

WASHINGTON, D.C.

CAPITAL ADDITION

Newseum exhibits relics and realities of modern media in a monumental setting

By Tom Haines
GLOBE STAFF

In a shaded side room of the Newseum, a \$450 million museum on a prime piece of Pennsylvania Avenue, pairs of opposite words are etched in three walls:

WAR|PEACE . . . LOVE|HATE . . . DESTRUCTION|INVENTION . . .

The letters are only two inches high and draw relatively little attention in the newly-opened building of steel and glass that holds everything from slabs of the Berlin Wall to a 4D theater with moving seats, from shelves of century-old headlines to a dangling news-channel helicopter. Yet the engravings capture, perhaps more than anything else in the overstimulating place, the boundless breadth of what the news, and the Newseum, can be.

. . . RUMOR|FACT . . . TRUTH|LIES . . . WISDOM|IGNORANCE . . .

On the Newseum's top floor, reached after paying \$20 and riding a glass elevator to a terrace with an intimate view of this city of monuments, a daily exhibit of front pages — the Arizona Republic and Charlotte Observer, for example, the Age, from Australia, and La Tribune, from France — tends to define news in extremes.

. . . HARVEST|DROUGHT . . . DISCOVERY|LOSS . . . WORK|PLAY . . .

So a key question, when turning to descend through seven floors of exhibits tucked in dark corners and sprawled in bright light, is whether the Newseum explores the complexities of newsgathering beyond what makes the front page.

Basic contexts come quickly, first with a brief history of communication that in-

cludes a clay-brick dispatch honoring the building of a Sumerian chapel more than 3,000 years ago, and details of the bronze type used by Koreans in the 15th century.

Down a few steps, a side hall hosts a ranking of "Great Books," including the Magna Carta and writings of English philosopher John Locke. Nearby, a short film recounts the press's role in the civil rights movement, and a photo gallery captures

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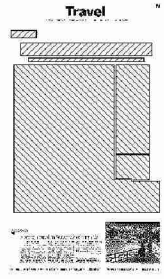
posturings on this year's campaign trail.

"It is like a liberal arts education," said Dianne Schwager of Bethesda, Md., who visited soon after the Newseum's opening this month. "Here are the words of Aristotle, of Thomas Aquinas, of the Constitution. This is what makes things stick."

Schwager, whose daughter works on her high school paper, offered only one criticism: "It should be free."

Access is often unfettered in this city: Just across the street, visitors can enter for no charge the National Gallery of Art and face Gilbert Stuart's portrait of George Washington, or the paintings of James McNeill Whistler, Albert Bierstadt, Childe Hassam, or Thomas Cole. The same goes for other government-funded museums along much of the nearby National Mall.

The Newseum, though, is a nonprofit established by the Freedom Forum, a successor foundation to one begun in 1935 by Frank E. Gannett, of the Gannett Company. The museum is financed, in addition to admission fees and Freedom Forum support, by personal and corporate dona-



tions, including those of mainstream media such as Comcast, Bloomberg, Hearst, and News Corp. Multimillion-dollar gifts have landed prominent display: The New York Times — Ochs-Sulzberger Family Great Hall of News, the Time Warner World News Gallery, and the NBC News Interactive Newsroom.

For a visitor, it can feel like walking into an industry advertisement, and exhibits often embrace the mainstream perspective. The fifth-floor News Corporation News History Gallery notes the increasing role of women in network television — Barbara Walters and Katie Couric feature prominently — and an increase in “alternative” formats. Gathered together are everything from “Saturday Night Live’s” “Weekend Edition” to “NewsHour” on PBS, and alternative weekly newspapers. The example is a 1992 cover of *The Village Voice*, which displayed an oversized marijuana leaf.

A computer catalog of prominent news people offers hundreds of names. But touch one, and only a few sentences detail each of a collection of lives that includes the likes of Jann Wenner, Alexander Woolcott, and Thomas Winship.

An illustration shows that General Electric owns NBC, Disney owns ABC, and Viacom CBS. The result? Commentary ends only with this: “Vast conglomerations of news outlets grew — some of them controlled by corporations with no ties to journalism.”

