

Moments of Truth: An Exploration of Journalism’s Past, Present and Future

A MAP OF COLORADO'S MEDIA STORY: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE



Like many of the Western territories, Colorado's pathway to statehood was part of the "Manifest Destiny" movement of the mid-19th century, described by Colorado's first territorial governor, William Gilpin, as: "The untransacted destiny of the American people is to subdue the continent—to rush over this vast field to the Pacific Ocean..." This Western movement was partially fueled by advances in communications technology. John Gast's famous painting, American Progress, shows Columbia (the manifestation of America) bringing East Coast-style "progress" to the West. Trailing from her hand are telegraph wires establishing communication between the coasts. The discovery of precious metals in Colorado led to rapid population growth as people rushed to the new mining "boom towns."

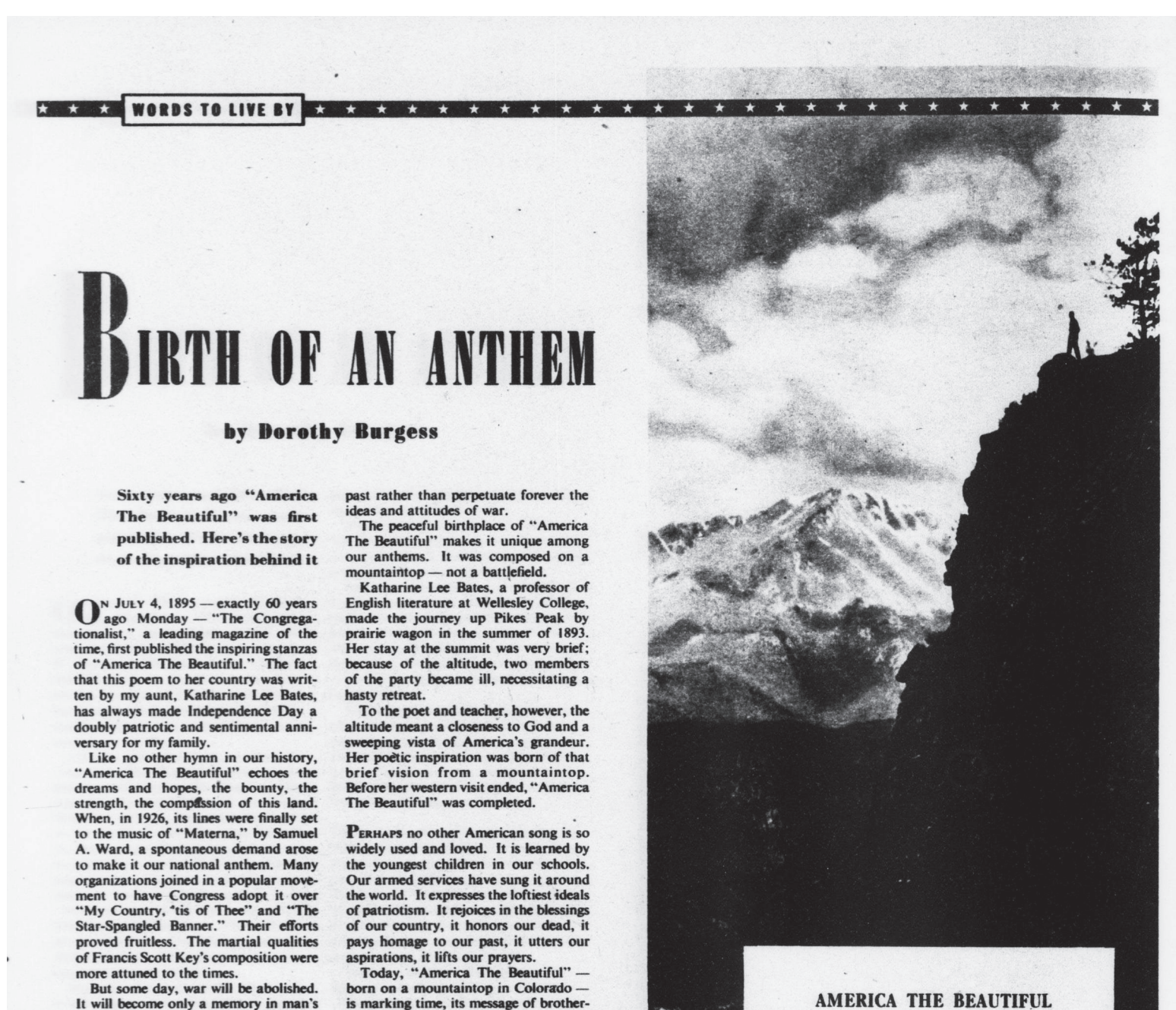
Negatively, this westward expansion disrupted millennia old communications systems used by the Native nations in Colorado and brought further violence and destruction to the Indigenous peoples of the West, as is shown in the lower left of the painting. While the pathway to statehood marked a turning point, Colorado's communication history spans millennia.

