

CHAPTER 12

The Media

OBJECTIVES

This chapter examines the historical evolution and present status of relations between the government and the news media. After reading and reviewing the material in this chapter, the student should be able to do each of the following:

1. Describe the evolution of journalism in United States political history and indicate 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 impact of the pattern of ownership and control of the media on the dissemination of news. Show how wire services and TV networks have affected national news coverage. Discuss the impact of the “national press.”
4. Discuss the issue of “media bias” and how this bias might manifest itself. Assess the impact of such bias, if it exists, on the electorate.
5. Assess the impact of the media on politics and indicate why it is so 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.

OVERVIEW

Changes in United States politics have been accompanied by—and influenced by—changes in the mass media. The rise of strong national political party organizations was facilitated by the emergence of mass-circulation daily newspapers. Political reform movements depended in part on the development of national magazines catering to middle-class opinion. The weakening of political parties was accelerated by the ability of candidates to speak directly to constituents by radio and television.

The role of journalists in a democratic society poses an inevitable dilemma: If they are to serve well as information gatherers, gatekeepers, scorekeepers, and watchdogs, they must be free of government controls. But to the extent that they are free of such controls, they are also free to act in their own political or economic interests. In the United States, a competitive press largely free of government controls has contributed to a substantial diversity of opinion and a general (though not unanimous) commitment to the goal of fairness in news reporting. The national media are in general more liberal than the local media, but the extent to which a reporter’s beliefs affect reporting varies greatly with the kind of story—routine, feature, or insider.

CHAPTER OUTLINE WITH KEYED-IN RESOURCES

- I. Journalism in American political history (THEME A: THE HISTORY AND STRUCTURE OF THE NEWS MEDIA IN THE UNITED STATES)
 - A. Most people’s knowledge of politics comes from the media
 1. Media: newspapers, television, radio, World Wide Web

2. Blogs: web logs
 - a) The New Media that is challenging the Old Media
 - b) Bloggers showed evidence that CBS documents incriminating the President were forgeries
 3. Laws and understandings in the U.S. give the media more _____ than that found in any other nation
 - a) Laws governing _____ are stricter in the U.K. than in the U.S.
 - b) England also has Official Secrets Act that makes it illegal to _____ information
 - c) Prime Minister of Italy owns a large media empire _____
 - d) Possible to punish a newspaper in France for being extremely critical of French president
 4. Long tradition of private media ownership in U.S.
 - a) Radio and television stations require _____ license
 - b) Potential limits to freedom of privately-owned newspapers and broadcast stations
 - c) _____ driven: may need to distort the news to build an audience or satisfy advertisers
 - d) Media bias: reporters and editors may only present one side of a story
- B. The party press
1. _____ created, subsidized, and controlled various newspapers
 2. _____ Possible because circulation small, subscriptions expensive
 3. Newspapers circulated among political and commercial elites
 4. Government often subsidized the president's party press
- C. The popular press
1. Changes in society and technology made possible self-supporting, mass readership daily newspapers
 - a) High-speed press
 - b) Telegraph gave local papers greater access to news
 - c) Associated Press, 1848; objective reporting and systematic distribution of information
 - d) Urbanization concentrated population to support paper, advertisers
 - e) Government Printing Office established 1860—end of most printing contracts to Washington newspapers
 2. Partisanship in mass-readership newspapers reflected the views of publishers and editors
 - a) Convictions blended _____ beliefs with _____ interest
 - b) Used sensationalism and exposes to attract large readership
 - c) William Randolph Hearst and his alleged role in catalyzing Spanish-American War
 3. Established the feasibility of a press _____ of government, demonstrating that there was profit to be made in criticizing government policies
- D. Magazines of opinion
1. Middle class favored new, progressive periodicals
 - a) *Nation*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's* in 1850s and 1860s
 - b) *McClure's*, *Scribner's*, *Cosmopolitan* later
 2. Individual writers gained national followings through investigative reporting
 3. Number of competing newspapers declined, reducing the need for _____ to sell papers
 4. Readers were also becoming more educated and sophisticated
 5. Today, national magazines focused on politics account for a _____ and declining fraction of magazines
- E. Electronic journalism
1. Radio arrives in 1920s, television in the late 1940s
 2. Politicians could address voters _____ but people could easily ignore them