One impact of this new ownership appears when leaving floor five: A giant screen broadcasts a rehash of important news stories of recent decades, including the explosion of the space shuttle Columbia and the Iraq war. Sounds and images are set to rock ‘n’ roll — news as entertainment more than information.

The Newseum delves more deeply into the attacks of 9/11 with an exhibit that includes a battered broadcast antenna from a World Trade Center tower, reproductions of front pages, and a film

of the challenges and tragedies for journalists working that day.

There is debate about whether journalism needs such a prominent place in the heart of the capital, particularly at a time when many newspapers celebrated at the Newseum are cutting reporting staff and shrinking in circulation. Jack Shafer, an editor for *Slate.com*, criticized the idea of the Newseum before it opened. Couldn’t the \$450 million have been better spent to endow a newspaper?

It is tempting to think any museum of the fourth estate belongs at the edge, on the outside, across the Potomac in Virginia, for example, where the Newseum lived in more modest means for five years. Yet the building’s Pennsylvania Avenue façade includes a four-story marble wall engraved with the 45 words of the First Amendment:

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.”

In a city of monuments, in which ideas are immortalized to unite us in common cause, it is impressive to have one that promises the right to look behind such façades.

Beyond the 9/11 exhibit, on floors four, three, and two, a gallery highlights each of the rights protected in the First Amendment. A wall-sized map shows the status of press freedoms around the world. On it, a swath of red, indicating tight media control by government, stretches from Africa across the Middle East into Russia, Central Asia, and China. A memorial to fallen journalists, with names and faces cataloged in two displays, more simply shows the risks of the job.

Many bells and whistles have been created to make visiting such hard realities fun. The building’s

architecture maximizes natural light, with many sweeping views of the city, including the Capitol dome. Films in small rooms, and in the larger 4D theater, try to provocatively distill eras and journalistic themes. The Newseum partnered with Wolfgang Puck for *The Source*, a high-end restaurant, and a basement food court. Efforts to engage come closest to the mission, though, in interactive exhibits on the second floor.

On a weekday afternoon, Teddy Ferguson, 13, from Rochester, N.Y., stepped from a stage where he and his brother Tucker, 10, had recorded a mock newscast.

“It felt like you were actually on TV,” Teddy said. “I like the stuff you can do, instead of just looking around.”

Beside him, dozens of computer terminals offered “Be a Reporter,” a game in which the user interviews a hippie protester, a clown, an animal trainer, and others after circus animals flee their cages. Other computers posed real-world ethics conundrums. Does the photographer stop working to save the starving child? Do you publish a story about the school principal’s health problems?

Down one last flight of stairs to the main foyer, the capital calls. But behind the ticket booths and past the coat check, a final gallery holds a vast collection of Pulitzer Prize-winning photographs.

Some images are famous, and difficult: A prisoner being shot in the head on a Saigon street. A starving child hunched on dry African earth as a vulture waits.

Others are joyful: Olympic runners celebrating. A woman giving birth.

In interviews broadcast on a screen, photographers describe the highs and lows of wandering the world hoping to document. But on the walls all around, the content, the extremes of news and intimacy of personal life, dominates.

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If you go . . .



CHIP SOMODEVILLA/GETTY IMAGES



CHIP SOMODEVILLA/GETTY IMAGES

The “News History” exhibit of pages under glass and oversized graphics on the walls was popular on opening day this month.

Newseum

555 Pennsylvania Ave.
Washington, D.C.
888-639-7386
newseum.org

Daily 9 a.m.-5 p.m., except Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year’s Day. **Tickets:** Ages 13-64 \$20, 65 and older \$18, children ages 7-12 \$13, 6 and under free. **A food court**, run by Wolfgang Puck catering, offers cafeteria dining. Roast chicken with two sides \$9.95, cheeseburger \$5.95. **The Source**, a high-end Puck restaurant with a separate entrance, serves museumgoers and neighborhood power brokers. Lunch for two \$45.



THIS JUST IN . . .

Look around inside the Newseum on boston.com/travel.



JACQUELYN MARTIN/ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Newseum's atrium from a sixth-floor vantage point; against sections of the Berlin Wall, a television image of an East German guard tower; Misky Sharif, 10, of Landsowne, Va., top right, reads a script on camera in the interactive "Be a TV Reporter" exhibit.



