

Pages of phrases

PRESS-QUOTE PRIMER

New book explains famous sayings, including journalistic ones

BY DAVE ASTOR

CURIOS ABOUT THE ORIGIN OF SUCH PHRASES AS “Journalism is the first draft of history”? Then you should check out *The Quote Verifier*. Ralph Keyes’ book— slated to be published May 30 by St. Martin’s Griffin — looks at the roots of the “first draft” quote and 459 other well-known sayings. Nine of the 460 are directly journalism-related, while several others loosely apply.

Keyes, the author of 14 books, has worked as a journalist himself — including a 1968-70 stint at *Newsday* in Melville, N.Y. Now an Ohio resident, Keyes discovered while researching his new tome that roughly two-thirds of the 460 sayings were either misworded (often to make them shorter and more graceful) or misattributed. In numerous cases, a famous person is credited with a quote actually coined by a lesser-known individual.

And many of the sayings date back further than people realize, Keyes tells *E&P*. For instance, “Show me the money” didn’t originate with the 1996 film *Jerry Maguire*; rather, it came out of the mouths of at least two boxers who fought in the early 20th century.

But what about those journalistic quotes? Discussing the “first draft” comment, Keyes writes in his upcoming book: “Some think it originated with former *Washington Post* editor Ben Bradlee. Others credit *Post* publisher Katharine Graham. In fact, it was Philip Graham — Bradlee’s boss, Katharine’s husband, and her predecessor as *Post* publisher — who made a somewhat more turgid exhortation to *Newsweek* correspondents soon after his newspaper acquired that magazine in 1963: ‘So let us today drudge on about our inescapably impossible task of providing every week a

first rough draft of a history that will never be completed about a world we can never understand.”

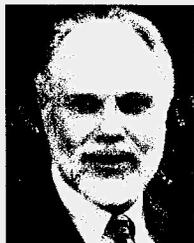
Keyes also provided *E&P* with the eight other press-quote passages from his book. Here are three of them:

Comfort the afflicted and afflict the

comfortable. “In the 1960 movie *Inherit the Wind*, an H.L. Mencken-like newspaper editor says, ‘It is the duty of a newspaper to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.’ Credit for this credo gets passed around. In his 1942 quotation collection, Mencken attributed the saying as ‘author unidentified’ — although

Mencken himself is sometimes thought to have been that author. (He was prone to quoting himself anonymously.)

“Four decades before Mencken’s collection was published, however, Finley Peter Dunne wrote this observation by his philosophizing bartender, Mr. Dooley: ‘The newspaper does ivrything f’r us. It runs th’ polis foorce an’ th’ banks, commands th’ milishy, conthrols th’ ligis-lachure, baptizes th’ young, marries th’ foolish, comforts th’ afflicted, afflicts th’ comfortable, buries th’ dead an’ roasts thim afterward.’”



Author Ralph Keyes cuts to the sources

When a dog bites a man, that isn’t news. When a man bites a dog, that’s news. “By legend this was the response of *New York Sun* city editor John Bogart (1845-1921) to a cub reporter who, in the early 1880s, asked him to define ‘news.’ The author of a 1918 history of the *Sun* credited Bogart with this comment. It was recalled when he died in 1921. The observation has also been attributed to *Sun* editor Charles A. Dana; to its first managing editor, Amos Cummings; and to early-20th-century British press baron Lord Northcliffe (Alfred Harmsworth).

“Whoever first defined news as ‘man-bites-dog’ may have got that notion from Oliver Goldsmith’s ‘An Elegy on the Death of a Mad Dog.’ In this 1766 poem, a kindly man in Islington is bitten by a dog whom he’d befriended. To the consternation of all, ‘The man recovered of the bite/The dog it was that died.’ This popular bit of doggerel was adapted in many forms, including one in which a man actually bit a dog. Lexicographer Eric Partridge believed that this might have inspired the classic definition of news.”

You furnish the pictures, and I’ll furnish the war. “As the Spanish-American War was about to erupt, newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst sent sketch artist Frederick Remington to portray the action in revolutionary Cuba. After spending a few days there, Remington wired that he could find no hostilities and wanted to return. Hearst is notorious for responding, ‘Please remain. You furnish the pictures, and I’ll furnish the war.’ There is no reliable evidence that the publisher sent any such telegram. He himself denied having done so. The wire in question has never been found.

“As Hearst biographer John K. Winkler pointed out, it is unlikely that such an inflammatory message would have gotten past Spanish censors. The source of Hearst’s pithy telegram seems to have been a 1901 memoir by journalist James Creelman, a Hearst admirer who reported the publisher’s order to Remington without giving any source.”

Non-press quotes and misquotes discussed in Keyes’ book include “The whole nine yards,” “Ain’t I a woman?,” “He was born on third base and thinks he hit a triple,” and hundreds of others. □

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