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**Bates, Stephen. *An Aristocracy of Critics: Luce, Hutchins, and the Committee that Redefined Freedom of the Press*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020, 336 pp., \$28.00 (hardback).** Reviewed by Gwyneth Mellinger, James Madison University (mellingx@jmu.edu)

Scholar Stephen Bates has written a book matching the enduring impact of his subject, the Commission on Freedom of the Press and the canonical Hutchins Report, which has guided media criticism since its publication in 1947.

Focusing on the personalities, ambitions, and social and political context that informed the commission's work, Bates presents a cogent and beautifully written history of what some scholars regard as the twentieth century's most significant discussion of media standards. The historical analysis running through *An Aristocracy of Critics: Luce, Hutchins, Niebuhr, and the Committee that Redefined Freedom of the Press* places readers in the room with the intellectuals who examined the role and duty of postwar mass media. For more than two years they debated the social responsibility of the press and its relationship to free expression and democracy.

The foundation for this history is a breathtaking assemblage of primary source material drawn from fifty-nine archives and manuscript collections. The historical narrative is anchored in the records of the commission, conversations and correspondence among its members and staff, and the perspectives of contemporaries who shared, to varying degrees, the commission's concern that the press had lost its way and imperiled the democracy it was intended to serve.

Complaints about the print media were a greater focus of the commission's investigation than film and broadcasting and included a range of topics that now seem familiar: sensationalism, inaccuracy (both willful and inadvertent), a lack of context for the news, the deleterious effect of chain and absentee ownership, and the press's emphases on negative news and celebrity culture, to name a few. Following the U.S. Supreme Court's 1945 ruling in the Associated Press antitrust case, the impact of media

monopoly also drew a good deal of the commission's attention.

At the center of the story are Robert Hutchins, the University of Chicago president who led the commission, and Henry Luce, Time Inc. founder and the project's benefactor. Although Luce remained on the sidelines, his influence was unmistakable. In securing Hutchins's service, he ensured that the commission would be led by the mid-century's most magnetic young intellectual, and in collaborating with Hutchins on the makeup of the commission, Luce installed an "aristocracy of critics" atop the project. Although billed as a citizen commission on the press, the membership, which included no journalists, was anything but rank and file. The only member not tenured at a university, Archibald MacLeish, was a Pulitzer-winning poet who had been librarian of Congress.

The project's elitism, an undemocratic irony that runs throughout the commission's story, was largely Hutchins's doing. While at the University of Chicago, he canceled the football team and installed the Great Books of the Western World Seminar at the core of the curriculum. Strikingly, he disdained vocational training, including journalism, which he described as "a low form of academic life" (p. 131); he believed that a broad study in the liberal arts sufficiently prepared journalists for their work, the skills for which could be learned on the job.

On the commission, Hutchins's intellectual snobbery would register as a bias against quantitative scholarship and a devaluing of data as necessary for drawing conclusions. Twenty years after the commission completed its work, he still had not developed a respect for communications research: "You just count things as they pass by" (p. 203).

Through deep and sometimes passionate

discussions at its seventeen meetings, the commission developed recommendations, without clear consensus and framed primarily by Hutchins as he edited the report. Key to the process of truth-seeking were the debates among the commission's eminent members. As such, the heart of this book is Bates's description of these conversations and the personal and professional biographies of the participants.

By design, the commission was a blue-ribbon endeavor featuring debates among its accomplished members, nearly all with ties to Harvard and the University of Chicago. Bates directs readers' focus to the salience of the discussions of ethics and law among MacLeish, who then was a former assistant secretary of state; theologian Reinhold Niebuhr; philosopher William Ernest Hocking; political scientist Charles Merriam; law professors Zechariah

Chaffee Jr., John Dickinson, and Harold Lasswell; anthropologist Robert Redfield; economists Beardsley Ruml and John M. Clark; historian Arthur Schlesinger; and George N. Schuster, president of Hunter College and the commission's only Catholic. It was an all-star lineup of America's intellectual elite at the end of World War II. These conversations culminated in straightforward recommendations for the press to act responsibly.

Other scholarship has examined the Hutchins Report and its legacy, yet this book still fills a void in its emphasis on the commission's process, which is possible only through Bates's exhaustive primary-source research and deep study of secondary literature. Particularly useful to media historians is the chapter "From Target to Canon," which traces the trajectory of the Hutchins Report itself.