He simply reported that Mankiewicz was

uncomfortable talking about the story and asked that it not be printed, then he let the readers draw their own conclusions.<sup>4</sup>

Like Thompson, Crouse showed his lack of journalistic decorum by reporting news that was not necessarily on the record. When Humphrey gave a speech to his supporters at the Democratic convention and closed the speech to the press, Crouse reported on it by listening to the crowd reaction from down the hall and getting a second-hand account on the content from a Humphrey supporter (1972a, p. 40). In his first post-election story, Crouse reported that in the days before the election McGovern told a *Newsweek* correspondent, presumably off the record, that a speech he had just given was a “heap of shit.” Although Crouse’s reports may not have been as sensational as Thompson’s Humphrey story, he was able, in a way that many reporters were not, to present what he believed was “the real McGovern” (1972b, p. 24).

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## Problematizing Objectivity

In addition to identifying the trend toward pack journalism and providing off-the-record coverage of the campaign, the *Rolling Stone* reporters used their coverage of the press to highlight the shortcomings of journalistic norms such as objectivity. Thompson argued against the very possibility of objectivity, saying,

The only thing I ever saw that came close to Objective Journalism was a closed-circuit TV setup that watched shoplifters in the General Store at Woody Creek, Colorado ... So much for Objective Journalism. Don’t bother to look for it here – not under any byline of mine; or anyone else I can think of. With the possible exception of things like box scores, race results, and stock market tabulations, there is no such thing as Objective Journalism. The phrase itself is a pompous contradiction in terms (1972e; 1983, p. 48).

Thompson also expressed his disdain for the norm of objectivity through his unabashed bias toward McGovern. In his first *Rolling Stone* article of 1972, he called McGovern “the only candidate in either party worth voting for” and lamented that the candidate was “hung in a frustrated limbo created mainly by the gross cynicism of the Washington Press Corps” (1972d, p. 6; 1983, p. 33). Thompson admitted that 1972 was “the first time I’d voted for a major party candidate since [John F. Kennedy in] 1960” (Thompson 1973a, p. 529) and that McGovern was

one of the few men who’ve run for President of the United States in this century who really understands what a fantastic monument to all the best instincts of the human race this country might have been, if we could have just kept it out of the hands of greedy little hustlers like Richard Nixon (1972g, p. 30).

Clearly, Thompson was on McGovern’s side through the primaries and general election.

In addition to avoiding a strict standard of objectivity for themselves, Thompson and, especially, Crouse showed that objectivity was a rarely practiced ideal among mainstream journalists. These preferences may not have always been as ideological as Thompson’s preference for McGovern, but they existed for a variety of pragmatic

reasons. For example, Crouse discussed why journalists generally preferred the candidates they were assigned to cover, especially in the primaries. He explained,

If you ride the Winner's Bus you have a shot at the White House assignment, which is the biggest plum in political journalism ... Even if you miss the White House, you can always write a book about a losing presidential nominee; but nobody wants to read a book about a losing presidential hopeful. So the correspondents do not like to dwell on signs that their Winner is losing any more than a soup manufacturer likes to admit there is botulism in the vichyssoise (1972c, p. 50).

Additionally, Crouse documented how journalists developed personal feelings toward candidates. For example, as Humphrey was preparing to bow out of the race, Crouse observed, "The Press did not actually hate Humphrey, it was more that they felt sorry for him, and since they don't like to feel sorry for anyone, they wished that he would go away." (1972a, p. 40). In the final days of the campaign, Crouse reported that "the traveling reporters, who like all cynical people were also deeply sentimental, felt terrible for the McG[overn] staffers whom they had come to love." On the day after the election, McGovern addressed the press on his airplane, saying, "What we extend to you is the kiss of brotherhood, and good-bye until we meet again." The unnamed reporter sitting next to Crouse replied, "That is one of the classiest men I have ever seen" (1972b, p. 24). Although it is not clear from Crouse's *Rolling Stone* reporting that all of the reporters covering McGovern chose to vote for him, it is clear that they generally developed a strong affection for him.

