

# Sigma Delta Chi's New Code of Ethics

*(Editors' Note: These Canons of Journalism were drawn up and adopted by The American Society of Newspaper Editors in their annual conventions of 1924 and 1925. The 1926 convention of Sigma Delta Chi, sitting at Madison, Wisconsin in November, officially adopted the Canons in behalf of the fraternity.)*

The primary function of newspapers is to communicate to the human race what its members do, feel and think. Journalism, therefore, demands of its practitioners the widest range of intelligence, of knowledge, and of experience, as well as natural and trained powers of observation and reasoning. To its opportunities as a chronicle are indissolubly linked its obligations as teacher and interpreter.

To the end of finding some means of codifying sound practice and just aspirations of American journalism these canons are set forth:

**I. Responsibility**—The right of a newspaper to attract and hold readers is restricted by nothing but considerations of public welfare. The use a newspaper makes of the share of public attention it gains serves to determine its sense of responsibility, which it shares with every member of its staff. A journalist who uses his power for any selfish or otherwise unworthy purpose is faithless to a high trust.

**II. Freedom of the Press**—Freedom of the press is to be guarded as a vital right of mankind. It is the unquestionable right to discuss whatever is not explicitly forbidden by law, including the wisdom of any restrictive statute.

**III. Independence**—Freedom from all obligations except that of fidelity to the public interest is vital.

1. Promotion of any private interest contrary to the general welfare, for whatever reason, is not compatible with honest journalism. So-called news communications from private sources should not be published without public notice of their source or else substantiation of their claims to value as news, both in form and substance.

2. Partisanship, in editorial comment which knowingly departs from the truth, does violence to the best spirit of American journalism; in the news columns it is subversive of a fundamental principle of the profession.

**IV. Sincerity, Truthfulness, Accuracy**—Good faith with the reader is the foundation of all journalism worthy of the name.

1. By every consideration of good faith a

newspaper is constrained to be truthful. It is not to be excused for lack of thoroughness or accuracy within its control or failure to obtain command of these essential qualities.

2. Headlines should be fully warranted by the contents of the articles which they surmount.

**V. Impartiality**—Sound practice makes clear distinction between news reports and expressions of opinion. News reports should be free from opinion or bias of any kind.

1. This rule does not apply to so-called special articles unmistakably devoted to advocacy or characterized by a signature authorizing the writer's own conclusions and interpretation.

**VI. Fair Play**—A newspaper should not publish unofficial charges affecting reputation or moral character without opportunity given to the accused to be heard; right practice demands the giving of such opportunity in all cases of serious accusation outside judicial proceedings.

1. A newspaper should not invade private rights or feeling without sure warrant of public right as distinguished from public curiosity.

2. It is the privilege, as it is the duty, of a newspaper to make prompt and complete correction of its own serious mistakes of fact or opinion, whatever their origin.

**VII. Decency**—A newspaper can not escape conviction of insincerity if while professing high moral purpose it supplies incentives to base conduct, such as are to be found in details of crime or vice, publication of which is not demonstrably for the general good. Lacking authority to enforce its canons, the journalism here represented can but express the hope that deliberate pandering to vicious instincts will encounter effective public disapproval or yield to the influence of a preponderant professional condemnation.

*Editors' Note: The A. S. N. E. adopted the above Canons of Journalism at their 1924 convention, and their 1925 convention voted to add the following paragraph:*

To its privileges under the freedom of American Institutions are inseparably joined its responsibilities for an intelligent fidelity to the Constitution of the United States.