Below, you can explore key moments from a thousand years of Colorado media history, spanning the eras before and after statehood.

TRADITIONAL



Rock art is one of the oldest forms of human communication, and many of the oldest examples in the United States are in Colorado. Petroglyphs, carved rock art like this one created by an Ute artist (above), and pictographs—cave paintings—were a common form of media created by Indigenous nations across North America. One culture, called the Fremont by archaeologists (their original name is unknown), created many petroglyphs in the region, including this one in Dinosaur National Monument (inset).



Music has always been a major way to share information and messages. From recording events to songs as an act of political protest, people have long set their stories to tunes. On July 22, 1893, Katharine Lee Bates climbed Pikes Peak and, inspired by the majesty of the view, wrote a poem of her experience. The poem was later set to music and became one of the most famous songs in American history: "America the Beautiful." This article from the Evening Star celebrates the 60th anniversary of the famous song.

NEWSPAPERS

The Granada Pioneer was published by incarcerated Japanese Americans at the Granada "Relocation Center" and reported on news in the camp community (below). The incarceration center, also known as Amache, was established as a result of Executive Order 9066, ordering the imprisonment of Japanese Americans, a decision fueled by wartime paranoia and racism toward Asian Americans. Eventually, Amache held over 7,000 people during World War II (below). Several notable Americans were forcibly incarcerated at Amache, including future U.S. Rep. Mike Honda (Calif.). This is the second anniversary edition from Nov. 3, 1944, which acts as a powerful record of these tragic events. The last detainees wouldn't be freed from Amache until Oct. 15, 1945.

On April 23, 1859 the Rocky Mountain News published the first newspaper in Colorado, beating the Cherry Creek Pioneer to press by 20 minutes. This achievement was noted above the paper's masthead. The Pioneer would be absorbed into the Rocky Mountain, publishing only two more issues under the shared offices. The Rocky Mountain News would continue publishing until 2009.



The largest newspaper in Colorado, The Denver Post, began as the Evening Post on Aug. 8, 1892, reporting on news from the state's largest city. After closing in 1893, the paper reopened under new investment. It began publishing under its current name in 1901. Built in 2006, the Colfax Ave building (above) served as the Post's headquarters until 2017 when paper relocated its offices out of downtown. Despite the move, the Post still covers both local news for the city of Denver along with statewide and national reporting. Over its history, the Post has won nine Pulitzer Prizes.

BROADCAST



Less than two years after the first commercial radio broadcast in the United States, Colorado's first radio station, KLZ, went live on March 10, 1922, and has been on the air ever since (left). This makes it one of the longest-running radio stations in the United States. Later, on Nov. 1, 1952, the company would also establish KLZ-TV, Colorado's first television station. This isn't the only legacy radio station operating in Colorado. KOA has been on the air since 1924 with its kickoff programming including an address by then CU Boulder president Dr. George Norlin.

Indigenous news outlets, published by individual nations or tribes and as collective outlets across cultures, started in 1828. The first was the Cherokee Phoenix, which began printing in Georgia, publishing primarily in Cherokee with some English stories. Today, there are a wide variety of Native news organizations. In Colorado, KSUT Tribal Radio has been on the air since 1976, reporting on tribal news (inset).

DIGITAL



The story of journalism in Colorado has always been defined by change, and in the age of digital media, change is coming faster than ever. While the nature of an independent press has always required some focus on the business model of the press, things like private equity and corporate chain takeovers have impacted the media landscape. These new owners are placing an even heavier focus on the business side of journalism, making changes like shrinking newsroom size and moving away from hyper-local reporting. At the same time, the digital age has seen a rise of collaborative journalism and innovative business models. An example of this is The Colorado Sun, launched Sept. 10, 2018 as a digital-only news outlet that provides coverage across the state and is owned by its journalists and members.

The rise of generative artificial intelligence also has shifted how we gather, report, verify and share the news—improving our ability to find sources and mine endless public records, but exposing Coloradans to deepfakes, disinformation and more. Experts at places like CU Boulder's College of Communication, Media, Design and Information and Poynter's AI Innovation Lab are studying how AI is changing the ways we create and tell stories, from traditional news to algorithm design, video evidence and architecture.

Scan the QR code to learn more about Colorado's unique news ecosystem and how CMDI students and faculty are helping us remain responsible reporters and consumers of news in the AI age.