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## Solidarity with the Mainstream Press

Despite their criticisms of other media outlets, in some ways Crouse, Thompson, and other *Rolling Stone* writers acknowledged that, at the most basic level, they were trying to serve the same function as reporters for traditional news outlets. They did this primarily by being self-reflexive about their own journalistic shortcomings and by singling out specific journalists for praise when appropriate.

Thompson, especially, acknowledged his own tendencies to do the same things he criticized other journalists for doing. As noted above, Thompson bragged that he did not need to maintain off-the-record sources and pointed out other journalists' tendencies to self-censor the information they received from sources. However, in the course of covering the Muskie campaign, Thompson admitted to the same type of self-censorship. In a meeting with representatives of the Democratic candidates, Chris Hart, a state campaign manager for Muskie, was rumored to have said, "My instructions are that the Senator should never again be put in a situation where he has to think quickly." Thompson recounted that the story was widely disseminated among reporters, who got a good laugh out of it, but never printed or mentioned it on television. At the time, Thompson also decided not to print it. He said, "Muskie was obviously in deep trouble, and Hart had been pretty decent to me ... so I figured what the hell? Let it rest" (1972f, p. 32). Of course, Thompson did eventually print the story, along with his explanation of why he decided not to print it initially. However, by the time he printed it Muskie's campaign was effectively over, so the only harm that could come from the story was mild embarrassment for Hart.

Crouse showed his solidarity with the mainstream media by praising journalists that he believed embodied true journalistic ideals. In his signature article, “The Boys on the Bus,” Crouse included mostly glowing profiles of Karl Fleming (former *Newsweek* correspondent), Walter Mears (Associated Press), Bruce Morton (CBS), Jim Naughton (*The New York Times*), Dick Stout (*Newsweek*), David Broder and Haynes Johnson (*The Washington Post*), Jules Witcover (*Los Angeles Times*), and Richard Reeves (*New York* magazine). His profile of Johnny Apple, from *The New York Times*, was more ambivalent but still showed a certain amount of respect to the influential reporter who, according to an unnamed political insider, “thinks he’s better than the pol[itician]s he writes about” (1972c, p. 52).

In his profiles of these journalists, whom he called “the Heavies” (1972c, p. 52), Crouse noted the ways in which these elite reporters broke from the pack journalism he described previously. Of Broder, for example, Crouse noted, “What separates him from the pack is his incredible detachment, which is not cynical, or even bemused, but scholarly” (1972c, 56). In several cases, Crouse highlighted the ability of these journalists to recognize their own shortcomings. For example, he quoted Witcover’s assessment of the press’s failings in covering the Muskie campaign:

I was aware of the organization that McGovern was building up there, and aware that Muskie wasn’t doing anything. But I bought the Muskie people’s story that they were OK because Muskie had been in and out of the state for 20 years. Muskie intimidated the press. We wanted to have chapter and verse before we went at him (1972c, pp. 56).

Witcover, along with other journalists, appealed to Crouse precisely because they recognized the same problems with their journalism that Crouse and Thompson identified.

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## Using Thompson and Crouse in the Classroom

Soon after the 1972 election, English Professor Wayne C. Booth (1973) wrote a scathing review of Thompson’s coverage in the *Columbia Journalism Review*. Booth compared Thompson’s reflexive, first-person approach to journalism to

the freshman essay every writing teacher receives at least once a year: ‘Sitting in front of my blank page at 2:30 a.m., with the paper due tomorrow, I am desperate. But suddenly I have an idea. I’ll write about how it feels to be sitting in front of my blank page’ (p. 12).

Interestingly, it is this characteristic of Thompson’s writing that makes it useful for journalism classrooms. Undergraduate students can relate to Thompson’s meta-journalistic approach because it allows them to follow the process and explore the world of reporting. They are particularly likely to appreciate Thompson’s reporting if they are given a chance to experience Thompson’s charismatic persona, perhaps through films like the documentary *Breakfast with Hunter* (Ewing 2003) or Johnny Depp’s portrayal in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (Gilliam 1998).

Crouse and Thompson’s work is also a great starting point for conceptual discussion about the interdependence of media in political reporting. Crouse’s “Boys on the Bus” article (1972c), or the book it inspired (2003), is an especially useful

assignment for facilitating such discussions. While textbooks have echoed Crouse's observations (for example, Bennett 2007), there may be no subsequent publication that illustrates the nature of political reporting in a more engaging and compelling way.

