Advanced Placement American Government
Unit VI: The Media
Wilson (Ch12)

Monday 11/10 Answers due to set of summary questions found at the end of: ***"The Mass Media: Free and Independent?"*** by Parenti in Ciglar/Loomis, p. 254.
Video: *The Insider (if we have finished Primary Colors).*

Tuesday 11/11 Quiz over Ch12, pp. 292 - 302 (to **Are the Media Biased**?).
Video: *The Insider. Veterans Day!*

Wednesday 11/12 Answers due to summary questions: ***"Is There an Anti-Republican, Anti-Conservative Tilt?"*** by Sabato in Ciglar/Loomis, p. 265.
Video: *The Insider.*

Thursday 11/13 Quiz over Ch12, pp. 303 - 313.
Video: *The Insider.*

Friday 11/14 Critical review due on **"Lowering the Political Hero to Our Level,"** by Meyrowitz, in Ciglar/Loomis, p. 246.
Focus Points:

1) Why are old style political heroes no longer possible?
2) How is the modern mystification and management of the candidate's image different from that which existed prior to radio and television?

Video: *The Insider.*

Monday 11/17 **Video: *The Insider (If not finished with Primary colors.***

Tuesday 11/18 **AP Multiple Choice Test.** Units IV, V and VI. (Chapters 7-12)
45 minutes, 60 Questions-**Note Cards Due!**

Wednesday 11/19 **AP Format Essay Test.** Two required essays, 45 minutes

10

The Media

I. Reviewing the Chapter

A. Chapter Focus

In this chapter you will examine the historical evolution and current status of relations between the government and the news media—how the media affect government and politics and how government seeks to affect the media.

After reading and reviewing the material in this chapter, you should be able to do each of the following:

1. Describe the evolution of journalism in American political history, and describe the differences between the party press and the mass media of today.
2. Demonstrate how the characteristics of the electronic media have affected the actions of public officials and candidates for national office.
3. Describe the effect of the pattern of ownership and control of the media on the dissemination of news, and show how wire services and television networks have affected national news coverage. Discuss the influence of the national press.
4. Describe the rules that govern the media, and contrast the regulation of electronic and print media. Describe the effect of libel laws on freedom of the press and of government rules on broadcasters.
5. Assess the effect of the media on politics, and discuss why it is difficult to find evidence that can be used to make a meaningful and accurate assessment. Explain why the executive branch probably benefits at the expense of Congress.
6. Describe the adversarial press and how reporters use their sources. Describe how an administration may develop tactics to use against the adversarial press.

B. Study Outline

I. Journalism in American political history
  A. The party press
    1. Parties created and subsidized various newspapers
    2. Circulation was small, newspapers expensive, advertisers few
    3. Newspapers circulated among political and commercial elites
  B. The popular press
    1. Changes in society and technology made press self-supporting and able to reach mass readership
      a. High-speed press
      b. Telegraph
      c. Associated Press, 1848; objective reporting
      d. Urbanization allowed large numbers to support paper
      e. Government Printing Office—end of subsidies in 1860

2. Influence of publishers, editors created partisan bias
    a. "Yellow journalism" to attract readers
    b. Hearst foments war against Spain
3. Emergence of a common national culture

C. Magazines of opinion
1. Middle class favors new, progressive periodicals
    a. *Nation, Atlantic, Harper's* in 1850s and 1860s on behalf of certain issues
    b. *McClure's, Scribner's, Cosmopolitan* later on
2. Individual writers gain national followings through investigative reporting
3. Number of competing newspapers declines, as does sensationalism
4. Today the number of national magazines focusing on politics accounts for a small and declining fraction of magazines

D. Electronic journalism
1. Radio arrives in 1920s, television in 1940s
2. Politicians could address voters directly but people could easily ignore them
3. But fewer politicians could be covered
    a. President routinely covered
    b. Others must use bold tactics
4. Recent rise in talk show as political forum has increased politicians' access to electronic media
    a. "Big Three" networks have made it harder for candidates by shortening sound bites
    b. But politicians have more sources: cable, early morning news, news magazine shows
    c. These new sources feature lengthy interviews
5. No research on consequences of two changes:
    a. Recent access of politicians to electronic media
    b. "Narrowcasting," which targets segmented audiences
6. Politicians continue to seek visuals even after they are elected
7. New era of electronic journalism emerging

II. The structure of the media

A. Degree of competition
1. Newspapers
    a. Number of newspapers has not declined
    b. Number of cities with multiple papers *has* declined
        (1) 60 percent of cities had competing newspapers in 1900
        (2) 4 percent in 1972
2. Radio and television
    a. Intensely competitive, becoming more so
    b. Composed mostly of locally owned and managed enterprises, unlike Europe
    c. Orientation to local market
    d. Limitations by FCC—widespread ownership created

B. The national media
1. Existence somewhat offsets local orientation
2. Consists of
    a. Wire services
    b. National magazines
    c. Television networks
    d. Newspapers with national readerships
3. Significance
    a. Washington officials follow it closely
    b. Reporters and editors different from local press a distinctive group
        (1) Better paid
        (2) From more prestigious universities

(3) More liberal outlook
(4) Do investigative or interpretive stories
4. Roles played
a. Gatekeeper: what is news, for how long
(1) Auto safety
(2) Water pollution
(3) Prescription drugs
(4) Crime rates
b. Scorekeeper: who is winning, losing
(1) Attention to Iowa, New Hampshire
(2) Gary Hart in 1984
c. Watchdog: investigate personalities and expose scandals
(1) Hart's name, birth date, in 1984; Donna Rice in 1987
(2) Watergate (Woodward and Bernstein)

III. Rules governing the media
A. Newspapers versus electronic media
1. Newspapers almost entirely free from government regulation
a. Prosecutions only after the fact and limited: libel, obscenity, incitement
2. Radio and television licensed, regulated
B. Confidentiality of sources
1. Reporters want right to keep sources confidential
2. Most states and federal government disagree
3. Supreme Court allows government to compel reporters to divulge information in court if it bears on a crime
4. Myron Farber jailed for contempt
5. Police search of newspaper office upheld
C. Regulation and deregulation
1. FCC licensing
a. Seven years for radio
b. Five years for television
c. Stations must serve "community needs"
d. Public service, other aspects can be regulated
2. Recent movement to deregulate
a. License renewal by postcard
b. No hearing unless opposed
c. Relaxation of rule enforcement
3. Other radio and television regulations
a. Equal time rule
b. Right of reply rule
c. Political editorializing rule
4. Fairness doctrine was abolished in 1987
D. Campaigning
1. Equal time rule applies
a. Equal access for all candidates
b. Rates no higher than least expensive commercial rate
c. Debates formerly had to include all candidates
(1) Reagan-Carter debate sponsored by LWV as "news event"
(2) Now stations and networks can sponsor
2. Efficiency in reaching voters
a. Works well when market and district overlap
b. Fails when they are not aligned
c. More Senate than House candidates buy TV time

IV. The effects of the media on politics
A. Studies on media influence on elections
1. Generally inconclusive, because of citizens'
a. Selective attention
b. Mental tune-out

2. Products can be sold more easily than candidates
3. Newspaper endorsements of candidates
    a. Often of Republicans locally, whereas Democrats endorsed nationally
    b. But worth 5 percent of vote to endorsed Democrats

B. Major effect is on how politics is conducted, not how people vote
1. Conventions scheduled to accommodate television coverage
2. Candidates win party nomination via media exposure
    a. Estes Kefauver
3. Issues established by media attention
    a. Environment
    b. Consumer issues
4. Issues that are important to citizens similar to those in media
    a. TV influences political agenda
    b. But people less likely to take media cues on matters that affect them personally
5. Newspaper readers see bigger candidate differences than do TV viewers
6. TV news affects popularity of presidents; commentaries have short-term effect

V. Government and the news

A. Prominence of the president
1. Theodore Roosevelt: systematic cultivation of the press
2. Franklin Roosevelt: press secretary a major instrument for cultivating press
3. Press secretary today: large staff, many functions
4. White House press corps is the focus of press secretary
5. Unparalleled personalization of government

B. Coverage of Congress
1. Never equal to that of president; members resentful
2. House quite restrictive
    a. No cameras on floor until 1978
    b. Sometimes refused to permit coverage of committees
    c. Gavel-to-gavel coverage of proceedings since 1979
3. Senate more open
    a. Hearings since Kefauver; TV coverage of sessions in 1986
    b. Incubator for presidential contenders through committee hearings

VI. Interpreting political news

A. Are news stories slanted?
1. Most people believe media, especially television, from which they get most news
    a. But percentage that think media biased is increasing
    b. Press itself thinks it is unbiased
2. Liberal bias of national media elite
3. Various factors influence how stories are written
    a. Deadlines
    b. Audience attraction
    c. Fairness, truth imposed by professional norms
    d. Reporters', editors' beliefs
4. Types of stories
    a. Routine stories: public events regularly covered
        (1) Reported similarly by all media; opinions of journalists have least effect
        (2) Can be misreported: Tet offensive
    b. Selected stories: public but not routinely covered
        (1) Selection involves perception of what is important
        (2) Liberal and conservative papers do different stories
        (3) Increasing in number; reflect views of press more than experts or public
    c. Insider stories: not usually made public; motive problem

5. Studies on effects of journalistic opinions
    a. Nuclear power: antinuclear slant
    b. School busing: probusing
    c. Media "spin" almost inevitable
6. Insider stories raise questions of informant's motives
    a. From official background briefings of the past . . .
    b. . . . To critical inside stories of post-Watergate era

B. Why do we have so many news leaks?
    1. Constitution: separation of powers
        a. Power is decentralized
        b. Branches of government compete
        c. Not illegal to print most secrets
    2. Adversarial nature of the press since Watergate
        a. Press and politicians distrust each other
        b. Media are eager to embarrass officials
        c. Competition for awards
        d. Spurred by Irangate: arms for hostages
    3. Cynicism created era of attack journalism
        a. Most people do not like this kind of news
        b. Cynicism of media mirrors public's increasing cynicism of media
        c. People believe media slant coverage
    4. Public confidence in big business down and now media are big business
    5. Drive for market share forces media to use theme of corruption

C. Government constraints on journalists
    1. Reporters must strike a balance between
        a. Expression of views
        b. Retaining sources
    2. Abundance of congressional staffers makes it easier
    3. Governmental tools to fight back
        a. Numerous press officers
        b. Press releases—"canned news"
        c. Leaks and background stories to favorites
        d. Bypass national press for local
        e. Presidential rewards and punishments for reporters based on their stories