3. Fewer politicians could be covered by these media than by newspapers
 - a) routinely covered
 - b) Others must be controversial or have a national reputation or buy time
 4. soundbites on the nightly news make it more difficult for candidates and officeholders to convey their message
 5. Politicians now have more —cable, early-morning news, news magazine shows—and many of these new sources feature lengthy interviews
 6. Consequences of two changes remain unknown:
 - a) Recent access of politicians to media for campaigns, elections, governing
 - b) Narrowcasting, where a segmented audience is targeted by TV and radio stations
 7. Politicians continue to seek the media spotlight even after they are elected
- F. The Internet
1. Increasingly important: 40% of American households access the
 2. Free market in political news: from newspaper/magazine stories to blogs to gossip
 3. Playing a larger role in politics
 - a) In 2004, most of money was raised through Internet appeals
 - b) Every candidate now has a
 4. Facilitates communication between voters and political activists
- II. The structure of the media
- A. Degree of competition
1. Newspapers
 - a) Number of daily newspapers has declined significantly
 - b) Number of cities with multiple papers has declined
 - (1) Sixty percent of cities had competing newspapers in 1900
 - (2) Four percent in 1972
 - (3) In some cities, Joint Operating Agreements (JOAs) merge business operations of two papers, supposedly preserving editorial independence
 - c) Subscription rates have fallen, however, as most people get their news from television
 2. Radio and television are intensely and becoming more so
 3. U.S. press is composed mostly of locally owned and managed enterprises, unlike Europe
 - a) Oriented to local market
 - b) regulations dispersed ownership
- B. The national media
1. Existence somewhat offsets local orientation
 2. Consists of:
 - a) Wire services (AP, UPI)
 - b) National magazines
 - c) Television network evening news broadcasts
 - d) CNN, Fox News, MSNBC
 - e) Newspapers with national readerships (*New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*)

3. Significance of a national press
 - a) They have a large readership
 - b) Political follow them closely
 - c) Radio and television stations often decide what to broadcast by looking at the national press
 - d) National reporters and editors are distinctive from the local press
 - (1) Better paid
 - (2) From more prestigious universities
 - (3) More outlook
 - (4) Do investigative or interpretive stories
 4. Roles played by the national press: (THEME B: MEDIA SELECTION AND BIAS IN THE NEWS)
 - a) : influences what subjects become national political issues, for how long
 - b) : tracks political reputations and candidacies
 - (1) Elections are covered like horse races rather than as choices among policy alternatives
 - (2) Media momentum during the presidential primary season is crucial
 - c) : investigate personalities and expose scandals
- III. Rules governing the media (THEME C: GOVERNMENT INFLUENCE ON THE MEDIA)
- A. Newspapers versus electronic media
 1. Newspapers are almost entirely from government regulation
 - a) Prosecutions only after the fact—no prior restraint
 - b) After publication, sue only for libel, obscenity, incitement to illegal act
 - c) Each of these conditions has been defined narrowly by the courts, to the freedom of the press
 2. Radio and television are licensed and regulated
 - B. Confidentiality of sources
 1. Reporters want right to keep sources
 2. Most states and federal government
 3. Supreme Court allows the government to compel reporters to divulge information in court if it bears on a crime
 - C. Regulating broadcasting
 1. FCC licensing
 - a) years for radio license renewal
 - b) years for television license renewal
 - c) Stations must serve “community needs”
 2. Recent movement to deregulate
 - a) License renewal by postcard
 - b) No hearing unless opposed
 - c) Relaxation of some rule enforcement
 - d) Radio has been the most regarding both ownership and content
 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; has permitted the rise of talk radio shows, like Rush Limbaugh

