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Mass Media in a Democratic Society: Keeping a Promise

By the end of this chapter, you should be familiar with:

- many of the criticisms leveled at the way the U.S. media cover government and elections.
- the special problems of reporting on terrorism and hate.
- why the media should be concerned with social justice for the powerful and the powerless alike.
- evaluating all forms of political communication through a single, ethically based framework.

INTRODUCTION

Americans view the written word as essential to political society. The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution states:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

Scholars such as John C. Merrill (1974) assert that the First Amendment should be interpreted purely as a restriction on government, emphasizing freedom of expression and downplaying any notion of reciprocal journalistic responsibility. But others, including Alexis de Toqueville (1835), who studied our democracy about 150 years ago, viewed the press of the day as an essential antidote to a culture that valued liberty over community. The press, de Toqueville said, was an incubator of civilization, an idea that political philosopher John Dewey would further for the mass media of his day just under a century later.



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Madison, Hamilton and Jay in the *Federalist Papers* expected citizens to be informed and to participate in politics. They knew that political debate, including what was printed in the press, would be partisan and biased rather than objective, but they also believed that from this “noisy” information the rational being would find the truth. Unfettered communication was essential to building a new nation. Citizens had an obligation to read such information; the press had an obligation to provide it. Tucked within all of this, we believe, is a promise that the mass media, both in 1791 and now more than 200 years later, will provide citizens with what they need to know to get along in political society, an analysis now called the “social responsibility theory” of the press. However, assuming such a responsibility is becoming progressively more difficult because of the increasingly complex structure of the contemporary American political system.

EVALUATING POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

For the Greeks, where democracy was born, the art of politics was considered a gift from the gods, who provided men with *adios*, a sense of concern for the good opinion of others, and *dike*, a sense of justice which makes civic peace possible. In the ancient myth, these gifts were bestowed on everyone, not just some elite. All men were able to exercise the art of politics through rhetoric and argument in the assembly, a form of direct democracy that survived for only a few years in Athens. No newspapers, no television, just in-person debate. The Greeks called it *polity*, which translates as community, one of the Greeks’ highest ethical constructs. Greece was also the last place that direct democracy was practiced.

Considering the contemporary cacophony, that’s not such a big surprise. It’s not just the negative campaign commercials. It’s the barrage of opinion masquerading as analysis on cable television, the thousands of blogs available on the Internet, the candidate campaign Web sites—including entries into domains such as Facebook—the late night comedians, “Comedy Central” and all the rest. One study by the Pew Charitable Trusts in 2004 found that more than half of Americans under age 50 get their news about politics “regularly” or “sometimes” from late-night comedians. But these respondents were also among the least likely to know basic facts about candidates. Even on the lowest level, politics, for most, is a mass-mediated event.

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Evaluating all this political information is a problem for both media consumers and for journalists. Furthermore, as news blends into entertainment and persuasion leeches into both genres, providing a consistent way of examining every political message becomes essential in ethical analysis. Political scientist Bruce A. Williams (2009) has begun this process with a four-part test he believes will help you determine when information has political relevance:

- First, is the information **useful**—does it provide citizens with the kind of information that helps individual and collective decision making?
- Second, is the information **sufficient**—is there enough of it and at enough depth to allow people to make informed choices?
- Third, is the information **trustworthy**?
- Fourth, **who is the “audience”**—the political “we” on which the ancient Greeks placed so much emphasis?

Information that meets these criteria should be considered politically relevant, mediated information regardless of genre or source, Williams says. Under this test, a Jon Stewart show or a Stephen Colbert monologue would be considered politically relevant communication every bit as much as a campaign ad or an investigative piece. Under this sort of analysis, cable news programming, which often features dueling opinions by talking heads talking over each other, often unsubstantiated by evidence, would actually fare less well than the comedy monologue. In a famous dustup between cable news personality (now CATO Institute fellow) Tucker Carlson, “Comedy Central” comedian Jon Stewart took on the entire genre of punditry, suggesting that his show was more truthful and politically relevant.

Putting all political communication into the same arena also has another virtue—every message can be evaluated along the same standard. Here, again, Williams (2009) suggests four criteria.