C. Key Terms Match

Match the following terms and descriptions:

a. Associated Press
b. attack journalism
c. canned news
d. community needs
e. equal time rule
f. fairness doctrine
g. FCC
h. feature stories
i. Freedom of Information Act
j. insider stories
k. loaded language

1. ____ British legislation to punish officials who divulge private government business
2. ____ U.S. legislation guaranteeing citizens access to certain government documents
3. ____ An organization founded for the telegraphic dissemination of news in 1848
4. ____ Sensationalized news reporting
5. ____ Investigative reporters such as Lincoln Steffens
6. ____ Filmed stories for evening television news
7. ____ The government agency charged with regulating the electronic media
8. ____ Information from a government official who can be quoted by name

(continued)

l. market (television)
m. muckrakers
n. Official Secrets Act
o. off the record
p. on background
q. on deep background
r. on the record
s. reckless disregard
t. right-of-reply rule
u. routine stories
v. selective attention
w. sound bite
x. trial balloon
y. visuals
z. White House press corps
aa. yellow journalism

9. ____ Information from an official that cannot be printed
10. ____ Information from an official that can be printed, but not attributed to the official by name
11. ____ Information from an official that can be printed, but not attributed at all
12. ____ A court standard for finding the media guilty of libeling officials
13. ____ An official criterion for the renewal of broadcast licenses
14. ____ A principle that formerly obligated broadcasters to present both sides of an issue
15. ____ An obligation on broadcasters to give all candidates equal access to the media
16. ____ An area easily reached by one television signal
17. ____ The tendency of people to see what they like and ignore what they do not like
18. ____ Reporters regularly assigned to cover the president
19. ____ Public events regularly covered by reporters
20. ____ Public events not regularly covered by reporters
21. ____ Events that become public only if revealed to reporters
22. ____ Press releases or other news items prepared for reporters
23. ____ Journalism that seizes upon information that might question the character or qualifications of a public official
24. ____ Words that reflect a value judgment, used to persuade the listener without making an argument
25. ____ An FCC rule permitting a person the right to respond if attacked on a broadcast other than in a regular news program
26. ____ A brief statement no longer than a few seconds used on a radio or television broadcast
27. ____ Information provided to the media by an anonymous source as a way of testing reaction to a potential policy or appointment

D. Did You Think That . . . ?

Below are listed a number of misconceptions. You should be able to refute each statement in the space provided, referring to information or argumentation contained in this chapter. Sample answers appear at the end of the Handbook.

1. "Freedom of the press means that Congress cannot regulate the mass media."

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JOURNALISM 101: HUMAN NATURE

The people of the press are people, too. So where does that leave the idea of objectivity?

By ANNA QUINDLEN

A FUNNY THING HAPPENED TO ME ON THE WAY TO this column. I endorsed a presidential candidate.

For those of you who have spent months looking at the television screen over a slice of pizza and saying, "I don't care if Kevin Costner is the Reform Party candidate, I'm voting for George W.," this may not seem remarkable. But in the journalistic profession it is not at all the done thing, even among opinion columnists. Careful readers may see this as vainglorious. If a list of a dozen columnists were to be drawn up and a four-part grid laid out next to it, not unlike one of those "what do your color choices say about you?" quizzes in lifestyle magazines, many could effortlessly drop the pundit into the appropriate box: liberal, conservative, Republican, Democrat. Except for Dave Barry, who I suppose is the Jesse Ventura of columnists.

But reporters and editors and even opinion columnists are expected, according to the mostly unwritten rules, to be on the outside looking in, to reflect events without becoming part of them. This is a cornerstone of the profession, embodied by the venerable Walter Lippmann decades ago in a single word: objectivity. A lofty goal, a great notion. Yet at some level the notion is nonsense, and it has helped to poison the compact between the people and the press in present-day news reporting.

Take a report released by the Women's Leadership Fund about the press coverage of female gubernatorial candidates. It found that personal characteristics were more often reported, and stands on the issues less often reported, in stories about women running for office. The study concluded that the candidacies of women may be subtly undercut by that sort of coverage.

This is bad, and it should change. But it also reflects not simply the press but the world. After all those years of hearing "How do I look?" there are men who think the color of a woman's dress is a worthy factoid, and even some women who think so, too. The Leadership Fund's study doesn't show a conscious pattern of sexist bias on the part of a male-dominated press, although there's still some of that around. It reflects imperfect human behavior.

And that's what the people need to understand about the press: that reporters are human. The thing is the press needs to admit it, too. The discussions of objectivity have often made news gathering sound like a cross between a standardized test and a fugue state, in which the reporter becomes a tabula rasa, reflecting truth like a mirror. This is impossible even under the best of circumstances. Reporters and editors bring to the table their backgrounds, their friendship circles, their covert prejudices. Along with deadline pressures, these things shape whom they choose to talk to, what they manage to see and how they put all this together in words and pictures. The effect is usually subtle. But the effect is always there.

Sometimes it is not subtle at all. I happened to be in our nation's capital when the story broke about the president and the then unnamed intern. Washington is a city in which reporters learn what Americans are thinking by talking to—and sometimes dating—political operatives and lobbyists; thus after three days I began repeating the prevailing opinion, that the days of the Clinton presidency were numbered. When I returned home I was deprogrammed and subsequently realized that the president was sullied but safe. Reporters, however, were in grave danger of appearing seamy and foolish.

Yet the Lewinsky debacle may have marked a turn for the better. In its wake the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press did a survey that showed, as usual, that people were disgusted with the media. But the center also did a survey that showed that journalists were more critical than ever of their own standards, and terribly concerned about the distrust of readers.

Readers are in a better position to deal with that distrust than at any moment in history. Don't trust press reporting of the debates? Watch them yourself. Believe one newspaper or news magazine is biased? Skim two, or three, or read the wire stories online. Not interested in Monica's diet or Newt's divorce? C-Span, friend, C-Span. Where once there were only three evening news programs, now there are dozens. Never before has it been possible to learn so much from so many different sources in so many different fashions.

But none of that should let reporters off the hook. The problem is that the press sometimes seems to suggest that reporting is objective science, that there is no scrim between the reader and the information. But there is always a scrim. The scrim is the reporter. And some reporters manage to shave it to a shadow, while others get in the reader's way, not usually because of overt bias but because of the limitation of their talents. We always carry with us what we've learned and those we like. But the best reporters, whether among the old guys in hats who once populated city rooms or the lacquered consonant-cracking princesses of local TV news, use that only as a starting point. Objectivity is a goal. Curiosity is the way to get there.

So what can readers conclude from the fact that six months ago, before I had returned to journalism, I gave a speech in support of Bill Bradley? Perhaps that I'll favor one man over another. Maybe just the opposite. In "Fat Man in a Middle Seat," his self-deprecating memoir of a reporter's life, Jack Germond writes of one campaign, "I wondered at times whether I was not bending over backward to be hard on Udall because I liked him so much. That happens sometimes with reporters." Certainly I'll feel readers looking over my shoulder whenever I write about the presidential race. But in the relationship between the people and the people of the press, that's always part of the deal. Together, somehow, we make sense of the world, in a fashion that, if we are being honest, is eminently satisfactory, and yet often satisfies no one.

Summary Questions

1. Why does the author believe that "old style" political heroes are no longer possible?
2. It has been said that American voters prefer a "candidate of the people, but not like the people." What does this mean? Would Meyrowitz agree with this assertion?

8.2

The Mass Media: Free and Independent?

Michael Parenti

It is usually conceded that the mass media set the agenda for public debate, but there is a great deal of disagreement over the extent of the agenda. Are important issues left out? Are certain ideas systematically excluded from public consideration? How free are the media to act as a watchdog by addressing items that are potentially embarrassing to government and important economic interests?

Michael Parenti believes that the American media simply cannot either seriously scrutinize government and economic elites or facilitate genuinely open political debate. He sees mass communications essentially as a business, run by businesspeople for profit and increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few corporations. One result is that the media favor business and capitalism and discredit opposing views or fail to give them a fair hearing. This orientation extends to coverage of foreign affairs. In Parenti's view, government manipulation of the press is common, and government agencies have a long history of suppressing information they do not want the public to have.

For all the talk about a free press, it comes as a shock to some people to discover that the major media are an increasingly concentrated component of corporate America, being themselves giant companies or subsidiaries of conglomerates controlled by a small number of top banks and corporations, and

Michael Parenti received his Ph.D. from Yale University and has taught political science at a number of colleges and universities.

a handful of rich conservative tycoons like Rupert Murdoch and Walter Annenberg. Murdoch, for instance, owns major newspapers in England, Australia, New York, and Chicago, a European cable network, and is co-owner of 20th Century Fox and a chain of television stations in the United States. Another example: the Tribune Company owns, besides the *Chicago Tribune* and the Chicago Cubs, television stations in Los Angeles, Atlanta, New Orleans, and Denver, five radio stations, fifteen cable television systems, and the *New York Daily News*. As Charles Perlik, president of the Newspaper Guild, observed: "The news industry has always been a business, run by businessmen—and an occasional businesswoman. Today it is in danger of being run—and overrun—by financiers."[1]

Of the "independent" television stations, 80 percent are affiliates of one of the three major networks, NBC, CBS, and ABC. Except for the local news, practically all the shows they run are network programs. Most of the remaining "independents" are affiliated with NET, the "educational" network, which receives most of its money from the Ford Foundation (controlled largely by the Morgan and Rockefeller banks) and a few allied foundations. The Ford Foundation picks NET's board of directors and reserves the right to inspect every program produced with Ford money.

Newspapers show a similar pattern of ownership. Two-thirds of the 1700-odd dailies, controlling 80 percent of circulation, are owned by chains like Gannett and Knight-Ridder. The trend in ownership concentration continues unabated, as the large chains buy not only independent papers but other chains. The "free and independent American press" is largely a monopoly press. Less than 4 percent of American cities have competing newspapers under separate ownership; and in cities where there is a "choice," the newspapers offer little variety in ideological perspective and editorial policy. In general, newspapers vary mostly from moderately conservative to ultraconservative, with a smaller number that are centrist or tepidly liberal.