- D. Campaigning
1. Equal-time rule applies
 - a) Equal access for all candidates
 - b) Rates no higher than the cheapest commercial rate
 - c) Debates formerly had to include candidates.
 - (1) Therefore, Reagan-Carter debate had to be sponsored by LWV
 - (2) Now stations and networks can sponsor debates limited to candidates
 2. Not all candidates use TV because its efficiency in reaching voters varies
 - a) Works well only when the market and the district overlap
 - b) More than candidates buy television time
- IV. Are the national media biased?
- A. What are the views of members of the national media?
1. Generally are more than the average citizen
 - a) Also tend to be more
 - b) Public believes that the media are liberal
 2. Conservative media outlets have become more visible in recent years
 - a) Fox News, talk radio such as Rush Limbaugh
 - b) 20% of Americans listen to talk radio every day; another 10% listen several times a week
 3. Talk radio is predominantly
 - a) Half of the 28 largest talk shows hosted by outspoken conservatives
 - b) hosts get good ratings
 - (1) There are more self-described conservatives than liberals
 - (2) Conservative listeners do not think their views are reflected in big-city media
 - (3) audience has racial and ethnic cleavages (Hispanic stations, Black stations, etc.)
- B. Do the beliefs of the national media affect how they report the news?
1. Journalistic philosophy is that the news should be and
 - a) Does not apply to editorials
 - b) Does not apply to talk radio
 2. Hard to measure whether commitment to objectivity is actually achieved
 3. News stories differ in opportunity for bias
 - a) Routine stories
 - (1) Cover major political events; involve relatively simple matters
 - (2) Examples: president takes a trip, Congress passes a major bill
 - (3) Little room for bias: story is often written about the same way by every reporter
 - b) Feature stories
 - (1) Public events that are not covered
 - (2) Reporter has to find the story and persuade editor to publish it
 - (3) Examples: interest-group lobbying; agency adopts a new ruling
 - (4) More easily reflect reporter's opinion
 - c) Insider stories
 - (1) Cover things that are often secret
 - (2) Investigative reporters often get credit, though government insider usually story
 - (3) Leaks a reporter picks up on may be influenced by reporter's views
 4. Feature and insider stories became more important to newspapers with the rise of radio and television
 5. Studies that look at bias
 - a) *New York Times* and *Washington Post* are likely to call conservatives "conservative" than to call liberals "liberal"

- b) *Time* and *Newsweek* tended to : quoting nuclear scientists and engineers because they favored nuclear power and the magazines opposed it
 - c) Economic headlines tended to have a more positive spin when Democratic president was in office
 - d) Public editor of *New York Times* admits the paper is
- C. Does what the media write or say influence how their readers and viewers think?
- 1. people remember or believe only what they want to
 - 2. Would need to study how people think about politics in ways that take into account what they read or hear
 - a) 1964 presidential election: newspaper endorsement LBJ added 5% to vote he received in that area
 - b) Newspapers that endorsed gave them more positive coverage, and voters had more positive feelings about endorsed incumbents than ones that were not endorsed
 - c) Press coverage affects policy issues that people think are
 - 3. Important limits to media influence: personal experience
- D. Candidates believe the media is important
- 1. Estes Kefauver: made strong bid for presidential nomination in 1952 after televised organized-crime hearings
 - 2. Sometimes bid for media presence backfires: Howard Dean in 2004
 - 3. LBJ decided was a lost cause after Walter Cronkite turned against the war
- V. Government and the news
- A. Prominence of the president
- 1. systematic cultivation of the press became an art form
 - 2. press secretary cultivated, managed, informed the press
 - 3. Press secretary today: large staff, performing many functions focused on White House press corps
- B. Coverage of Congress
- 1. Never equal to that of president; members resentful
 - 2. House quite restrictive in the past
 - a) No cameras on the floor until 1978
 - b) Gavel-to-gavel coverage of proceedings since 1979 (C-SPAN)
 - 3. Senate more open
 - a) Hearings since Kefauver (1950) have frequently been broadcast
 - b) TV coverage of sessions initiated by C-SPAN in 1986
 - c) Senatorial use of televised committee hearings has turned the Senate into a presidential candidate
- C. Why are there so many news leaks?
- 1. Constitution: separation of powers
 - a) Power is
 - b) Branches of government compete and is a weapon in the competition
 - c) Not illegal to print most secrets
 - 2. Adversarial press since Vietnam, Watergate, Iran-contra
 - a) Press and politicians each other
 - b) A more suspicious and adversarial press
 - c) Competition for awards, etc. among journalists

