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The Short-lived 1940s NYC Tabloid That “Dared to Tell the Truth

By Allison Meier

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Helen Levitt, “Third Avenue, Upper East Side, Offers no Trees or Cliffs for Kids to Climb, but Porch of Abandoned Building is Excellent Substitute” (July–August 1940), vintage gelatin silver print (all images courtesy Steven Kasher Gallery unless indicated otherwise)

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The *New York PM Daily* only lasted from 1940 to 1948, but in its short run it served as a vital progressive voice in New York City, and promoted groundbreaking photography to accompany its stories. [Steven Kasher Gallery](#) in Chelsea is currently hosting the first exhibition on the defunct newspaper, *PM New York Daily: 1940–48*.



Morris Engel, "Shopping Ninth Avenue, New York City" (1938), gelatin silver print, 14 x 11 in (click to enlarge)

Over 75 photographs are in the show, many vintage prints accompanied by newspaper clippings showing their original context, along with wall text adapted from Paul Milkman's 1997 book *PM: A New Deal in Journalism, 1940–1948*. Founded by Ralph Ingersoll, the newspaper focused from its first issue on overlooked social issues, starting with health oversights in its readers' food under headlines like "EXCLUSIVE: Chicken Ghoul's Unload Rotten Poultry in City." The publication also hired the first two women to

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be staff photographers at a US newspaper — [Mary Morris](#) and [Margaret Bourke-White](#), although the latter soon left due to the relentless pace of the daily paper.

“*PM* is against people who push other people around,” went the publication’s mission statement. “*PM* accepts no advertising. *PM* belongs to no political party. *PM* is absolutely free and uncensored. *PM*’s sole source of income is its readers — to whom it alone is responsible. *PM* is one newspaper that can and dares to tell the truth.”



Mary Morris, “Ralph Ingersoll, PM Founder and Publisher” (June 1942), vintage gelatin silver print

Unfortunately, the tabloid never quite got those readers, averaging below the 225,000 circulation necessary to break even. Housing affordability, strikes, hospital neglect, milk price gouging, racism, and especially the US’s obliviousness to World War II were major coverage focuses while the paper was in operation. A May 3, 1942 issue advocating for US participation in the war read “NAZIS BOMB NEW YORK” on its front page, with the disclaimer “WARNING — This is a preview NOT A REAL NEWS STORY,” accompanied by an ominous edited photo of sunken ships by the Brooklyn Bridge and a burning Manhattan.

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PM also regularly covered everyday life in New York City, from its strange seediness as documented by famed crime photographer [Weegee](#) — who was equally adept documenting a late-night murder or the scantily-clad ladies of the Coney Island beaches — to candid street portraits by [Morris Engel](#). And while social issues were the focus, sensationalism was never excluded, such as a 1942 photo by [Alan Fisher](#) of a man eagerly guzzling booze from a hose at a 1942 beer bust, a chaotic 1941 shoot-out captured by [Max Peter Haas](#), or a 1948 image of a car that crashed into a Bronx home by [Sheldon Gottesman](#). *PM* offered a cross-section of the ups and downs of 1940s New York, with its brazen eye always turned to where others weren't looking.

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Alan Fisher, "Beer Bust, Internal Revenue Agents Raid Building at 47 Hull St." (May 1942), vintage gelatin silver print, 8 x 10 in



Max Peter Haas, "The Esposito Episode. Heroic Taxi Driver, Leonard Weisberg, Lying Dead at Deadly 'Mad Dog' Shoot-Out in Manhattan" (January 14, 1941), vintage gelatin silver print, 6 1/2x 8 1/2 in

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Margaret Bourke-White, "Men Searched the Job Boards on Sixth Avenue as Unemployment is Rising Again" (June 1940), vintage gelatin silver print, 10 x 8 in

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John Albert, "Theodore Donaldson (Ex 8th Air Force) Shows His Paintings on His Jeep" (May 1946), vintage gelatin silver print, 8 x 10 in



Irving Haberman, "Children Recently Evicted From Their Home on East 121st Street, New York" (1947), vintage gelatin silver print mounted on board, 12 1/8 x 8 5/8 in