Most of the "independent" dailies rely on the wire services and big-circulation papers for stories, syndicated columnists, and special features. Like television stations, they are independent more in name than content. Coverage of national and local affairs is usually scant, superficial—consisting of a few brief "headline" stories and a number of conservative or simply banal commentaries and editorials.

Along with the accelerated concentration of ownership is the growing trend toward cross-media conglomerates, as corporations and banks engage in mammoth multibillion-dollar takeovers of newspapers, television and radio stations, magazines, publishing houses, and movie studios. What fuels these record-breaking mergers? As one conservative publication explains: "The profits are almost unbelievable."[2] Like other businesses, the media corporations are diversified and multinational, controlling print, broadcast, and film outlets throughout Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East—as well as in Europe and North America.

Government coercion and official censorship are not the only threats to freedom of the press. As a report by one group of scholars noted, protection

against the state is not enough: "The owners and managers of the press determine which person, which facts, which version of the facts, and which ideas shall reach the public."[3] The pro-business, conservative, and centrist biases of the mainstream media are readily evident. Given the media's pattern of ownership and dependency on big-business advertising, labor unions have few opportunities to present programs on the needs and struggles of working people. Peace activists seldom get a chance to challenge the military-industrial complex. Information favorable to existing socialist countries is systematically suppressed. . . .

Of the many interesting documentaries made by independent film producers, dealing critically with racism, women's oppression, labor oppression, corporate environmental abuse, the FBI, and U.S. imperialism in Central America and elsewhere, few if any have ever gained access to commercial movie houses or major television networks. In 1986, for instance, the documentary *Faces of War*, revealing the destructive U.S.-supported counterinsurgency waged against the people of El Salvador, was denied broadcast rights in twenty-two major television markets.

Journalists express concern about having their stories killed, about getting reassigned, passed over for promotion, and fired. *New York Times* columnist Tom Wicker testifies:

> When I was *Times* bureau chief in Washington, I was a member of the League of Gentlemen [i.e., the established elite]; otherwise I never would have been bureau chief. Time after time, good reporters . . . complained about not being able to get stories in the paper. And time after time I said to them, "You're just not going to get *that* in the *New York Times* . . . it's too reliant on your judgment rather than on official judgment, it's too complex, it contradicts the official record more flagrantly than the conventions of daily journalism allow."[4]

News reports on business rely mostly on business sources and allow little space for the views of antibusiness critics, or the communities and individuals afflicted by business. Reports about State Department or Pentagon policies rely heavily on State Department and Pentagon releases. Media coverage of the space program uncritically accepts the government's claims about the program's desirability and seldom gives exposure to the arguments made against it.

An Official Press

Far from being vigilant critics, most news organizations share the counterrevolutionary, anticommunist assumptions and vocabulary of the media magnates who own them. For years the press has supported cold-war policies, indulging in an unremitting Soviet-bashing and a hatred and fear of existing socialist societies that is so formidable in its ideological monopoly as to permeate even much of the American left. The Vietnam War was portrayed in the media as a noble but ill-conceived venture, with little attention given to the underlying class interests and to the horrendous devastation wreaked by U.S. forces upon the Vietnamese people and their society and environment. . . .

For twenty-five years, the Shah of Iran, a friend of the U.S. oil companies and a product of the CIA, maimed and murdered tens of thousands of dissident workers, students, peasants and intellectuals. For the most part, the American press ignored these terrible happenings and portrayed Iran as a citadel of stability and the Shah as an enlightened modernizer. However, when the Polish government cracked down on the Solidarity union in Poland in December 1981, resulting in the death of several miners and the incarceration of several thousand other people, every network, newspaper, and newsmagazine gave these events top-story play for weeks on end. . . .

The business-owned media treats the atrocities of U.S.-sponsored rightist regimes with benign neglect while casting a stern, self-righteous eye on popular revolutions, as in Nicaragua. Generally the press defames leftist movements and governments and supports those right-wing pro-capitalist dictatorships that are clients of the multinational corporations.

When seven political parties participated in elections in Nicaragua in 1984, with each accorded funds and free television time by the government during a campaign judged to be fair and open by teams of observers from neutral countries, the U.S. media—following the White House line—treated the election as a rigged affair conducted under "unfair conditions." The news media never provided evidence to support that conclusion, but simply repeated the charges in successive news stories and editorials. That same year, however, the U.S.-sponsored election held in El Salvador between two right-wing candidates, under highly coercive and restricted conditions—including the lack of secret ballots—was hailed in the U.S. press as a great blossoming of democracy (in a country where most of the labor-union leadership had been assassinated along with thousands of other opponents of the regime). . . .

The workings of the capitalist political economy remain another area uncharted by the news media. The need to invest surplus capital; the tendency toward a falling rate of profit; the drive toward profit maximization; the instability, recession, inflation, and underemployment—these and other such problems are treated superficially, if at all, by newspersons and commentators who have neither the knowledge nor the permission to make critical analyses of multinational corporatism. Instead, economic adversity is ascribed to innocent and unavoidable causes, such as "hard times." One television commentator put it this way: "Inflation is the culprit and in inflation everyone is guilty." When economic news is reported, it is almost always from management's viewpoint.

Each evening the network news programs faithfully report the Dow Jones stock-exchange averages, but stories deemed important to organized labor are scarcely ever touched upon, according to a study made by union members. Reporters fail to enlist labor's views on national questions. Unions are usually noticed only when they go on strike, but the issues behind the strike, such as job security, occupational and public safety, and resistance to loss of benefits are

seldom acknowledged. The misleading impression is that labor simply turns down "good contracts" because it wants too much for itself.

There are few militantly progressive and no avowedly socialist commentators and editorialists in the mass media. Of the liberal columnists and commentators, most take care to present themselves as judiciously moderate—that is, they avoid class issues and direct confrontations with class power, knowing full well who their employers are and under what limits they are working. Some liberal commentators have been refused radio spots even on the relatively infrequent occasions they have had sponsors who would pay. When independent liberal groups manage to muster enough money to buy broadcasting time or newspaper space, they still may be denied access to the media—as has happened to those wanting to run ads against the Vietnam War, the nuclear arms buildup, and U.S. intervention in Central America.

Denied access to the major media, the political left has attempted to get its message across through little magazines and radical newspapers, publications that suffer chronic financial difficulties and sometimes harassment from police, FBI, rightist vigilantes, the IRS, and the U.S. Postal Service. Dissenters also attempt to make themselves heard by mobilizing great numbers of people in public protest. But popular demonstrations against official policies are often trivialized, undercounted, and accorded minimal coverage by the business-owned media. The September 1981 march on Washington, in which a half million working people protested Reagan's policies, was the largest ever to take place in that city. In June 1982, upwards of a million people marched in New York to protest nuclear armaments in the largest demonstration in U.S. history. However, neither historic event received direct coverage (unlike the marriage of England's Prince Charles or the funeral of Monaco's Princess Grace). The networks preferred to concentrate on sporting events on those days, giving but a few minutes of evening news to these massive expressions of popular sentiment.

This is not to say that the press is entirely immune to mass pressures. If, despite the media's misrepresentation and neglect, a well-organized and persistent public opinion builds around an issue or set of issues, the press eventually feels compelled to acknowledge its existence. If the popular opinion is strong and widespread and *if it does not attack the capitalist system as a system*, it can occasionally break through the media-controlled sound barrier, albeit with selected images. On occasion, acts of skulduggery and cover-up are committed in high places involving no class-wide interest as such but leaving prominent personages—presidential cabinet members or even the president—vulnerable before the law. When elite power is thus weakened for a time and held accountable to law in a democratic way, then it is hard to keep the press from digging into the story, especially an important one like the Watergate scandal or the Iran-contra connection. In such instances, conservatives are convinced the press is a liberal conspiracy dedicated to wrecking the system. . . .

To combat what they see as the ideological "softness" of the centrist media, hardcore ultraconservatives have launched repeated attacks on specific newspersons and have induced corporations to withdraw their advertising support from certain programs. They have organized corporate proxy fights against those news organizations deemed not sufficiently sympathetic to the right's message, and have poured millions of dollars into building new media outlets to compete with the centrist media; these include the religious right's radio network, consisting of 1,300 local stations, and two national networks, PTL and CBN; each has almost as many affiliates as ABC. Spreading the gospel is only one concern of the Christian rightists; most of the programming is economically conservative, militaristic, phobically anticommunist, antiunion, and hostile toward the needs of minorities.

It is said that a free and independent press is a necessary condition for democracy, and it is frequently assumed that the United States is endowed with such a press. While the news in "totalitarian" nations is controlled, we Americans supposedly have access to a wide range of competing sources. In reality, the controls exerted in the United States, while more subtle than in some other countries, leave us with a press that is far from "free" by any definition of the word. When it comes to getting the other side of the story, Americans are a rather deprived people. U.S. programs can be heard throughout Eastern Europe via Voice of America. American films are regularly shown in socialist countries. Twenty percent of the television shows in Poland come from the United States. American novels and other books are translated and widely read in the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries. Cubans can watch Miami television and listen to a half dozen U.S. radio stations and to Spanish-language Voice of America programs. But how many Americans are exposed to the media and literature of socialist countries? More importantly, how many Americans get information about their *own* country, from *within* their own country, that is contrary to the capitalist orthodoxy? . . .

The Politics of Entertainment

While the entertainment sector of the media, as opposed to the news sector, supposedly has nothing to do with politics, entertainment programs in fact undergo a rigorous political censorship. Shows that treat controversial, antiestablishment subjects often have trouble getting sponsors and network time. The censorship code used by Procter & Gamble, the largest television advertiser in the United States, for programs it sponsors states in part: "Members of the armed forces must not be cast as villains. If there is any attack on American custom, it must be rebutted completely on the same show."[5] Truly radical themes are eschewed by both the networks and Hollywood. On the rare occasions a leftist film is produced, such as *1900*, or *Reds*, or *Burn*, it is likely to be accorded a limited distribution.

But entertainment shows contain plenty of politics of their own. Be it adventure film, prime-time drama, or soap opera, adversities are caused by ill-willed

individuals rather than by the economic and social system in which they live, and problems are solved by individual effort within the system rather than collective effort against it. Evening soap operas like "Dallas" and "Dynasty" depict a corporate world of ruthless tycoons engaged in an amoral pursuit of wealth, power, and sex—but the audience is invited to identify with, rather than reject, it all.