- **Transparency**—Does the audience know who is speaking? This has become a major problem in recent elections with the rise of PACs and groups not bound by campaign finance rules and rarely bothered with the total accuracy of their claims, something seen on both sides in the 2009 debate over health care reform.
- **Pluralism**—Does the media environment provide an opportunity for diverse points of view, either in different messages that are equally accessible or within a single message? Does every side have access to the engines of information that are now the modern equivalent of the face-to-face rhetoric of ancient Greece?
- **Verisimilitude**—Do the sources of the messages take responsibility for the truth claims they explicitly and implicitly make, even if these claims are not strictly verifiable in any formal sense?
- **Practice**—Does the message encourage modeling, rehearsing, preparing and learning for civic engagement? Does it encourage activities like voting or less direct forms of political activity like thinking about issues, looking at Web sites, blogging or talking to neighbors face-to-face? Is the ad or article empowering or does it contribute to the cacophony that has dominated recent political campaigns?

While this puts all political messages on a level and ethically based playing field, contemporary democratic politics still produces some morally relevant variations—at least when it comes to news and persuasion. We will review some of the most commonly acknowledged issues now.

GETTING ELECTED

For any politician to enact change, he or she must first be elected, and in our mass society, that means turning to the mass media to reach the electorate. In one classic study, voters admitted learning more about candidates' stands on issues from advertising than they did from news (Patterson 1980). And considering that modern presidential campaigns place ads only in contested states, many voters get little exposure to even the limited and one-sided information coming from ads. In the past decade, campaign Web sites have become increasingly important. But since they are under the control of the candidate and not bound by any constraints of objectivity or completeness, they too qualify as advertising. So today, more than 30 years after the first studies indicated this, advertising is still the leading source of information for most people in most campaigns.

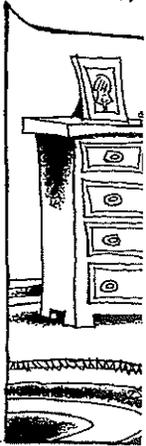
Because ads are a leading source of campaign information, factual accuracy, therefore, must be the starting point for ethical political advertising. As philosopher Hannah Arendt has noted, "Freedom of information is a farce unless factual information is guaranteed and the facts themselves are not in dispute" (Arendt 1970).

News stories about elections emphasize strategy and tactics rather than stands on issues, forcing voters who want to become informed about the candidate's policy choices to get their information from ads, often "negative" or "attack" ads framed by the other side. They do this in part because policy information is largely missing from news stories which tend to focus on polls, who's hot and who's not, electability and character, but usually only the search for flaws.

Contemporary voters can discern the various types of political ads, according to election studies. Comparative ads, ones that contrast candidate positions on specific issues, were viewed as information rich, and voters view them as an appropriate part of political discourse. Attack ads, ones that are personal and negative, that contain no "positive" or "issue-oriented" information, were disliked and distrusted in the studies. A few years ago, a majority of political ads were either positive or contrasted stances of the candidates (Benoit 1999). Another study from the same time showed that voters were able to distinguish among negative, comparative and positive or biographical ads (Jamieson 2000). Studies provide ample evidence that it once is possible to create ethical political advertising on the local, state and national levels and win.

However, in just a decade, the tide has turned, and "going negative" is now seen as the only route to victory for candidates at all levels. And as an added inducement to create negative ads, candidates see them run repeatedly, for free, as the negative charge is debated on cable news over and over. It was perceived negative coverage and a slew of ethics complaints that Sarah Palin blamed for her

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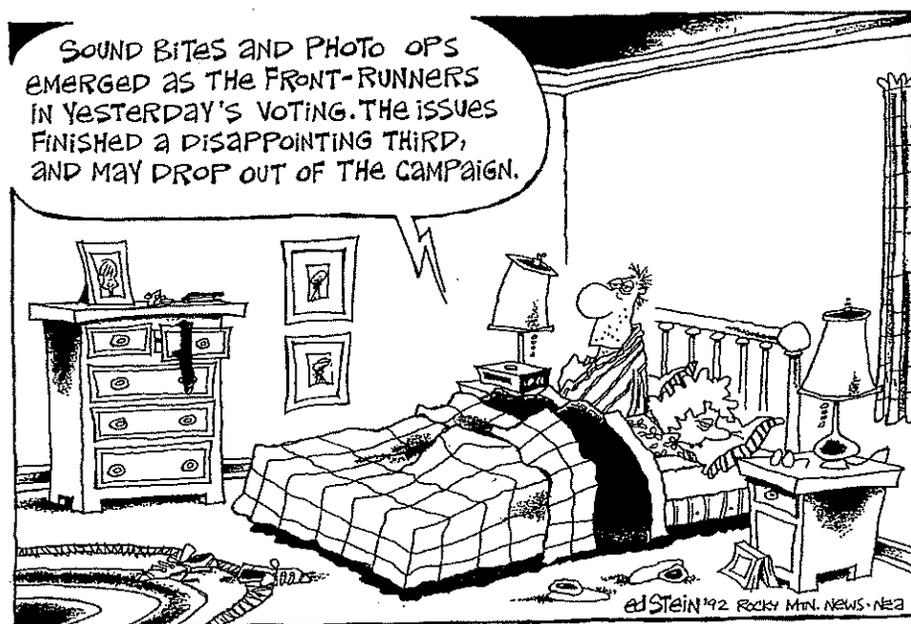
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Today, political advertising is a news beat. These news stories, often called "ad watches," put the claims in political ads to the tests of truthfulness and context. Anecdotal evidence suggests that aggressive journalism focusing on attack ads and negative campaigning can have an impact on the voters' knowledge of particular candidates. Under the social responsibility of the press, it is the responsibility of journalists to evaluate political advertising as legitimate news and to hold candidates publicly accountable for the advertising sponsored by a campaign or, in the grayer areas, advertising paid for by political action groups, even those disavowed by the candidate.