3. Cynicism created era of attack journalism
 - a) _____: seizing upon any bit of information or rumor that might call into question the qualifications or character of a public official
 - b) Most people do not like this kind of news
 - c) Media cynicism about government mirrors public's increasing cynicism about media
 - d) People believe the media slant their coverage, have too much influence, and abuse their constitutional protections
 4. Also, public confidence in big business is down, and now media are big business
 5. Adversarial media, meanwhile, has made _____ campaign advertising more socially acceptable
- D. Sensationalism in the media
1. Intense competition among many media outlets means that each has a small share of the audience
 2. _____ draws an audience and is cheaper than investigative reporting
 3. Reporters, meanwhile, may not be checking sources _____ because there is such competition for stories
 4. Scattered evidence that sensationalism has decreased slightly since September 11th attacks
 - a) People who followed the national news increased slightly
 - b) More people judged the media coverage as being of higher quality
- E. Government constraints on journalists
1. Reporters must strike a balance between two competing factors:
 - a) Expressing critical views, which may alienate sources
 - b) Retaining sources, and becoming their mouthpiece
 2. Abundance of congressional staffers makes it easier because sources are more numerous
 3. Governmental tools to fight back
 - a) Numerous press officers in legislative and executive branches
 - b) Press releases—canned news
 - c) Leaks and background stories to favorite reporters
 - (1) _____ reporter can quote official by name
 - (2) _____ what the official says cannot be used
 - (3) _____ information can be used, but not attributed to source by name
 - (4) _____: information can be used, but not attributed to anybody, including an anonymous source
 - d) Bypass national press to local
 - e) Presidential rewards and punishments for reporters based on their stories

WEB RESOURCES

The Media

The Internet is becoming a primary source of news and political information for many citizens. A selection of web addresses for major news outlets (newspapers and newsmagazines, network and cable television) is provided below.

ABC News: <http://www.abcnews.com/>

CBS News: <http://www.cbsnews.com/>

Christian Science Monitor: <http://www.csmonitor.com/>

CNN: <http://www.cnn.com/>

C-SPAN: <http://www.c-span.org/>

Los Angeles Times: <http://www.latimes.com/>

MSNBC: <http://www.msnbc.com/news>

New York Times: <http://www.nytimes.com/>

USA Today: <http://www.usatoday.com/>

US News & World Report: <http://www.usnews.com/usnews/home.htm>

Wall Street Journal: <http://online.wsj.com/public/us>

Washington Post: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/>

Other Resources

Columbia Journalism Review (periodical): <http://www.cjr.org/>

Gallup Poll: <http://www.gallup.com/>

Media Watch: <http://www.mediawatch.com/>

National and International Newspapers, The Internet Public Library: <http://www.ipl.org/>

Pew Research Center for the People and the Press: <http://www.people-press.org/>

Pulitzer Prize: <http://www.pulitzer.org/>

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION TOPICS

How informative is the news? Tape one session of the nightly news, either national or local, and ask students to assess its format and content. Give consideration to tone, as well, since news anchors are often perceived as appealing to different audiences. Encourage students to determine whether there are differences between network and cable coverage, as well as print, broadcast, and ‘Net formats.

Who are the muckrakers of today? Ask students to compare the political coverage that is provided by a wide selection of newspapers, comparing both their standards of “newsworthiness” and their analysis of on-going events. (The web makes this project particularly feasible.) Comparing the front-page coverage of important events, such as the September 11th attacks, will serve a similar function. What level of literacy is required to understand these newspapers? How do they educate their readers?