Revolutionaries and foreign agents are seen as menacing our land, and the military and police as protecting it. Movies like *Rambo* glorify the killing of Communists and depict Russians as subhumans who delight in torture and atrocity. Other films like *Red Dawn* and *Invasion USA*, and television specials like ABC's "Amerika," offer fantasy depictions of the conquest of the United States by Soviet troops—assisted by Cubans and Nicaraguans. The message is clear: the Soviets are our inexorable enemy and we had better not expect to live in peace and friendship with them. . . .

In the media, women appear less often than men and primarily in subsidiary roles as housewives, secretaries, and girlfriends, who are usually incapable of initiating responsible actions of their own. In media advertisements it is even worse: women seem predominantly concerned with being cheery, mindless handmaidens who shampoo a fluffy glow into their hair, wax floors shiny bright, make yummy coffee for hubby, and get Junior's grimy clothes sparkling clean. One-fifth of all television time is taken up with commercials that often characterize people as loudmouthed imbeciles whose problems are solved when they encounter the right medication, cosmetic, or cleanser. In this way, industry confines the social imagination and cultural experience of millions, teaching people to define their needs and life-styles (and those of hubby, wifey, and baby) according to the dictates of the commodity market.

For years, characters who were Afro-American, Latino, or some other ethnic minority were given little exposure except in unflattering stereotyped roles. When minorities have made appearances in cop shows, it has been most often as crooks, pimps, informers, or persons in need of assistance from White professionals. Working people in general, be they White, Black, Latino, or whatever, have little representation in the entertainment media except as uncouth, simple persons, hoodlums, sidekicks, and other stock characters. The tribulations of working-class people in this society—their struggle to make ends meet; the specter of unemployment; the lack of decent recreational facilities; the victimization by unscrupulous landlords and realty developers; the loss of pensions and seniority; the bitter strikes and the historical and ever-present battle for unionization, better wages, and work conditions; the dirty, noisy, mindless, dangerous quality of industrial work; the lives wrecked by work-connected injury and disease—these and other realities are given little if any dramatic treatment in the business-owned media.

In recent years, however, partly in response to the public pressure of a more politically advanced audience, there have been changes for the better. Various television series like "Hill Street Blues," "St. Elsewhere," "Cagney and Lacey," "Who's the Boss," and "Hail to the Chief" have offered plots with some social content and have projected women and minorities as intelligent and capable persons, sometimes as doctors, lawyers, district attorneys, police lieutenants, or as occupying other positions of authority and empowerment. Situation comedies continue to be loaded with a contrived and frenetically aggressive or downright silly humor. But in some of the better ones, like "The Cosby Show," minorities are portrayed as intelligent, likable, and decent people. And in a few rare films, such as *Norma Rae*, the struggles of working people have been given respectful attention.

Not all air time is given to commercial gain. The Federal Communications Commission requires that broadcasters devote some time to public-service announcements. Like the free space donated by newspapers and magazines, this time is monopolized by the Advertising Council, a group composed of representatives from the networks and big business. No public-interest groups are represented. While supposedly "nonpolitical," the Council's "public service" commercials laud the blessings of free enterprise and falsely claim that business is "doing its job" in hiring veterans, minorities, and the poor. Workers are exhorted to take pride in their work and produce more for their employers—but nothing is said about employers paying more to their workers. The ads blame pollution on everyone (but not on industry) and treat littering as the major environmental problem. In general, social and political problems are reduced to individual failings or evaded altogether. Air time that could be used by conservationists and labor, consumer, and other public-interest groups has been preempted by an Advertising Council that passes off its one-sided ads as noncontroversial and nonpartisan.

Repressing the Press

On those rare occasions when the news media expose the murky side of official doings, they are likely to encounter serious discouragements from public authorities. Government officeholders treat news that places them in an unfavorable light as "slanted" and criticize reporters for not presenting the "accurate" and "objective" (that is, uncritical and supportive) viewpoint. These kinds of attacks allow the media to appear as defenders of free speech against government pressure, instead of supporters of the established order as they more commonly have been.

The federal government has used the FBI to harass and arrest newspersons who persist in writing troublesome news reports. The Justice Department won a Supreme Court decision requiring reporters to disclose their information sources to grand-jury investigators, in effect reducing the press to an investigative arm of the courts and the prosecution—the very officialdom over whom it is supposed to act as a watchdog. Dozens of reporters have since been jailed or threatened with prison terms on the basis of that decision. On repeated occasions the

government has subpoenaed documents, tapes, and other materials used by news media. Such interference imposes a "chilling effect" on the press, a propensity—already evident in news reports—to slide over the more troublesome aspects of a story and censor oneself in order to avoid censorship by those in power.

To offer one of numerous recent examples: in May 1986, William Casey, then CIA director, threatened to prosecute NBC, the *Washington Post*, and other media, for printing stories that supposedly violated "national security." One of these stories concerned an American who was charged with selling the Soviets information about how U.S. submarines were spying in Soviet harbors. But if the Soviets already knew about this, then suppressing the story would only keep it from the American people. While the U.S. government attempts to prevent unauthorized leaks to the press, it itself continually leaks information when it serves official purposes. As *New York Times* columnist James Reston noted, the administration "leaks the baloney it thinks people will swallow, and threatens to sue anybody who publishes information it wants to suppress."[6]

In 1986 the Reagan administration admitted that it had generated misinformation against Libyan leader Colonel Qaddafi as part of a campaign to overthrow him. This revelation evoked shocked comments from newspaper editors and executive producers of news shows—as if it were the first time the government had ever tried to manipulate the press. In fact, most American presidents and other top officials have attempted to manipulate the news flow. . . .

In 1983, the White House refused to let reporters cover the U.S. invasion of Grenada, thus making certain that the public would get only the official version. This was the first time in U.S. history the press had been banned from covering a war. "The exclusion of reporters during the first days of the Grenada invasion gave new meaning to the concept that no country can limit the freedom of others without also limiting it for itself."[7] While these curbs were supposed to be temporary, the government came up with a set of guidelines in October 1984 that were to be imposed on all future surprise military operations; these included limiting the number of reporters to a select pool, imposing press blackouts, and restricting coverage. . . .

Government manipulation of the press is a constant enterprise. Every day the White House, the Pentagon, and other agencies release thousands of self-serving statements and reports to the media, many of which are then uncritically transmitted to the public as information from independent news sources. White House staffers meet regularly with network bosses and publishers to discuss and complain about specific stories and reporters. They withhold information or feed misleading data to troublesome journalists. And in the 1980s the administration increased its control over what becomes news by severely reducing reporters' expectations about having full access. As the *New York Times*'s Washington editor, Bill Kovach, stated: "[The administration's] whole attitude is that government information belongs to the government." Helen Thomas of UPI, dean of the White House press corps, complained: "They [the administration] pick the story every day. They pick the one that will almost invariably wind up on the

nightly news, and that's the one they answer questions on or give access to information about. [On] a lot of events, we're absolutely blacked out, and if you don't like it, too bad. The whole attitude is: We will tell you what we think you should know."[8]

From what has been said so far it should be clear that one cannot talk about a "free press" apart from the economic and political realities that determine who owns and controls the media. As [Herbert] Schiller asks: "How may at least a part of the nation's information and cultural apparatus be rescued from near-total corporate control and made accountable and accessible to the viewing, listening and reading public?"[9]

There is no such thing as unbiased news. All reports and analyses are selective and inferential to some inescapable degree—all the more reason to provide a wider ideological spectrum of opinions and not let one bias predominate. If in fact we do consider censorship to be a loathsome danger to our freedom, then we should not overlook the fact that the media are already heavily censored by those who own and control them. The very process of selection allows the cultural and political biases and class interests of the selector to operate as a censor. Some measure of ideological heterodoxy could be achieved if public law required all newspapers and broadcasting stations to allot substantial portions of space and time to a diverse array of political opinion, including the most progressive and revolutionary. But given the interests the law serves, this is not a likely development.

An existing statute, known as the Fairness Doctrine, requires that unpaid time be given to an opposing viewpoint—only if a particular editorial opinion is voiced, which discourages some stations from engaging in discussions of political questions. The law makes no requirement as to the diversity of the opposing viewpoints, so usually the range is between two slightly different establishment stances. In the 1980s, the Reagan administration all but ceased enforcing the Fairness Doctrine, with the consequence that advocacy advertising by corporations and well-financed conservative private organizations rose dramatically.* In 1985, these interests spent an estimated $1.8 billion to communicate their views on a variety of public issues. Advocacy ads tend to be emotionally charged appeals paid by corporate sponsors who often hide behind public-service sounding names. . . .

* In 1985 the Federal Communications Commission, reflecting the Reagan administration's deregulation policy, declared that the Fairness Doctrine unduly restricted the broadcast media in comparison with the print media. The FCC further argued that the plurality of media in American society makes the Fairness Doctrine unnecessary. The doctrine was not immediately scrapped, however, because the Commission was not sure whether Congress had mandated the requirement. A 1986 federal appeals court ruled that Congress had never fully embraced the rule, and the FCC no longer applies it. Attempts within Congress to reinstate the requirements have been unsuccessful.

With few exceptions, those who own the newspapers and networks will not relinquish their hold over private investments and public information. Ordinary citizens will have no real access to the media until they come to exercise control over the material resources that could give them such access, an achievement that would take a different kind of economic and social system than the one we have. In the meantime, Americans should have no illusions about the "free press" they are said to enjoy.

Notes

1. Charles Perlik, address before the Newspaper Guild, reprinted in the *Daily World*, November 7, 1985: As of the 1980s, the majority of all American newspapers, magazines, radio and television stations, publishing houses, and movie studios were controlled by fifty giant corporations, which themselves interlocked financially with massive industries and major banks: Ben Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983).
2. *U.S. News and World Report*, May 13, 1985.
3. Report by the Commission on Freedom of the Press, quoted in Robert Cirino, *Don't Blame the People* (New York: Vintage, 1972), 47.
4. Quoted in Kevin Kelly, " 'League of Gentlemen' Rates Media," *Guardian*, February 13, 1985.
5. Eric Barnouw, *The Television Writer* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1962), 27.
6. *New York Times*, May 21, 1986.
7. Mike Zagarell, "News Reporting—the Military Vies for Command," *World Magazine*, November 1, 1984, p. 8.
8. Both Kovach and Thomas are quoted in *Washington Post*, June 10, 1985.
9. Herbert Schiller, "Beyond the Media Merge Movement," *Nation*, June 8, 1985, pp. 696–98.

