

Hell and High Water: The Battle to Save the Daily New Orleans Times-Picayune

Rebecca Theim



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Hell and High Water: The Battle to Save the Daily New Orleans Times-Picayune Rebecca Theim The tale of the fierce grassroots battle to save New Orleans' beloved 175-year-old, Pulitzer Prize-winning newspaper, and the changes that continue to roil it and other Advance Publications properties from Portland to Mobile.

Near midnight on May 23, 2012, the New York Times broke the story that Advance Publications, the New York-based owner of about three dozen US newspapers, would use its 175-year-old New Orleans Times-Picayune as the testing ground for a risky experiment. The Picayune--which won fierce local devotion, international acclaim, and two Pulitzer Prizes for its heroic coverage of the aftermath of 2005's Hurricane Katrina--would become a three-day-per-week publication and shift its focus to its much derided nola.com Web site, leaving New Orleans as the largest US city without a daily newspaper. The profitable newspaper, with the country's highest readership penetration in a city its size, then proceeded to purge its veteran newsroom, antagonize much of the city and state, attract negative national and international attention, and jeopardize its vaunted reputation--all in an effort to create a new blueprint for the profitable operation of American newspapers in today's increasingly digital world.

The *Times-Picayune* wasn't the first or last Advance Publications newspaper to undergo this transformation. The company began implementing this plan at many of its newspapers in 2009 despite waves of protest. However, the *Times-Picayune* was its foremost guinea pig. In a desperate attempt to recapture public favor, Advance implemented daily newsstand-only editions of the *Times-Picayune* to supplement its scant coverage. Author Rebecca Theim's deft treatment of the impact on employees and region; the enigmatic owners of Advance Publications; and Advance Publication's ambitious business model is a revelatory exposé of the swiftly changing face of journalism.



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