Are journalists politically biased? Journalists are popularly perceived as liberals, with expectations that their coverage and analysis will be correspondingly skewed. Yet many elites are far more biased than members of the media. Reporters also consider themselves to be professionals, bound by canons and public obligations. Ask students to study a variety of news outlets for evidence of bias, looking at the framing of stories—and considering also which stories are present and which stories are not. The latter enquiry requires students to consider *who*, as well as *what*, is newsworthy.

IMPORTANT TERMS

- ***adversarial press** The tendency of the national media to be suspicious of officials and eager to reveal unflattering stories about them.
- ***background story** A public official’s statement to a reporter that is given on condition that the official not be named.
- ***blog** A series, or log, of discussion items on a page of the World Wide Web.
- ***equal time rule** An FCC regulation that if a broadcaster sells time to one candidate, it must sell equal time to other candidates.
- ***feature stories** Media stories about events that, though public, are not regularly covered by reporters.

*insider stories	Media stories about events that are not usually made public.
*loaded language	Words that imply a value judgment, used to persuade a reader without having made a serious argument.
*routine stories	Media stories about events that are regularly covered by reporters.
*selective attention	Paying attention only to those news stories with which one already agrees.
*sound bite	A radio or video clip of someone speaking.
*trial balloon	Information leaked to the media to test public reaction to a possible policy.

THEME A: THE HISTORY AND STRUCTURE OF THE NEWS MEDIA IN THE UNITED STATES

Instructor Resources

Craig M. Allan, *News Is People: The Rise of Local TV News and the Fall of News from New York*. Iowa State University Press, 2001.

Gerald R. Baron, *Now Is Too Late: Survival in the Era of Instant News*. Financial Times – Prentice Hall, 2002.

David Barsamian, *The Decline and Fall of Public Broadcasting: Creating Alternative Media*. Boston, MA: South End Press, 2001.

Ronald V. Bettig and Jeanne Lynn Hall, *Big Media, Big Money: Cultural Texts and Political Economics*. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Peter Browning, *The Development of the Mass Media, 1896-1996*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Leonard Downie, Jr. and Robert G. Kaiser, *The News About the News: American Journalism in Peril*. New York: Knopf, 2002.

Stephen J. Farnsworth and S. Robert Lichter, *The Nightly News Nightmare: Network Television's Coverage of U.S. Presidential Elections, 1988-2000*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

Kent State University Symposium, *Media, Profit, and Politics: Competing Priorities in an Open Society*. Kent State University Press, 2003.

Gene Roberts, Thomas Kunkel, and Charles Layton, eds., *Leaving Readers Behind: The Age of Corporate Newspapering*. University of Arkansas Press, 2001.

Robert Shogan, *Bad News: Where the Press Goes Wrong in the Making of the President*. Ivan R. Dee, 2002.

Summary

Changes in the organization and technology of the press have brought major changes in the organization of United States politics. In the era of the *party press* in the early years of the Republic, parties established and provided government support for newspapers. The press was relentlessly partisan and reached the commercial and political elites. Changes in society and technology made the *popular press* possible. Urbanization created large cities that could support mass circulations, and the invention of the rotary press made producing papers cheap and quick. In order to attract large numbers of subscribers, newspapers—under the leadership of men like Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst—stressed violence, romance, patriotism, and exposed wrongdoing in business and government. The mass circulation newspaper facilitated the emergence of mass politics, the mobilization of voters, and the development of strong party loyalties.

The rising middle class was repelled by the *yellow journalism* of the popular press, however, and provided the market for magazines of opinion. During their peak around the turn of the century, these magazines promoted the causes of the Progressive movement: business regulation, the purification of municipal politics, and civil service reform. *Muckrakers* such as Lincoln Steffens set the pattern for today's investigative reporting. Electronic journalism, which began with the emergence of radio in the 1920s and continued with the spread of television in the late 1940s, placed great stress on the personal characteristics of politicians—whether they were attractive, spoke well, or behaved in a manner sufficiently colorful to justify inclusion in newscasts that had to hold audience attention.