Summary Questions

1. According to Parenti, what items should be on the nation's political agenda that are not? Why does he believe political dialogue through the nation's mass media is one-sided?
2. In Parenti's view, how is censorship practiced in the United States? Why is it difficult for the media to resist censorship attempts by business and government?

8.3

Is There an Anti-Republican, Anti-Conservativ Media Tilt?

Larry Sabato

Given the importance of mass communications in modern campaigns, i not surprising that charges of media bias are frequently leveled by ca dates and their supporters who feel that opponents are being aided by the cont and tone of the news. In 1992 supporters of incumbent President Geo Bush and independent candidate Ross Perot felt particularly aggrieved, believ that the national news media were wittingly hostile to their respective choi while presenting news coverage that portrayed Democrat Bill Clinton in a fav able light.

In this article, Larry Sabato surveys the empirical evidence from the press c erage in the last presidential election and finds that, on the whole, "the pr was certainly a Clinton ally in 1992." Besides a much higher proportion of negat to positive references to Bush or Perot compared to Clinton in press and netw news stories, the media tilt was enhanced by late-night comics and so prime-time entertainment shows, such as "Murphy Brown," which bashed Rep licans and promoted Democrats. Particularly costly to the Bush campaign was t media's coverage of the economy: instead of focusing upon economic data t pointed to a recovery from the recession, coverage emphasized the negative especially unemployment rates.

Sabato believes that although the ideology and partisan identity of report played a role in the liberal, pro-Democrat slant of the media, in addition, Geo Bush was not well liked personally by reporters. Still another problem for Bu was the fact that "the press is traditionally tougher on an incumbent administ tion, whatever its party affiliation, especially so in hard times." Sabato conclud that the election results, however, did not hinge on media coverage since "pre tilt has a marginal-to-moderate effect, no more and no less."

A surprising number of prominent journalists and commentators, not from the conservative wing of their profession, insist that in the 19 general election the press leaned heavily in Bill Clinton's dire tion. Republicans are overwhelmingly of this opinion, having long ago consign

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journalists to the rung of hell reserved for Democrats. The Perotists would concur: George Bush and Ross Perot may not agree on much, but dislike for those Bush called the "nutty talking heads" and Perot termed "jerks" and "teenage boys" is one unifying element. (The first half of Bush's favorite slogan. "Annoy the Media—Reelect Bush" could easily have been adopted by Perot.)

Naturally enough, much of the media establishment disagrees with Bush, Perot, and the bold journalists whose critiques are cited above. NBC's political director, Bill Wheatley, declared, "I don't believe there was an active bias at work," while his network colleague, anchor Tom Brokaw, offered his own sound bite to dampen the controversy: "Bias, like beauty, is most often in the eye of the beholder." Thus, fairness prevailed, say most of the news business's high priests, and the press did not defeat Bush; Bush beat Bush.

The more one studies the remarkable case of 1992, the greater the likelihood of judging both sides of this debate partly correct. For 1992, the conclusions about the press tilt are essentially the same as they were in earlier years: "of course" the news media are biased, but "press tilt has a marginal-to-moderate effect, no more and no less. . ."

Broadcasters for Clinton

Television viewers could be forgiven for sometimes believing the acronyms ABC, NBC, and CBS stood for the American Broadcasters for Clinton, the National Broadcasters for Clinton, and the Clinton Broadcasting System. From Labor Day to Election Day the Center for Media and Public Affairs found that 71 percent of the substantive comments made about George Bush on ABC, NBC, and CBS by reporters and other "nonpartisan" sources were negative. Bill Clinton's evaluations among the same group were 52 percent positive. These totals excluded "horse race" remarks about who was likely to win the election—portrayals that favored Clinton by an even greater margin.

Another study, by PR Data Systems and Mead Data Center, suggests that print news organizations exhibited a similar bias. A painstaking content analysis of AP, UPI, and eleven major U.S. daily newspapers over the general election period showed that nearly three-quarters (72 percent) of all negative characterizations made in presidential debate stories and accompanying headlines were about Bush. Clinton garnered just 15 percent of these unfavorable mentions, and Perot only 13 percent. By contrast, Clinton was the beneficiary of almost half (48 percent) of the glowing characterizations and headlines, while Perot garnered 30 percent of the positive mentions and Bush a paltry 22 percent. Most observers rated Perot the best performer in the first debate, Clinton in the second, and Bush in the third, so even a healthy frontrunner's bonus could scarcely entitle Clinton to such a lion's share of kudos if fairness prevailed. The tilt to Clinton in the news pages was matched on the editorial pages, too, as Clinton became the first Democrat since Lyndon Johnson in 1964 to win more newspaper editorial endorsements than the Republican nominee.

Seemingly, everywhere one looked in the summer and autumn of 1992, Bush and Quayle were being bashed and Clinton and Gore were being hailed in the media. The *Washington Post* certainly fit the pattern, and when its ombudsman, Joann Byrd, scrutinized the newspaper's contents (including headlines and photographs) covering the campaign's last two and a half months, she reached the conclusion that her paper had a "very lopsided" tilt in Clinton's direction. For instance the *Post*'s Style section featured a glowing account of a Clinton-Gore bus trip headlined, "New Heartthrobs of the Heartland." And in one of the most embarrassing juxtapositions of the campaign, the *Post* hyped its mid-September public opinion poll showing a 21 percentage point lead for Clinton with a front page, top-left headline, "Clinton's Lead Appears Solid, May Be Growing." Just a week later, when its next poll revealed a much narrower 9-point lead for Clinton, the *Post* buried the story inside page A6 with the amusingly protective headline, "Clinton Slide in Survey Shows Perils of Polling." The news media tilt was supplemented by late-night comics and even some prime-time entertainment shows, such as "Murphy Brown," which piled on the Republicans and promoted the Democrats.

There were notable exceptions, of course. Broadcast personality Rush Limbaugh, with a weekly radio audience of over 12 million, aimed daily broadsides at the Clinton bandwagon. The *Washington Times* was slanted against Clinton from its masthead to its classified ads, with headlines and news stories so enthusiastically pro-Bush that at times it appeared to be a throwback to the nineteenth century's cheerleading party press. And many of the news approaches to Hillary Rodham Clinton suffered from a subtle—and sometimes blatant—sexism. But added together, these anti-Clinton transgressions are still no match for the collective pro-Clinton fare of the leading networks and newspapers.

Covering the Economy

Everyone agrees that the economy torpedoed Bush and elected Clinton. But was it the economy itself or the media depictions of it that turned voters against Bush? No one can say with any certainty, but the networks' descriptions of economic conditions sounded more like the Great Depression than the moderate recession and prolonged period of sluggish growth that characterized 1990–1992. Fully 96 percent of the economic evaluations on the evening newscasts during much of the general election were negative, as were 83 percent of the predictions about the economy's future performance. The latter undoubtedly helped to drive down consumer confidence still further, and make Bush's predictions of recovery seem fanciful and "out of touch" to voters.

These media characterizations of the economy were no minor matter. The state of the economy was unquestionably the central issue of the campaign and the

Late-night Political Humor in the 1992 Campaign

Candidate	Total No. of Letterman, Leno, and Arsenio Hall Jokes	Examples
George Bush	608	On Bush's alleged affair: "Wouldn't it be ironic if Barbara got a chance to throw him out of the White House before we got a chance to?" (Jay Leno, June 25, 1992).
		"Bush is now being accused of manufacturing the current crisis with Iraq. If it's true, it'll be the first manufacturing job he's brought to the U.S. in years." (Jay Leno, September 2, 1992).
		On Bush meeting with the postmaster general: "It wasn't an emergency or anything. Bush just needed one of those change-of-address kits." (Jay Leno, October 27, 1992).
Bill Clinton	423	"Top Ten Surprises in the United Nations' Sex Study: No. 10—Of the 100 million acts of love daily, most occur in Bill Clinton's campaign van." (David Letterman, June 25, 1992).
		"Bill Clinton said yesterday, 'It's not appropriate to go after someone's wife in the media.' He said, 'Going after someone's wife is better done discreetly, like at a cocktail party.' " (Jay Leno, August 25, 1992).
		On Clinton saying he's capable of commanding the U.S. military because he's headed the Arkansas National Guard: "Isn't that like saying you can fly the Space Shuttle because you've seen every episode of Star Trek?" (Jay Leno, August 31, 1992).
Dan Quayle	357	On Quayle being like Hamburger Helper: "You know he's in the Cabinet. You just hope you never have to use him." (Jay Leno, June 19, 1992).
		On Quayle's trip to Los Angeles: "Just what L.A. needs—another dumb blond." (Arsenio Hall, June 24, 1992).
		On Quayle meeting with Ronald Reagan: "That must have been interesting—someone who doesn't know what he's doing meeting with someone who can't remember what he did." (Jay Leno, September 9, 1992).
		"Top Ten ways Quayle prepared for the vice presidential debate: No. 7—Read book of inspirational stories about dumb guys who went up against smart guys—and won. No. 2— Reread his 'how a bill becomes a law' comic book." (David Letterman, October 13, 1992).

Late-night Political Humor in the 1992 Campaign *(continued)*

Candidate	Total No. of Letterman, Leno, and Arsenio Hall Jokes	Examples
Ross Perot	334	"I haven't seen a guy so mixed up about being in a race since Michael Jackson." (Arsenio Hall, September 25, 1992).
		"If he is not elected president he should go out to the airport. He'd make a great Hare Krishna." (Jay Leno, October 8, 1992).
		"Top Ten reasons Clinton is losing his lead: No. 2—Mor and more people like the idea of a tiny, insane millionair running things." (David Letterman, October 29, 1992).
Jerry Brown	106	On Brown's showing in the New York primary: "He finished fifth, behind Clinton, Tsongas, uncommitted, ar the older, fatter Elvis." (Johnny Carson, April 8, 1992).
		On Brown's 800 Number: "They put you on hold and pla a recording of his concession speech." (David Letterman, April 26, 1992).
		On a break-in at Brown's campaign headquarters: "Not too serious, I understand. The thieves got away with thre mood rings, two lava lamps, some magic crystals, [and] a couple of beaded curtains." (Jay Leno, June 22, 1992).
Al Gore	49	On Al Gore, Sr.'s comment that his son was raised for the job of vice president: "How do you raise someone [for that]? Do you put them in their room with nothing to do. Take them to a funeral and let them hang around? (Jay Leno, July 10, 1992).
		On Gore's speaking style: "I never thought I'd miss the charisma of Paul Tsongas." (Jay Leno, October 13, 1992).