TIM SLOAN/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



SEPT. 11

Antenna from the World Trade Center and front pages.

JUDGMENT CALLS

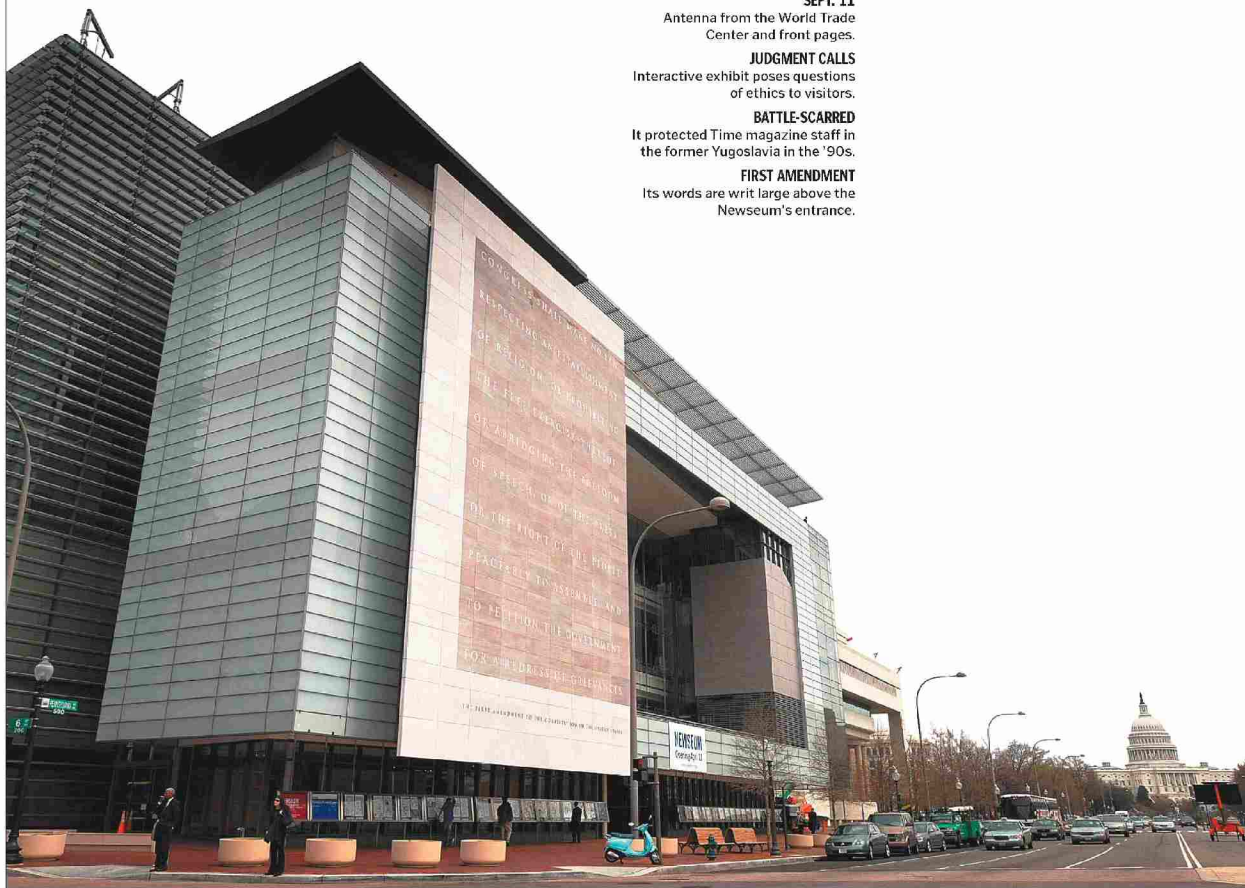
Interactive exhibit poses questions of ethics to visitors.

BATTLE-SCARRED

It protected Time magazine staff in the former Yugoslavia in the '90s.

FIRST AMENDMENT

Its words are writ large above the Newseum's entrance.



TIM SLOAN/APR/BETTY IMAGES. CHIP SOMODEVILLA/BETTY IMAGES (ETHICS)