In the contemporary media era, the media's structure is characterized by (a) a decline in the number of cities in which there are competing newspapers; (b) an orientation to the local market; (c) a decentralized broadcasting industry; (d) seven major national television networks, hundreds of television stations, and thousands of cable systems and radio stations; (e) national media consisting of the news magazines, television networks, and newspapers such as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Wall Street Journal*; and (f) a rapidly expanding Internet.

Discussion Questions

1. In the United States, the party press has a negative connotation because it imputes bias to a newspaper. Yet many major newspapers in Western Europe are subsidized by political parties and retain a reputation of quality. Consider some of the benefits of a party press. Does the desire of newspapers in the United States to be “objective” prevent hard questions from being asked? Is political debate in the United States less informed for this reason?
2. Does a popular press pander to the lowest common denominator of interest and taste?
3. Explain how the localism and decentralized qualities of the United States news media contribute to the promotion of democracy.

THEME B: MEDIA SELECTION AND BIAS IN THE NEWS

Instructor Resources

Eric Alterman, *What Liberal Media? The Truth about Bias and the News*. New York: Basic Books, 2003.

Mary Douglas Vavrus, *Postfeminist News: Political Women in Media Culture*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002.

Steve Michael Barkin, *American Television News: The Media Marketplace and the Public Interest*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2002.

Timothy Cook, *Governing With the News: The News Media as a Political Institution*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Gail Dines, *Gender, Race, and Class in Media*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002.

Eytan Gilboa, ed. *Media and Conflict: Framing Issues, Making Policy, Shaping Opinions*. Transnational Publishers, 2002.

Robert H. Giles and Robert W. Snyder, eds. *What's Next: Problems & Prospects of Journalism*. Transaction Publishers, 2001.

Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, *The Interplay of Influence: News, Advertising, Politics, and the Mass Media*, 5th ed. Pacific Grove, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 2000.

Jim A. Kuypers, *Press Bias and Politics: How the Media Frame Controversial Issues*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002.

Ian Law, *Race in the News*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002.

Regina G. Lawrence, *The Politics of Force: Media and the Construction of Police Brutality*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

Patricia Moy and Michael Pfau, *With Malice Toward All? The Media and Public Confidence in Democratic Institutions*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2000.

Jan P. Vermeer, *The View from Local Newspapers: Editorials and National Politics*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000.

Summary

The mass media do not simply mirror reality. The process of selecting and editing provides an opportunity for slanting the news, which is further enhanced when stories are not fast-breaking. Additionally, the national press is staffed by people who are more liberal than the public as a whole. The complaint of media bias even reached Congress in 1995 when the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) was targeted by conservative Republicans.

The national press not only reports the news but also fulfills three additional roles for the public: *gatekeeper*—passing judgment on what subjects become national issues and for how long; *scorekeeper*—tracking (and making) political reputations; and *watchdog*—exposing scandals and intrigues. These multiple functions suggest that the media have a profound impact on politics. But social scientists have been unable to determine the extent to which the media actually influence public opinion. From a logical standpoint, if the press was influential, the American public would have been converted to liberalism long ago.

The media do, however, influence the political agenda by determining what issues become prominent. This constitutes an entirely different sort of influence. In this capacity, the national press does exhibit a kind of bias. Its stories focus on activities in Washington, D.C. FCC rules, however, have achieved a degree of balance by forbidding monopoly control of the media, forcing a local orientation outside the network news programs.

Discussion Questions

1. If most reporters hold liberal views, why hasn't the American public become more liberal over the years? Could reporters alter public opinion if they tried?
2. What are some recent examples of the media's role as watchdog? Is the watchdog function ever exercised in a biased way? How?
3. Studies show that the issues the public considers important are substantially the same issues featured by the media. Does this prove that the media set the agenda? What other interpretation of this piece of information is possible?
4. On what sorts of issues would we expect the media to have the most impact—whether in setting the agenda, shaping attitudes, or determining how politics is conducted? Would we expect the media to have greater influence on:
 - a. Domestic issues or foreign-policy issues?
 - b. Issues where the parties have traditional positions, or issues that cut across party lines?
 - c. New issues or old issues?
 - d. National issues or local issues?
 - e. Socially divisive issues, where deeply committed segments of the population are lined up against each other, or majoritarian issues (such as corruption or the economy), where almost all Americans share similar notions of what is right but are not sure which policy or candidate can achieve it?
 - f. Young people or old people?