Note: Other politicians (and total number of 1992 late-night jokes) who were frequent targets inclu Edward Kennedy (59), Patrick Buchanan (56), Ronald Reagan (53), and Paul Tsongas (51).
Sources: Numbers of jokes on the "Tonight Show with Jay Leno," "Late Night with David Letterma and the "Arsenio Hall Show" were compiled by the Center for Media and Public Affairs. All of calend year 1992 was surveyed. The joke examples were selected from campaign issues of *Hotline* from January 1992 to November 3, 1992.

chief source of President Bush's woes. A positive press spin suggesting economi recovery could have helped Bush regenerate lost momentum and would hav undercut Clinton's major campaign thrust. But not only did Bush not receive a assist, the news media repeatedly ignored or downplayed nearly every encourag

Media Comments on the 1992 Campaign

"Indeed, coverage of the campaign vindicated exactly what conservatives have been saying for years about liberal bias in the media."

Jacob Weisberg, *The New Republic*

"I sensed and observed a bias toward Clinton and more liberal policies and positions."

Richard Benedetto, *USA Today*

"There seems little doubt—at least in this corner—that press coverage was tilted against Bush during much of the campaign."

David Gergen, *U.S. News & World Report*

"[The pro-Clinton] bias of reporters, editors, the whole crew . . . brought about a tilt that was more pervasive and obvious than I've ever seen."

Hugh Sidney, *Time*

"The coverage has not been equal, not been fair."

Reid Collins, CNN

ing sign of an ongoing recovery that was slowly picking up steam. Near the end of the campaign, when the U.S. gross domestic product was announced to have grown by a strong 2.7 percent in the third quarter, most major media outlets pooh-poohed the news, some even implying the government's books had been cooked to make Bush look good at a critical moment. After the election, when the government released the final revised GDP growth rate for the third quarter, the statistic turned out to be 3.4 percent—an even better showing than Bush had been able to trumpet.

Was this just an isolated incident, one where skeptical reportorial juices were flowing freely as election day approached? Not according to a number of experienced financial reporters who attended the Commerce and Labor Departments' briefings throughout the campaign. Some colleagues, they noted, openly cheered bad economic statistics and booed good ones, hoping for the best spin from Clinton's perspective. These personal reactions would be revealing but harmless enough, as long as the resulting stories were not affected by the bias. Yet many news reports of economic statistics seemed to share the same slant. When the civilian unemployment rate rose, the headlines logically reflected that bad news. But when it fell in the summer and autumn, that fact was sometimes de-emphasized or even buried in print stories, with more obscure, unfavorable jobless statistics—such as private, nonfarm payroll employment—highlighted in the headlines. For example, in early September when overall unemployment edged down a tenth of a point, to 7.6 percent, the front pages of both the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* headlined instead the loss of 167,000 private nonfarm jobs. Said one financial reporter for a major news service, "Financial markets paid attention to the [private nonfarm] number, but even

professional economists weren't uniformly focused on that drop. and I hav never [before] seen a paper lead with it in a general news report."

The Big Tilt

The media's Democratic tilt is not new to many voters. A post-election surve by the Times-Mirror Center for the People and the Press found that 35 percen of the voters believed the press had been unfair to George Bush, while just 1 percent termed the press unfair to Bill Clinton. Even many reporters acknowl edged as much. An October 1992 study by the *Times-Mirror* center revealed tha 55 percent of the journalists surveyed believed Bush's candidacy was damaged b press coverage, while only 11 percent thought Clinton was similarly harmed.

True, the press targeted Clinton early on, thanks to Gennifer Flowers, the draf charges, and marijuana non-inhaling—but this was the time when key reporters had tagged Clinton "easy meat" for the Republicans in the fall and many news persons were privately hoping a "stronger" Democrat would enter the fray. Once Clinton was the nominee and alternative to four more years of Bush, the tone of his coverage changed markedly. Adding to Clinton's advantage was the shame and regret many reporters felt about their handling of the Flowers affair, not to mention embarrassment about their mispredictions of Clinton's "inevitable" demise.

What motivated the tilt? The obvious but incomplete candor is party preference and ideology. A Freedom Forum survey of journalists revealed that journalists are predominantly and increasingly Democratic: 44 percent of reporters in 1992 called themselves Democrats, up from 38 percent in 1982, while only 16 percent identified with the Republican party, down from 19 percent ten years earlier. Whether Democratic, Republican, or independent, most reporters are ideologically liberal, especially on social issues. Thus, the Democratic National Convention platform was almost universally labeled "moderate" despite containing an absolutist pro-choice position on abortion and, for the first time ever, controversial pledges to end the ban on gays in the military and seek civil rights legislation for homosexuals. (President Clinton and the news media were to discover just how explosive the proposal on gays in the military was shortly after the new president's inauguration.) By contrast, the Republican National Convention platform was repeatedly characterized as right-wing and extreme even though it was little changed from the ones with which Ronald Reagan and George Bush won landslide Electoral College victories in 1980, 1984, and 1988.

The abortion issue in particular generated an extra shove in the Democratic direction in 1992, since another GOP presidential victory could have eventually provided the fifth Supreme Court vote to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the decision guaranteeing abortion rights. Many reporters claim their personal views on abortion and other issues do not influence coverage, but this assertion rings more true for some than others. Journalists are not automatons, and at the very least

their personal preferences influence the kinds of subjects they choose to cover and the approach they take to that coverage. A few newspersons are quite blunt about the influence their views have on coverage. Margaret Carlson, *Time*'s deputy bureau chief in Washington who once worked in the Carter administration, explained: "You couldn't have fought the battles you have fought to get to where you are and not find what the Republicans say about women offensive—it's not possible, you cannot be that objective." Of course, most Republicans find Carlson's statement not only offensive but proof positive of press bias. Another example often cited by the GOP is the statement by ABC New's Carole Simpson that she "believed Anita Hill" in her 1991 charges of sexual harassment against Supreme Court Justice-to-be Clarence Thomas. This declaration came less than a week before Simpson was to moderate the second presidential debate in Richmond, Va. on October 16.

The Scent of a Loser

Other factors besides ideology were also at work in 1992. The press is traditionally tougher on an incumbent administration, whatever its party affiliation, especially so in hard times. The White House occupant's flaws are always well known, and the press's battles with him have usually left tender bruises that are easily inflamed or require the revenge of the pen. By contrast, the challenger is relatively unsullied, his transgressions less known or threatening. George Bush was an irresistibly inviting target because he had blown a massive lead and become unpopular with most viewers and readers—a development that actually predated the nasty turn in his press coverage. Bush took on the unmistakable look of a potential loser, and the possible fall of a once-invincible leader became a compelling story that shaped the context in which all other reporting was done. The scent of losing also emboldened enemies from the president's own party and ideology to carp and lash out, without fear of retribution, which made it all the more difficult for Bush to communicate a persuasive message. After all, the news media often only echo and amplify the biting criticism they readily find in the pundit class or on the campaign trail, and the source can as easily be on the right (Bush critics Patrick Buchanan, William Safire, and George Will, for instance) as on the left. In fact, the most dismissive, vicious remarks about Bush came from conservative, not liberal, commentators; the president's right flank was breathtakingly exposed, and relatively few ardent defenders of the Bush faith could be found to counteract the torrent of abuse heaped upon him.

Surprisingly, given Bush's apparent congeniality, many senior reporters also dislike him personally—and this group extends well beyond Dan Rather. Various explanations were offered privately, including Bush's inaccessibility, perceived favoritism, and even reverse class snobbery (the old "preppie factor" that long dogged the upper-crust Bush). Some journalists also harbored resentment about the way in which Bush won the presidency in 1988, especially his team's shrewd

manipulation of the media and the use of Willie Horton,* the pledge-of allegiance issue, and the like; 1992 became the payback, the just dessert for 1988 But whatever the cause, the press usually gives more favorable treatment t politicians they personally like (Bill Clinton, Ronald Reagan) than ones they d not like (Gary Hart, George Bush), regardless of ideology.

In addition, the newsrooms across America are now dominated by the bab boomers, and in the main they identify with the Democrats' young and hi boomer ticket. The forty-six-year-old Clinton's Fleetwood Mac, saxophone, an experiences in the '60s counterculture era had more resonance and relevance t youthful journalists than the sixty-eight-year-old Bush's country music, horse shoes, and World War II.

Perhaps most fundamentally, journalists' careers and personal satisfactior depend in good part on the importance of the news they cover. The defeat o an incumbent president, the end of the Reagan-Bush era, and the election of a Kennedyesque successor with the accompanying massive changes in policy anc personnel was simply better news, with the promise of years of drama anc upheaval to come. More than a few newspersons who did the reporting on candidate Clinton knew they would likely win the assignment to cover Presiden Clinton, sharing the White House limelight and—with visions of Ben Bradlee advising JFK dancing in their dreams—maybe even the Oval Office. Most of us just hope for change that will benefit our professions or businesses; journalists are in a position to assist their kind of change to fruition.

Newsroom Diversity

So on the whole, the press was certainly a Clinton ally in 1992. But George Bush probably could still have won the election had he held fast to his "no new taxes" pledge, capitalized early on his Persian Gulf victory, focussed purposefully on domestic ills, and spent the campaign convincing Americans of the worth of his recovery plan instead of mainly attacking Clinton's character and record. Bush and his managers ignored a fundamental lesson of American presidential elections: voters cast ballots retrospectively, and any contest for the White House inevitably becomes a referendum on the performance of the incumbent administration, not the challenger. So the fault, dear George, lay less in your press

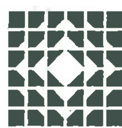
* When Bush's Democratic opponent in 1988, Michael Dukakis, was governor of Massachusetts, he supported a program that allowed weekend furloughs for prison inmates. One inmate who took advantage of the program was Willie Horton, a black man who had been convicted of first-degree murder. While on a weekend furlough, Horton escaped to Maryland, where he was captured after beating a white man and raping his fiancée. The Bush campaign used the image of Willie Horton in a very effective campaign advertisement to portray Dukakis as soft on crime. A number of prominent members in the national press believed that the ads were inappropriate because of underlying racist overtones.

clippings than in yourself and your truly awful campaign—one of the most inept in modern history.