Ideally, political advertising would be factual and rational. The use of emotional arguments designed to stir listeners or viewers "to set aside reason" is a "violation of democratic ethics" (Haiman 1958, 388). There may, however, be times when valid issues have strong emotional content, such as the ongoing debate over abortion or immigration. The melding of emotion and issue in such cases is not unethical. Totalitarian regimes have historically used emotional rather than rational appeals to either gain or retain power.

However, such ads usually lack any evidence to support the claims. Seeking the evidence behind political assertions has historically been the role of the news media. When this sort of journalism is lacking, it begins a cycle that was foreseen by Walter Lippmann: "In the absence of debate, restricted utterance leads to the degradation of opinion . . . the more rational is overcome by the less rational, and

the opinions that will prevail will be those which are held most ardently by those with the most passionate will" (Lippmann 1982, 196).

If political advertising is indeed a special case (Kaid 1992), then journalists and their audiences should demand higher standards, more regulations or both. While some of the solutions to the current problems have both First Amendment and financial ramifications, they are worthy of discussion. They include the following:

- Allot limited amounts of free time to qualified candidates for major office to level the playing field for candidates;
- Strengthen state regulations against corrupt campaign practices and find ways to enforce those regulations;
- Encourage journalists to stop covering the "horse race" aspect of campaigns and focus on problems and solutions;
- Hold candidates accountable for their ads and for the ads of political action committees or other groups such as moveon.org;
- Teach journalists to read and report on the visual imagery of a campaign, and to ask candidates questions about it;
- Allow attack ads only if they include the image of the candidate directing the attack;
- Reject unfair or inaccurate ads created by political action committees;
- Conduct ad watches as part of media coverage of a campaign, analyzing the ads for omissions, inconsistencies and inaccuracies.

It takes money to buy ads, and in contemporary democratic societies that means the candidate with the most money often has the loudest voice. Many argue the influence of money in the political system is pervasive and corrosive, and bills have been introduced to limit the power of money in politics only to die in the political process or be ignored in the real world by substituting "soft money" for restricted money.

The issue came to the forefront in the 2008 campaign. Barack Obama changed his mind about accepting public funding for his campaign when he realized that he could easily raise more money than the amount allotted by law, while John McCain accepted the public funds. The huge "money gap" that resulted played a role in the election (and was a much discussed topic on news shows) though it is debatable how much of a difference it made. While it can be argued that money buys elections, especially in the light of evidence that the most heavily-funded campaign wins more often than not, it can also be argued that monetary gifts are merely precursors to votes and the most popular candidate in gifts is often the most popular in votes as well.

How to deal with the influence of money in elections is an important policy question, but there seem to be few effective mechanisms for curtailing its influence. Politicians are too entrenched in the existing system to be objective, and the media that could presumably investigate political money and its negative influence are compromised by the act of receiving so much of the cash. The problem cannot be "solved" in this brief chapter, but it is worth considering whether a media system in a democracy might not be able to be a part of the solution rather than a part of the problem.

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LEARNING ABOUT LEADERS AND THEIR CHARACTER

Today, a pressing political issue is whether people can become acquainted well enough and deeply enough with any candidate to acquire an opinion. After all, a representative democracy rests on the Greek concept of *adios*, a concern for the good opinion of others. Except for a small group of insiders, the mass media have become the primary source of political information, including information about character. In addition to providing voters with facts, something that is generally assumed to be the role of news, the media also provide citizens with a framework to understand those facts.

