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(From: Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., ed. *The Almanac of American History*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1983.)

Joseph Pulitzer was one of those who define the character of the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Fearless, flamboyant, inventive, brilliant, he came to America when he was 17, recruited by the Union Army. Discharged in 1865, he arrived in St. Louis penniless. Working on a German-language paper, he soon found his true vocation: newspapers. Buying and selling shares and franchises in local papers he bought the weakened *St. Louis Dispatch* for a mere \$2500 and a \$30,000 lien. For sheer audacity, sensationalism, and competence, no one could match the red-bearded and dramatic Joseph Pulitzer. By 1880 he merged with another paper to become the sole owner of the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*.

The public had become addicted to newspapers during the Civil War and now they turned to them to learn about the amazing happenings in a world made new almost every day. An immigrant himself, Pulitzer understood the aspirations of this fellow

immigrants, their increasing literacy and their longing to acculturate. Pulitzer targeted this group. His recipe was sex and scandal plus a generally flamboyant if incisive approach to the news. Almost single-handedly Pulitzer developed the concept of the people's newspaper. His instinct for journalism was a matter of genius; he used the new tool of advertising, low newspaper prices, and added his mixture of sensationalism and controversy. This formula made him rich before he transplanted it to New York, buying the *World* from railroader Jay Gould. Within one year it reached a readership of 100,000. Pulitzer, as was characteristic of the rich men of his time, devised new ways to distribute his wealth. He endowed the Columbia School of Journalism and established Pulitzer prizes for excellence in drama, music, letters and, naturally, newspaper work.

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Substantive edit by Jennifer Klitzke

### Self-made Genius

Joseph Pulitzer was a fearless, flamboyant, red-bearded Hungarian immigrant who harnessed the American dream through news-making during the latter 1900s. Penniless, Pulitzer came to America as a no-name, 17-year-old, Union Army recruit in 1864 (Topping) who morphed into a wealthy reporting legend.

After discharge in 1865, he worked his way to St. Louis picking up odd jobs as a muleteer and waiter. Fluent in German and French, Pulitzer studied at the library to

sharpen his broken English and genius intellect. One day at the library, he challenged the move of two *Westliche Post* editors playing chess. Impressed, they engaged him in conversation and later offered 21-year-old Pulitzer his first journalism job (Topping).

No one's drama and drive could match this rising star. Pulitzer blended shrewd business dealings with passionate news reporting and became the publisher of the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* at the age of 25. Then he emerged as sole owner seven years later (Topping).

Pulitzer developed the concept of the people's newspaper. He mixed sex and scandal with a generally flamboyant, incisive approach to the news. The public became addicted to the newspaper; it was a world made new almost every day.

Pulitzer targeted fellow immigrants as he understood their aspirations to acculturate and increase in literacy. His genius blended advertising, low newspaper prices, and a mixture of sensationalism and controversy. This formula made him rich before he transplanted it to New York, buying the *World* from railroader Jay Gould. Within one year it reached a readership of 100,000.

Before his death in 1911 (Topping), Pulitzer devised new ways to distribute his wealth. He endowed the Columbia School of Journalism and established Pulitzer prizes for excellence in drama, music, letters and, naturally, newspaper work.

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## Source

Topping, Seymour. Pulitzer Biography from [www.pulitzer.org](http://www.pulitzer.org). 21 February 2009.