- g. People much exposed to the media or people little exposed to the media?

THEME C: GOVERNMENT INFLUENCE ON THE MEDIA

Instructor Resources

Alison Alexander and Jarice Hanson, *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Issues in Mass Media and Society*, 7th ed. New York: McGraw Hill, 2002.

Joseph N. Cappella, Kathleen Hall Jamieson, and Joseph Turow, *Partisan Media: Talk Radio and Political Parties in the Twenty-first Century*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Marjorie Cohn and David Dow, *Cameras in the Courtroom: Television and the Pursuit of Justice*. Routledge, 2003.

Herbert Gans, *Democracy and the News*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Benjamin Ginsberg and Martin Shefter, *Politics By Other Means: Politicians, Prosecutors, and the Press in the Post-Electoral Era*, 3rd ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002.

Michael Isikoff, *Uncovering Clinton, A Reporter's Story*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000.

Kathleen E. Kendall, *Communication in the Presidential Primaries: Candidates and the Media, 1912-2000*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000.

Michael P. McCauley, ed., *Public Broadcasting and the Public Interest*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2002.

Frederic Moritz, *Human Rights and the Media: International Reporting as a Global Watchdog*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2003.

Pippa Norris, *Digital Divide: Civic Engagement, Information Poverty, and the Internet Worldwide*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Monroe E. Price, *Media and Sovereignty: The Global Information Revolution and Its Challenge to State Power*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002.

Larry J. Sabato, Mark Stencel, and S. Robert Lichter, *Peep Show, Media and Politics in an Age of Scandal*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000.

Robert Shogan, *Bad News: Where the Press Goes Wrong in the Making of the President*. Ivan R. Dee, Inc., 2001.

Summary

A free press is a rarity in the world: one study of ninety-four nations found that only sixteen had a high degree of press freedom. Even among democracies that do have a high degree of press freedom, many have restrictions not found in the United States. Britain has an Official Secrets Act that can be used to punish any leak of confidential governmental information. In France, broadcasting is controlled by a government agency that acts to protect the image of the government in power.

There are some governmental restraints on what the American media can print or broadcast, however.

1. *Libel*. To sue a news organization for libel successfully, one must show that what was published was not merely untrue but was printed maliciously—that is, with “reckless disregard” for its truth or falsity. This is very difficult to do.
2. *Obscenity*. Governments in the United States may outlaw obscenity; however, the definition of obscenity has been steadily narrowed by the federal courts. Laws against obscenity have no effect on newspapers and magazines primarily interested in reporting political news.

3. *Incitement.* Media may not directly incite someone to commit an illegal act. However, the mere advocacy of, for example, the violent overthrow of the government, is protected under the First Amendment.

A newspaper may, in theory, be punished for any of the foregoing, but none of them may be used as a basis for *prior restraint*: government action to prevent the publication of the material.

Given the weakness of government controls on the media, it is not surprising that officials devise other strategies to manipulate the media. These may include providing *background stories* with much inside information to favored reporters, private tongue-lashings administered to reporters who publish embarrassing stories (a technique used by Kennedy and Johnson), and public attacks on the press (used by Nixon). In the long run, the press wins.

Discussion Questions

1. The media have much freedom in the selection and publication of material in the United States. In 1979, for example, the *Progressive* magazine announced its intention to publish the blueprint to a hydrogen bomb in its next issue. Should the government have intervened to prevent publication? What standards should be used in determining when information can be kept from publication? It should be noted that the blueprint was eventually published. Should a government agency like the FCC be established to regulate the press?
2. Freedom of press has greater First Amendment protection than freedom of broadcasting. To illustrate, cigarette advertisements are forbidden on radio and television but not in newspapers and magazines. Are the two forms of media so different to justify this disparity in treatment? How so? Doesn't the decentralization of the broadcast media make enforcement more difficult?