Perhaps most importantly, Thompson and Crouse's reporting from the 1972 election illustrates how narrative journalism can be used to cover traditional journalistic subjects. Works of narrative journalism, from *In Cold Blood* (Capote 1965) through *Black Hawk Down* (Bowden 1999), have tended to focus on people and events chosen less for their inherent newsworthiness than for their literary qualities. Topics ripe for literary journalistic treatment are those that warrant only limited attention from mainstream journalists, but that a skilled storyteller can turn in to a compelling narrative that illustrates larger themes. Even *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (Thompson 1971) grew out of an extremely routine assignment to cover a motorcycle race, and become one of the ultimate examples of the narrative journalism genre. By contrast, Thompson and Crouse's subject in 1972 was the most newsworthy topic an American journalist can cover: the presidential election. *Rolling Stone's* coverage of the 1972 campaign shows that a journalist can tell an interesting story without sacrificing the responsibility to inform readers about government and public affairs.

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## Conclusion

*Rolling Stone's* coverage of the 1972 election resulted in an immediate elevation of the magazine's stature. Early in the campaign, Thompson reported that most of his fellow reporters had never heard of *Rolling Stone*, but by May of 1972, *Newsweek's* Stewart Alsop was favorably quoting the magazine that he called "the organ of the counterculture" (1972, p. 108). Starting with the 1972 election, *Rolling Stone* transitioned from a regional music magazine to a national institution, a transition solidified with its move from San Francisco to New York a few years later. Additionally, Thompson's reputation as a journalist was solidified by his election coverage. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* may be Thompson's literary masterpiece, but at the time *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail* sold more copies (Thompson 1973b). In the long-term, Thompson's election coverage is more often held up as the exemplar of outstanding reporting in the "literary journalism" tradition (see Chance and McKeen 2001).

*Rolling Stone's* reporting is also important in the history of alternative political journalism. Current alternative news sources, from blogs to *The Daily Show* to *The O'Reilly Factor*, often exhibit an irreverent and self-reflexive style that echoes Thompson and *Rolling Stone's* reporting in 1972. In recent decades, even the most mainstream news outlets have tended toward a sort of "metacoverage" reminiscent of Crouse and Thompson (Esser and D'Angelo 2006). Of course, more research is necessary to determine the extent of this influence, but it is hard to believe that Thompson and Crouse did not play a role in establishing these trends.

This paper has analyzed *Rolling Stone's* coverage of the 1972 presidential election, paying particular attention to the reporters' coverage of their fellow journalists. Its findings are significant for understanding the role the magazine has played in the evolution on political journalism.

## Notes

1. A search on the Social Science Citation Index yields nearly 100 scholarly articles that cite Crouse's *The Boys on the Bus*. All of these sources that the author was able to consult cited Crouse in passing as part of a larger normative argument or social scientific theory development. None treated Crouse's work as an object of analysis.
2. For an in-depth explanation of the parliamentary vote and its importance to McGovern's nomination, see Thompson (1972b; 1983, pp. 269-323). According to Perry (1973, p. 171) Thompson was the only reporter to adequately explain the procedure.
3. Apple later told Crouse that the version of the story recounted by Stearns to Thompson was inaccurate; that the story did not run that day for other reasons and that a version of it ran the next day (Crouse 1972c, p. 54). However, he did admit to being outraged when the story did not appear, calling his bosses "a goiter on the body of journalism" and other, less nice, names. Whether the story is true or not, it nicely illustrates the phenomena of pack journalism that Thompson and Crouse ascribed to the press.
4. In a footnote in his book on the campaign, Thompson reported that later in the campaign he finally confirmed that the story was largely true, but that his printing it turned out to be inconsequential, as "it was almost universally dismissed as 'just another one of Thompson's Mackiewicz fables'" (1983, p. 237).
5. McGovern was one of the guests invited to Thompson's private "funeral" following his suicide in 2005, in which Thompson's ashes were shot from a canon, per his wishes (Brinkley 2005).

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