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Gene Badger, "42 Employees of 'The Day,' a Yiddish Newspaper, Are On Strike to Protest Against Alleged Wage Cuts And Discriminatory Firings" (May 13, 1941), vintage gelatin silver print, 8 x 10 in



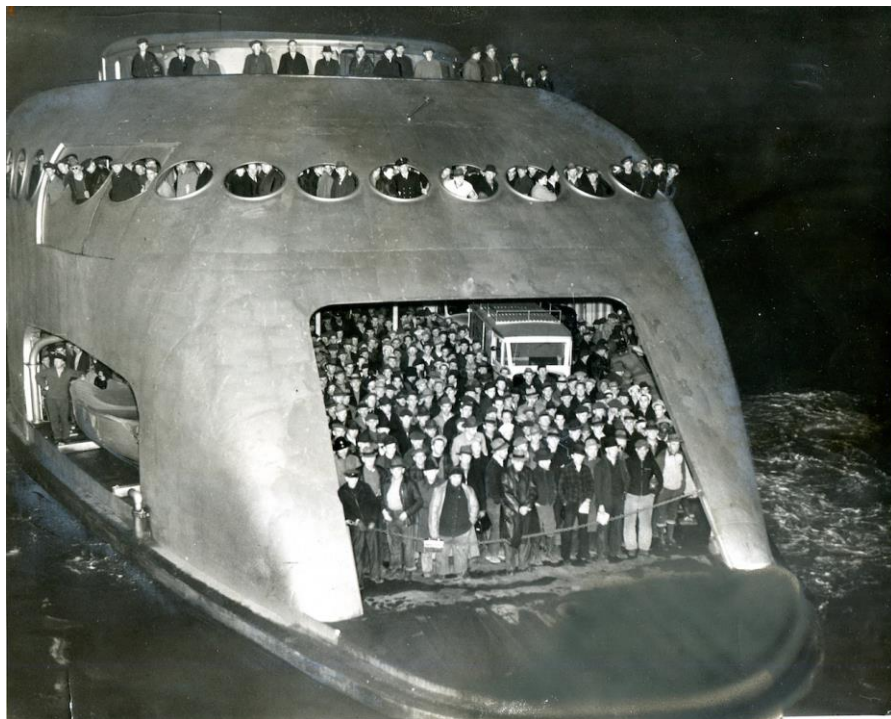
Bernie Aumuller, "More Coming, Pearl Reep, Belle Dodds, and Ruth Hassen, All of Flushing, Covering Their Heads as They Walk Along Chambers Street" (February 1946), vintage gelatin silver print, 8 x 10 in

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*Bernie Aumuller, "J.H. Williams and Betty Holmes of Queens, Won Second in the Jitter Bug Division"
(September 1947)*

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Anonymous, "The Modernistic, Streamlined Ferryboat Kalakala, Backing into her Bremerton Slip at 7:20 a.m. She's Jammed with Navy Yard Workmen, Forced to Take the 18-Mile Puget Sound Trip Twice Daily in the Dark. She's a Fine Boat, But Navy Experts Worry About Overcrowding" (January 1941), vintage gelatin silver print, 8 x 10 in

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Anonymous, "Adam Clayton Powell, Running for the US Congress, at the Negro Freedom Rally, Madison Square Garden" (June 26, 1944), vintage gelatin silver print, 8 x 10 in

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Weegee, "Mrs. Fred Meers, Wife of the Proprietor of the Eden Musee Dusts Off a Wax Figure of Franklin D. Roosevelt — Who, By Coincidence, Begins His Third Term Today. The Hooded Statue at Left is Joe Lewis; In Back of Mrs. Meers, Abraham Lincoln; At Right, Wallace"

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Sheldon Gottesman, "Wrong Way, Driver Anthony Fiore of Larchmont, 875 E. 228th St., Bronx" (March 1948), vintage gelatin silver print, 7 5/8 x 9 1/2 in



Installation view of 'PM New York Daily: 1940-48' (photo by the author for Hyperallergic)

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[PM New York Daily: 1940–48](#) continues through February 20 at [Steven Kasher Gallery](#) (515 West 26th Street, Chelsea, Manhattan).