

# University of Southern California - Media Giraffe Profile

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Jay T. Harris - Professor / ex-Publisher, San Jose Mercury News

"In more and more companies the steady and significant financial commitment required to do serious journalism is given less and less priority. What this means, and the importance of this is not to be underestimated, is that the best and most important journalism, that being journalism in the public interest, is on average being done less well, less frequently and less consistently than was once the case. This trend is playing out in newsrooms and communities large and small across the nation, and in the networks and the largest publicly owned newspaper companies."

Jay Harris, in an Aug. 24, 2001 at the National Association of Black Journalists annual convention in Orlando, Fla."

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## About

In March, 2001, Jay T. Harris created a stir in the newsrooms of American when he resigned as publisher of the San Jose Mercury News, citing incessant profit pressure from the management of Knight Ridder Corp., which owns the major California daily newspaper.

By August, he was able to reflect on his decision, and its implications for journalism, in a speech to the National Association of Black Journalists. The speech text is archived at the Poynter Institute website and may be viewed from this URL:

[http://www.poynter.org/content/content\\_\\_view.asp?id=5024](http://www.poynter.org/content/content__view.asp?id=5024)

Harris is now founding director of the Center for the Study of Journalism and Democracy at the University of Southern California and holds the Wallis Annenberg Chair in Journalism and Communication. In his 30 years in journalism, Harris worked as a reporter, editor, educator and corporate executive, and has served on the Pulitzer Prize board of directors. He also serves on the boards of the Pacific Council on International Policy and the Salzburg Seminar, and is a member of the American Society of Newspaper Editors and the Council on Foreign Relations.

In July 2003, he was also appointed to the board of the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco.

Harris began his journalism career in 1970 at the Wilmington (DE) News-Journal papers where he worked as a reporter and editor. Between 1975 and 1982, he was on the faculty of the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University and served as assistant dean of the school. In 1978, he designed and launched the American Society of Newspaper Editors' annual national census of minority employment in daily newspapers. It remains the industry benchmark to this day, and helped earn Harris a place on the list of the 20th century's 100 most influential black journalists.

Prior to joining the San Jose Mercury News as publisher in 1994, Mr. Harris was a vice president of operations at Knight Ridder with oversight responsibility of the business operations of nine of the company's newspapers.

During his seven years as Mercury News publisher, Mr. Harris's priorities were more complete coverage of community life, enhancing the newspaper's coverage of business and technology in Silicon Valley, and leading the drive to deepen and broaden the newspaper's service to a multi-lingual readership. In 1996, the Mercury News launched Nuevo Mundo, a Spanish language weekly, and three years later it launched Viet Mercury, a Vietnamese-language weekly.

During his tenure at the San Jose Mercury News the Columbia Journalism Review ranked it as one of the 10 best newspapers in the country.

*(Sources: USC website; news release from the San Francisco Federal Reserve Board, July 23, 2003; Pulitzer Prize website)*

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