Candidates have been quick to utilize a variety of media outlets. California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger announced his candidacy on the "Tonight Show." Because journalists cover national campaigns in a pack, there is seldom any really distinctive political reporting during elections (Crouse 1974; Sabato 1992). However, for journalists, campaign assignments hold the opportunity for personal prestige. The person who covers the winning candidate for a network will almost assuredly become the White House correspondent for the next four years, a guarantee of celebrity status, increased income and, many would argue, real political power by setting the agenda of coverage. Journalists covering a national election have almost as much at stake as the candidates they cover.

Further, journalists treat front-runners differently than they do the remainder of the candidate pack (Robinson and Sheehan 1984). Front-runners are the subject of closer scrutiny, but those examinations are seldom about issues. When Secretary of State Hilary Clinton was running for President in 2008, her front-runner status resulted in coverage that nearly everyone, including the journalists producing it, felt was subtly sexist. Clinton maintained that she had to campaign as much against the stereotype as she did against her opponents. Candidates and their paid consultants have developed strategies that will allow them either to capitalize on front-runner status and image or to compensate for a lack of it. Free media—synonymous with a positive story on the 5:00 p.m. news—has become the watchword of most state and national political campaigns. Candidates have mastered the "photo opportunity" and, for incumbents, the "Rose Garden strategy" designed to thwart anything but the most carefully scripted candidate contact with the voting public.

At the same time candidates try to script their every move, the media have the right, and the responsibility, to get "behind the curtain" (Molotch and Lester 1974) to the real candidate. What happens after the curtain is down often makes news in ways the candidates could not have foreseen. Often it is sexual scandal or financial wrongdoing that brings down the carefully crafted veil that major politicians erect. Journalists face a number of questions in cases such as these. Just because the information is available and even accurate does not automatically mean that it is relevant.

Conceptualizations of character have changed significantly since the founding of the republic, when character was defined in Aristotelian terms—an observable collection of habits, virtues and vices. Freudian psychology has altered that

definition to include motivation, the subconscious and relationships that help to form all of us as people. What journalists cover is “political character,” the intersection of personality and public performance within the cultural and historical context. Character is dynamic—the synergy of a person within an environment (Davies 1963). Journalists who explore character often do so for an ethical reason, despite apparent invasions of privacy.

Political figures are powerful people. Ethicist Sissela Bok (1978) has noted that when an unequal power relationship is involved, it is possible to justify what would otherwise be considered an unethical act. To paraphrase Bok, investigation of the private character of public people is validated if the person investigated is also in the position to do harm. In those cases, invading privacy in an attempt to counter that threat is justified. However, that invasion also needs to meet some tests (Schoeman 1984):

- The invasion must be placed in a larger context of facts and history and must include context to provide meaning;
- The revelation of private facts about political figures should meet the traditional tests of journalism and needs to be linked to public, political behaviors before publication or broadcast becomes ethically justifiable;
- The invasion of privacy must further the larger political discourse and must meet the most demanding ethical test: the “need to know.”

Careful reporting on character can pass these tests. However, journalists must also weigh the harm done to others, particularly family members, who have not sought the public limelight. In the campaign of 2008, one of the ethical quandaries reporters faced is whether the pregnancy of vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin’s unmarried daughter was news. Arguments can be made for both sides of the controversy, but eventually virtually every media outlet ran the story, including many who did so after determining the story was already “out there.”

Even reporting that passes the three tests above must be filtered through discretion—a word usually used in moral development theory. In ethics, discretion means having the practical wisdom not to reveal everything one is told, even if facts or events would be of casual interest to many. Journalists have the difficult problem of being discreet in their news coverage, even when candidates, their handlers or supporters and opponents have been indiscreet—sometimes deliberately so. Discretion prevents mainstream media from slipping into “tabloid journalism” or the domain of gossip blogs that cast doubt on our journalistic motives and credibility.

Reporters covering political character should be aware that there are several building blocks of character, including the:

- politician’s development of a sense of trust;
- politician’s own sense of self-worth and self-esteem;
- development of a politician’s relationship to power and authority;
- early influences on adult policy outlook;
- way a politician establishes contact with people;
- flexibility, adaptability and purposefulness of mature adulthood;
- historical moment.

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The media's current emphasis on covering political character provides the best illustration of the need to balance the demands of governing with privacy. No culture has ever expected its leaders to be saints; in fact, some cultures have prized leadership that is decidedly unsaintly. In American culture, the concept of public servant—which is the work of politics—has been replaced by the epithet “politician”—synonymous with “crook,” or “liar,” a caricature reinforced in popular culture by iconic films such as *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* or *All the King's Men*. However, Americans were reminded that public service can be a high calling, as shown by the first responders to the 9/11 tragedy, many of whom lost their lives. The late Senator Edward Kennedy described his job as public service. Such service, dating as far back as Athens, was considered the mark of a life well lived.