This is not to exonerate the press. Consumers have a right to expect more balance and fairness than they get in campaign coverage. Once again, vigorous ombudsmen who relentlessly challenge their news organizations can play a vital role, and the need for video ombudsmen is especially apparent in this area. The television networks need internal critics even more than most newspapers, where a variety of opinions is regularly available. It would also help if more conservative-minded young people could be attracted to news reporting; if news accounts and agendas are inevitably biased, perhaps readers and viewers would benefit from an ideological mix. "Diversity," after all, is the holy buzzword of the '90s. Why not the newsroom, too?

Summary Questions

1. What factors does the author believe were responsible for the negative media coverage of Bush in 1992? Did media coverage have a major effect on the eventual outcome of the election?
2. Why do news organizations tend to exhibit a liberal bias? What, according to the author, can be done to encourage a more balanced presentation of the news?



Chapter 9

Interest Groups

The United States has always been a nation of joiners, and more interest grou are active in our governmental affairs than in any other nation. Still, America have never been comfortable with special interest politics. Ever since Jam Madison first warned of the "mischiefs of faction" in *The Federalist*, No. 10 (t first selection in this chapter), citizens, politicians, and scholars have debated t role of special interests in policymaking.

The conflict between special interests and the public interest has been esp cially evident when the government has seemed to be functioning ineffective During the Progressive Era, for example, the influence of railroads, oil companie and insurance firms drew the attention of scholars and the popular press; co sequently, regulation of lobbyists became a major aim of the reformers. Duri the New Deal, in contrast, relatively little attention was paid to special interest The dominant view of scholars during and after that period was pluralism—t belief that competition among groups is healthy for democracy.

By the 1960s, however, it had become obvious that such competition was high distorted; some special interests almost always lost in the political process, ar others—especially those with money, access, or inside information—usually wo The interest group universe had a blatant representational bias, as well; som interests, such as business, were well represented in the process, whereas othe (minorities, the poor, and consumers) were seriously underrepresented.

Renewed attention to the role of interest groups grew stronger in the 1970s ar 1980s. The tremendous expansion in the number of interest groups, the declir of political parties, and the heightened visibility of interest groups in the elector and policymaking processes appeared to parallel government's inability to de with economic and social problems. From the inability of Congress and the pres dent to work together during the Carter years to the $200 billion deficits ar influence-peddling scandals of the Reagan presidency, interest groups have bee accused of being at the heart of the problem of contemporary government.

Depending on one's perspective, the United States is either blessed or curse with many special interests. The constitutional guarantees of free speech, fre association, and petition are basic to group formation. Because political organ zations often parallel government structure, federalism and the separation powers have encouraged a multiplicity of groups as interests organize aroun

AP United States Government and Politics
Lesson 22
Handout 22

Name________________________

Date________________________

Is the Media Biased?

Analyze the assigned newspaper using the definitions/criteria discussed in class.

Newspaper ____

Date of newspaper ____

Criteria	Editorial Position
Editorial Position	
Syndicated Correspondents	
Story Positioning	
Coverage Angles	
Selected Stories*	

*Requires Comparison

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8.1

Lowering the Political Hero to Our Level

Joshua Meyrowitz

Image has always been important in politics. Whether an individual is viewed as honest or untrustworthy, hard-working or lazy, tough or mean, has much to do with that person's political success. Moreover, the use of the electronic media, particularly television, has dramatically altered how the public views political figures, and has especially affected the image of elected leadership.

According to Joshua Meyrowitz, before the invention of the electronic media, the public held political leaders in awe. Politicians' images were based on mystification and careful management of public impressions. Political figures operated at a great distance from the public, who had limited access to them.

Radio and television, however, "reveal too much and too often." Television in particular appears to make politicians available for public inspection. This clouds the distinction between politicians' "onstage" and "backstage" behavior. Their human frailties are highlighted, as TV cameras show them sweating or reacting with anger or tears. National politicians no longer have the opportunity to test their presentations, they appear to the whole nation at the same time, and so they are more likely to make mistakes. Ill-chosen words or the inevitable inconsistencies that arise during a campaign are exaggerated, which calls into question a politician's honesty and competence.

In the end, "the familiarity fostered by electronic media all too easily breeds contempt." According to Meyrowitz, mystification is necessary for an image of strong leadership, yet disclosure eliminates mystery. As a result, few contemporary political leaders are universally revered in their own lifetime.

All our recent Presidents have been plagued with problems of "credibility." Lyndon Johnson abdicated his office; Richard Nixon left the presidency in disgrace; Gerald Ford's "appointment" to the presidency was later rejected by the electorate; Jimmy Carter suffered a landslide defeat after being strongly challenged within his own party; and even the comparatively popular

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Ronald Reagan has followed his predecessors in the now familiar roller coaster ride in the polls.*

We seem to be having difficulty finding leaders who have charisma and style and who are also competent and trustworthy. In the wish to keep at least one recent leader in high esteem, many people have chosen to forget that in his thousand days in office, John Kennedy faced many crises of credibility and accusations of "news management."

During the 1990 campaign, *Newsweek* analyzed recent political polls and concluded that "perhaps the most telling political finding of all is the high degree of disenchantment voters feel about most of the major candidates." Of course, every horse race has its winner, and no matter how uninspiring the field of candidates, people will always have their favorites. The obsession with poll percentage points and the concern over who wins and who loses, however, tend to obscure the more fundamental issue of the decline in the image of leaders in general.

There are at least two ways to study the image and rhetoric of the presidency. One is to examine the content and form of speeches and actions; in other words, to look at specific strategies, choices, and decisions. Another method is to examine the situations within which Presidents perform their roles. This second method requires a shift in focus away from the specific rhetorical strategies of individual politicians and toward the general environment that surrounds the presidency and is therefore shared by all who seek that office.

This [article] employs the latter method to reinterpret the causes of the political woes of some of our recent national politicians and to shed some light on our leadership problem in general. I suggest that the decline in presidential image may have surprisingly little to do with a simple lack of potentially great leaders, and much to do with a specific communication environment—a communication environment that undermines the politician's ability to behave like, and therefore be perceived as, the traditional "great leader."

The Merging of Political Arenas and Styles

Before the widespread use of electronic media, the towns and cities of the country served as backstage areas of rehearsal for national political figures. By the time William Jennings Bryan delivered his powerful "cross of gold" speech to win the nomination for President at the 1896 Democratic convention, for example, he had already practiced the speech many times in different parts of the country.

The legendary oratory of Bryan and the treasured images of many of our other political heroes were made possible by their ability to practice and modify their

* Ronald Reagan, especially after 1982 and before 1987, enjoyed levels of public regard that were exceptional among recent presidents and presidential contenders.

public performances. Early mistakes could be limited to small forums, minor changes could be tested, and speeches and presentations could be honed to perfection. Politicians could thrill many different crowds on different days with a single well-turned phrase. Bryan, for example, was very fond of his closing line in the 1896 speech ("You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns, you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold")—so fond, in fact, that he had used it many times in other speeches and debates. In his memoirs, Bryan noted his early realization of the line's "fitness for the conclusion of a climax," and after using it in smaller public arenas, he "laid it away for a proper occasion."[2]

Today, through radio and television, the national politician often faces a single audience. Wherever the politician speaks, he or she addresses people all over the country. Major speeches, therefore, cannot be tested in advance. Because they can be presented only once, they tend to be relatively coarse and undramatic. Inspiring lines either are consumed quickly or they become impotent clichés.

Nineteenth century America provided multiple political arenas in which politicians could perfect the form and the substance of their main ideas. They could also buttress their central platforms with slightly different promises to different audiences. Today, because politicians address so many different types of people simultaneously, they have great difficulty speaking in specifics. And any slip of the tongue is amplified in significance because of the millions of people who have witnessed it. Those who analyze changing rhetorical styles without taking such situational changes into account overlook a major political variable.

Many Americans are still hoping for the emergence of an old-style, dynamic "great leader." Yet electronic media of communication are making it almost impossible to find one. There is no lack of potential leaders, but rather an overabundance of information about them. The great leader image depends on mystification and careful management of public impressions. Through television, we see too much of our politicians, and they are losing control over their images and performances. As a result, our political leaders are being stripped of their aura and are being brought closer to the level of the average person.

The impact of electronic media on the staging of politics can best be understood by analyzing it in relation to the staging requirements of *any* social role. . . . Regardless of competence, regardless of desire, there is a limit to how long any person can play out an idealized conception of a social role. All people must eat, sleep, and go to the bathroom. All people need time to think about their social behavior, prepare for social encounters, and rest from them. Further, we all play different roles in different situations. One man, for example, may be a father, a son, a husband, an old college roommate, and a boss. He may also be President of the United States. He needs to emphasize different aspects of his personality in order to function in each of these roles. The performance of social roles, therefore, is in many ways like a multistage drama. The strength and clarity of a particular onstage, or "front region," performance depend on isolating the audience from the backstage, or "back region." Rehearsals, relaxations, and behaviors

from other onstage roles must be kept out of the limelight. The need to shield backstage behaviors is especially acute in the performance of roles that rely heavily on mystification and on an aura of greatness—roles such as those performed by national political leaders.

Yet electronic media of communication have been eroding barriers between the politician's traditional back and front regions. The camera eye and the microphone ear have been probing many aspects of the national politician's behavior and transmitting this information to 225 million Americans. By revealing to its audience both traditionally onstage and traditionally backstage activities, television could be said to provide a "sidestage," or "middle region," view of public figures. We watch politicians move from backstage to onstage to backstage. We see politicians address crowds of well-wishers, then greet their families "in private." We join candidates as they speak with their advisors, and we sit behind them as they watch conventions on television. We see candidates address many different types of audiences in many different settings.

By definition, the "private" behaviors now exposed are no longer true back region activities precisely because they are exposed to the public. But neither are they merely traditional front region performances. The traditional balance between rehearsal and performance has been upset. Through electronic coverage, politicians' freedom to isolate themselves from their audiences is being limited. In the process, politicians are not only losing aspects of their privacy—a complaint we often hear—but, more important, they are simultaneously losing their ability to play many facets of the high and mighty roles of traditional leaders. For when actors lose parts of their rehearsal time, their performances naturally move toward the extemporaneous.

