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James Fallows U.S. News & World Report Editor to Address Illinois Wesleyan Associates

Bob Aaron
Illinois Wesleyan University

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Contact: Bob Aaron, 309/556-3181

Local
Chicago
Central

James Fallows

**U.S. News & World Report Editor to Address
Illinois Wesleyan Associates Luncheon, Sept. 16;
Veteran Journalist Was President Carter's Chief Speechwriter**

"Americans have never been truly fond of their press. Through the last decade, however, their disdain for the media establishment has reached new levels. Americans believe that the media have become too arrogant, cynical, scandal-minded, and destructive."

James Fallows

Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine American Democracy

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--The editor of *U.S. News & World Report*, the 2.3-million circulation weekly news magazine, will address an Illinois Wesleyan Associates luncheon, Tuesday, Sept. 16.

James Fallows will speak to the invitation-only luncheon, which will convene at Noon in the Main Lounge, Memorial Student Center, 104 E. University Ave., Bloomington.

In announcing Fallows' appointment as editor last year, *U.S. News & World Report* described him as "one of the most distinguished journalists and authors in America."

Commenting on becoming editor, Fallows said: "I'm tremendously excited about the chance to continue the traditions of this excellent magazine and to help make *U.S. News* as vital and valuable as it can be."

Fallows on Journalism

In *Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine American Democracy*, Fallows' 1996 book, he admits he got into journalism by accident and stayed because he liked it.

"I liked many of the incidental aspects of the business," he wrote, "the craftsmanship required to tell a story in limited space with limited time, the thousands of decisions and feats of teamwork necessary to make a newspaper appear each morning or a broadcast begin on time. I enjoyed the chance to learn about a variety of subjects without having to tie myself permanently to any one of them."

Fallows added: "Like teachers, soldiers, nurses, or parents, journalists perform a job whose full value cannot be recognized by their pay. When they do their jobs well, many people benefit. When they do their jobs poorly, when they are irresponsible about their power, the damage spreads farther than they can see."

Career Synopsis

Prior to joining *U.S. News & World Report* in last September, Fallows was Washington Editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*. He was President Jimmy Carter's chief speechwriter for two years

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before joining *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1979. Fallows has been a weekly commentator for National Public Radio's (NPR) Morning Edition since 1987 and he continues his ties to *The Atlantic Monthly* as a contributing editor.

For four years during the late 1980s, Fallows lived with his wife and children in Japan and Malaysia. He has worked and traveled since that time in almost every East Asian country. This reporting is the basis for his book, *Looking at the Sun*, published in 1994.

In *Looking at the Sun*, Fallows wrote: "The central argument of this book is that Western societies, especially America, have been using the wrong mental tools to classify, shape, and understand the information they receive about Asia. They try to fit the facts into familiar patterns and categories--and then are hurt and frustrated when predictions derived from these patterns don't come true."

Fallows observed: "Americans in particular tend to view the world as one vast potential extension of their own culture, containing billions upon billions of people who would be American if only they could . . . When Americans see Chinese students demonstrating in Tiananmen square, they think of their own Civil Rights movement, if not their Founding Fathers. They see McDonald's restaurants in Jakarta and Kyoto and think that societies must be converging on an American norm.

"This universalizing instinct . . . can lead to terrible analytical mistakes," Fallows concluded. "American statesmen ignored the nationalist part of Ho Chi Minh's movement against the French, seeing only its Communist component--and saw only the nation-builder in Syngman Rhee of Korea and Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines, ignoring what was corrupt and oppressive in each of them."

Journalism and Democracy

His latest book is *Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine American Democracy*.

In it, Fallows sees journalism as having a role in threats to the long-term health of the U.S. political system.

"Step by step," he wrote, "mainstream journalism has fallen into the habit of portraying public life in America as a race to the bottom, in which one group of conniving, insincere politicians ceaselessly tries to outmaneuver another. The great problem for American democracy in the 1990s is that people barely trust elected leaders or the entire legislative system to accomplish anything of value. The politicians seem untrustworthy while they're running, and they disappoint even their supporters soon after they take office. By the time they leave office they're making excuses for what they couldn't do . . . the media's attitudes have played a surprisingly important and destructive role . . . But far from making it easier to cope with public challenges, the

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press often makes it harder. By choosing to present public life as a contest among scheming political leaders, all of whom the public should view with suspicion, the press helps bring about that very result."

Fallows' Background, Other Books

Fallows has written award-winning books and articles about topics ranging from military policy and international relations to immigration, mental testing, and the rise of the computer industry. His articles on American politics, foreign affairs, and technology have been published in magazines, including the *New York Review of Books*, *Esquire*, *Fortune*, *Smithsonian*, and the *New York Times Book Review*.

Fallows, born in 1949, was raised in Redlands, Calif., where he attended public schools. He studied American history and literature at Harvard, where he was president of the Harvard *Crimson*. Between 1970 and 1972, he studied economics at The Queens College, Oxford, as a Rhodes scholar. He holds numerous honorary degrees.

His previous books include *More Like Us* (1989) and *National Defense* (1981), which won the American Book Award for nonfiction.

National Defense, according to one description, "analyzes the shortcomings of the nation's defense, reveals the technical, bureaucratic, and often psychological sources of these shortcomings, and offers defense options . . . that reflect new domestic and international realities. In so doing [Fallows] rescues the subject from the ideological cross fire of right and left and the simplistic, increasingly sterile debate over 'more' versus 'less.'"

Fallows has testified before Congress on policy issues spanning economics, politics, and U.S.-Asian relations. He is a frequent speaker at universities and civic groups nationwide.

He lives in Washington, D.C., with his wife, Deborah, and their two sons.

Illinois Wesleyan Associates, formed in 1953, is a group of business and professional leaders interested in the advancement and support of IWU and independent higher education. Associates provide internships and job opportunities for IWU students, as well as financial support.

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 1,900 students in a College of Liberal Arts, and its Schools of Music, Theatre Arts, Art, and Nursing. Since 1994, these facilities have been added to the IWU campus: a \$15 million athletic center, a \$25 million science building, a \$6.8 million residence hall, and a \$5.1 million liberal arts center. The Carnegie Commission for the Advancement of Teaching ranks Illinois Wesleyan a "Baccalaureate I" institution, a classification that places it among the 161 highly selective National Liberal Arts Colleges. IWU won the 1997 NCAA Division III men's basketball championship.

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Editor's Note: James Fallows, editor of *U.S. News & World Report*, will take questions from the news media following his speech, Sept. 16 at about 1:15 p.m. in the Main Lounge, Memorial Student Center, 104 E. University, Bloomington. Reporters should meet Fallows at the dais.