The sidestage perspective offered by television makes normal differences in behavior appear to be evidence of inconsistency or dishonesty. We all behave differently in different situations, depending on who is there and who is not. Yet when television news programs edit together videotape sequences that show a politician saying and doing different things in different places and before different audiences, the politician may appear, at best, indecisive and, at worst, dishonest.

The reconfiguration of the stage of politics demands a drive toward consistency in all exposed spheres. To be carried off smoothly, the new political performance requires a new "middle region" role: behavior that lacks the extreme formality of former front region behavior and also lacks the extreme informality of traditional back region behavior. Wise politicians make the most of the new situation. They try to expose selected, positive aspects of their back regions in order to ingratiate themselves with the public. Yet there is a difference between *coping* with the new situation and truly *controlling* it. Regardless of how well individual politicians adjust to the new exposure, the overall image of leaders changes in the process. The new political performance remains a performance, but its style is markedly changed.

Mystification and awe are supported by distance and limited access. Our new media reveal too much and too often for traditional notions of political leader-

ship to prevail. The television camera invades politicians' personal spheres like a spy in back regions. It watches them sweat, sees them grimace at their own ill-phrased remarks. It coolly records them as they succumb to emotions. The camera minimizes the distance between audience and performer. The speaker's platform once raised a politician up and away from the people—both literally and symbolically. The camera now brings the politician close for the people's inspection. And in this sense, it lowers politicians to the level of their audience. The camera brings a rich range of expressive information to the audience; it highlights politicians' mortality and mutes abstract and conceptual rhetoric. While verbal rhetoric can transcend humanity and reach for the divine, intimate expressive information often exposes human frailty. No wonder old style politicians, who continue to assume the grand postures of another era, now seem like clowns or crooks. The personal close-up view forces many politicians to pretend to be less than they would like to be (and, thereby, in a social sense, they actually become less).

Some people were privy to a sort of "middle region" for politicians before television. Through consistent physical proximity, for example, many reporters would see politicians in a multiplicity of front region roles and a smattering of back region activities. Yet, the relationship between politicians and some journalists was itself a personal back region interaction that was distinguished from press accounts to the public. Before television, most of the news stories released were not records of this personal back region relationship or even of a "middle region." The politician could always distinguish for the press what was "on" the record, what was "off" the record, what should be paraphrased, and what must be attributed to "a high government official." Thus, even when the journalists and the politicians were intimates, the news releases were usually impersonal social communications. Print media can "report on" what happens in one place and bring the report to another place. But the report is by no means a "presentation" of the actual place-bound experience. The print reporters who interviewed Theodore Roosevelt while he was being shaved, for example, did not have an experience "equivalent" to the resulting news reports. Because private interactions with reporters were once distinct from the public communications released in newspapers, much of a politician's "personality" was well hidden from the average citizen.

Private press-politician interactions continue to take place, but electronic media have created new political situations that change the overall "distance" between politician and voter. With electronic coverage, politicians lose a great deal of control over their messages and performances. When they ask that the television camera or tape recorder be turned off, the politicians appear to have something to hide. When the camera or microphone is on, politicians can no longer separate their interaction with the press from their interaction with the public. The camera unthinkingly records the flash of anger and the shiver in the cold; it determinedly shadows our leaders as they trip over words or down stairs.

And, unlike the testimony of journalists or of other witnesses, words and actions recorded on electronic tape are impossible to deny. Thus, while politicians try hard to structure the *content* of the media coverage, the *form* of the coverage itself is changing the nature of political image. The revealing nature of television's presentational information cannot be fully counteracted by manipulation, practice, and high-paid consultants. Even a staged media event is often more personally revealing than a transcript of an informal speech or interview. When in 1977, President Carter allowed NBC cameras into the White House for a day, the result may not have been what he intended. As *The New York Times* reported:

> Mr. Carter is a master of controlled images, and he is obviously primed for the occasion. When he isn't flashing his warm smile, he is being soothingly cool under pressure. But the camera ferrets out that telltale tick, that comforting indication of ordinary humanity. It finds his fingers nervously caressing a paperclip or playing with a pen. It captures the almost imperceptible tightening of facial muscles when the President is given an unflattering newspaper story about one of his sons.[3]

Some politicians, of course, have better "media images" than others, but few can manipulate their images as easily as politicians could in a print era. The nature and the extent of this loss of control become even clearer when back and front regions are not viewed as mutually exclusive categories. Most actions encompass both types of behavior. In many situations, for example, an individual can play a front region role while simultaneously giving off covert back region cues to "teammates" (facial expressions, "code" remarks, fingers crossed behind the back, etc.). . . . Because expressions are constant and personal, an individual's exuding of expressions is a type of on-going back region activity that was once accessible only to those in close physical proximity. Thus, the degree of control over access to back regions is not simply binary—access/no access—but infinitely variable. Any medium of communication can be analyzed in relation to those personal characteristics it transmits and those it restricts.

Print, for example, conveys words but no intonations or facial gestures; radio sends intonations along with the words but provides no visual information; television transmits the full audio/visual spectrum of verbal, vocal, and gestural. In this sense, the trend from print to radio to television represents a shrinking shield for back region activities and an increase in the energy required to manage impressions. Further, Albert Mehrabian's formula for relative message impact—7% verbal, 38% vocal, and 55% facial and postural—suggests that the trend in media development not only leads to revealing more, but to revealing more of more. From the portrait to the photograph to the movie to the video close-up, media have been providing a closer, more replicative, more immediate, and, therefore, less idealized image of the leader. "Greatness" is an abstraction, and it fades as the image of distant leaders comes to resemble an encounter with an intimate acquaintance.

As cameras continue to get lighter and smaller, and as microphones and lenses become more sensitive, the distinctions between public and private contexts continue to erode. It is no longer necessary for politicians to stop what they are doing in order to pose for a picture or to step up to a microphone. As a result, it is increasingly difficult for politicians to distinguish between the ways in which they behave in "real situations" and the ways in which they present themselves for the media. The new public image of politicians, therefore, has many of the characteristics of the former backstage of political life, and many once informal interactions among politicians and their families, staff, reporters, and constituents have become more stiff and formal as they are exposed to national audiences. . . .

Most politicians, even Presidents, continue to maintain a truly private backstage area, but that area is being pushed further and further into the background, and it continues to shrink both spatially and temporally.

Writing and print not only hide general back region actions and behaviors, they also conceal the act of producing "images" and messages. Presidents once had the time to prepare speeches carefully. Even seemingly "spontaneous" messages were prepared in advance, often with the help of advisors, counselors, and family members. Delays, indecision, and the pondering of alternative solutions in response to problems were hidden in the invisible backstage area created by the inherent slowness of older media. Before the invention of the telegraph, for example, a President never needed to be awakened in the middle of the night to respond to a crisis. A few hours' delay meant little.

Electronic media, however, leave little secret time for preparations and response. Because messages *can* be sent instantly across the nation and the world, any delay in hearing from a President is apparent. And in televised press conferences, even a few seconds of thought by a politician may be seen as a sign of indecisiveness, weakness, or senility. More and more, therefore, the public messages conveyed by officials are, in fact, spontaneous.

Politicians find it more difficult to hide their need for time and for advice in the preparation of public statements. They must either reveal the decision process (by turning to advisors or by saying that they need more time to study the issue) or they must present very informal, off-the-cuff comments that naturally lack the craftsmanship of prepared texts. The new media demand that the politician walk and talk steadily and unthinkingly along a performance tightrope. On either side is danger: A few seconds of silence or a slip of the tongue can lead to a fall in the polls.

The changing arenas of politics affect not only the perceptions of audiences but also the response of politicians to their own performances. In face-to-face behavior, we must get a sense of ourselves from the ongoing response of others. We can never see ourselves quite the way others see us. On videotape, however, politicians are able to see exactly the same image of themselves as is seen by the public. In live interactions, a speaker's nervousness and mistakes are usually politely ignored by audiences and therefore often soon forgotten by the speaker too. With

television, politicians acquire permanent records of themselves sweating, stammering, or anxiously licking their lips. Television, therefore, has the power to increase a politician's self-doubt and lower self-esteem.

Highly replicative media are demystifying leaders not only for their own time, but for history as well. Few leaders are universally revered in their own lifetime. But less replicative media allowed, at least, for greater idealization of leaders after they died. Idiosyncrasies and physical flaws were interred with a President's bones, their good deeds and their accomplishments lived after them. Once a President died, all that remained were flattering painted portraits and the written texts of speeches. An unusual speaking style or an unattractive facial expression was soon forgotten.

If Lincoln had been passed down to us only through painted portraits, perhaps his homeliness would have faded further with time. The rest of the Lincoln legend, however, including Lincoln's image as a dynamic speaker, continues to be preserved by the *lack* of recordings of his unusually high, thin voice, which rose even higher when he was nervous. Similarly, Thomas Jefferson's slight speech impediment is rarely mentioned. Through new media, however, the idiosyncrasies of Presidents are preserved and passed down to the next generation. Instead of inheriting only summaries and recollections, future generations will judge the styles of former Presidents for themselves. They will see Gerald Ford lose his balance, Carter sweating under pressure, and Reagan dozing during an audience with the Pope. Presidential mispronunciations, hesitations, perspiration, and physical and verbal clumsiness are now being preserved for all time.

Expressions are part of the shared repertoire of all people. When under control and exposed briefly, expressive messages show the "humanity" of the "great leader." But when they are flowing freely and constantly, expressive messages suggest that those we look up to may, after all, be no different from ourselves. The more intense our search for evidence of greatness, the more it eludes us.

There is a demand today for two things: fully open, accessible administrations and strong, powerful leaders. Rarely do we consider that these two demands may, unfortunately, be incompatible. We want to spy on our leaders, yet we want them to inspire us. We cannot have both disclosure *and* the mystification necessary for an image of greatness. The post-Watergate fascination with uncovering cover-ups has not been accompanied by a sophisticated notion of what will inevitably be found in the closets of all leaders. The familiarity fostered by electronic media all too easily breeds contempt.

Notes

1. David M. Alpern, "A Newsweek Poll on the Issues," *Newsweek*, 3 March 1980, 29.
2. William Jennings Bryan and Mary Baird Bryan, *The Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan*, *Vol. I*, Reprint of 1925 edition (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat, 1971), 103.
3. John J. O'Connor, "TV: A Full Day at the White House," *The New York Times*, 14 April 1977.