THE PROPER ROLE OF THE MEDIA— GUARD DOG OR LAP DOG?

One of the ironies of democratic politics is that, in order to accomplish something, you first have to get elected, but it is accomplishing something, not getting elected, that is the major work of politics. Journalists fuel the irony by covering politicians more at the time of their elections or re-elections and paying much less attention to their policy making in between elections. Regulatory agencies, cabinet offices and the courts are not considered glamour beats by the national press corps. Annual surveys by journalism watchdog groups show a dwindling number of reporters on the regulatory beat, which accounts for the late start the media had on a story like global warming until it was forced to the forefront by former Vice President Al Gore in his award-winning documentary. A similar decline in coverage has been noted for years in state legislatures as well.

Yet the national press corps, particularly, is often a player in the policy process by reporting “leaks” and granting “off-the-record” interviews. Political scientist Martin Linsky (1986) describes how leaks have become part of the Washington policy-making process. Government officials, both elected and appointed, use the mass media to leak a story to find out how others will react to it—floating a “trial balloon” in the press. Other times, policymakers will leak a story because they wish to mount support for or oppose a cause.

Sometimes leaks take the form of whistle-blowing when a government employee honestly believes the public good is not being served by the system. Watergate's famed (and now named) source, “Deep Throat,” apparently was so motivated when he leaked key parts of the government investigation into the Watergate break-in to *Washington Post* reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, who wrote a set of stories that ended in the resignation of President Richard Nixon. More recently, the initial information about the Abu Ghraib prison abuse scandal in Iraq came to journalists in e-mails from service men and women who were alarmed at the treatment of Iraqis held at the prison and of the military command's unwillingness or inability to change the system.

More than two decades ago, Linsky (1986) wrote about the role of the media in the policy-making process and raised two important points regarding ethical

journalistic practice still relevant today. First, leaks are an acceptable way of doing government business and policymakers are using them skillfully. Second, leaks can alter the outcome of the policy process itself, and much anecdotal evidence exists to support this conclusion. Of fundamental importance for journalists is the question of whether reporters, editors and their news organizations should become consciously involved in the process of governing by participating in the leaking process, and if so, in what manner? Recent scandals involving faked stories have caused most national media to tighten their regulations on when they grant "off-the-record" requests and when they use the information. But still the practice is common.

Most ethicists agree that the media's primary function is to provide citizens with information that will allow them to make informed political choices (Hodges 1986; Elliott 1986). Media organizations are expected to act as a watchdog on government. Edmund Burke, in a speech in Britain's House of Commons during the late 1700s first called the media the "Fourth Estate" (Ward 2004). In the United States, the Founders protected the press in the Bill of Rights. Thomas Jefferson saw the press as the guardian of the public's interest despite the bitter, partisan nature of the press of his day.

The watchdog media, set apart by custom and by law, also have a "guide dog" function to help citizens make their way through the political process. However, when the press covers politics as a constant "food fight" by competing interests, both journalists and citizens are soured to the process. Political reporter E. J. Dionne in *Why Americans Hate Politics* (1991) argues that defining news as conflict (as virtually every journalism text does) inevitably reduces political debate into a shouting match. And, post-9/11 there is always the chance that critical coverage of government, especially the Pentagon, will be labeled "unpatriotic" by critics, including many in political power. This is not a problem exclusively confined to the U.S. system, as documentaries such as *Control Room*—in an in-depth look at the al-Jazeera newsgathering operation—make clear.

Dionne agrees with Plato, who said that democratic politics, while a "degenerative" form of government, was probably the best available system considering that human beings were its primary components. And the same can be said of the humans who cover the governing process. Media critic James Fallows (1996, 7) goes one step further. He holds journalism directly responsible for voter apathy, congressional gridlock and government via opinion polls rather than political leadership. In a quote that rings just as true today as it did when he made it before the turn of the century, Fallows claims:

The harm actually goes much further than that, to threaten the long-term health of our political system. Step by step, mainstream journalism has fallen into the habit of portraying public life in America as a race to the bottom, in which one group of conniving, insincere politicians ceaselessly tries to outmaneuver another. The great problem for American democracy in the 1990s is that people barely trust elected leaders or the entire legislative system to accomplish anything of value. . . . Deep forces in America's political, social and economic structures account for most of the frustration of today's politics, but the media's attitudes have played a surprisingly important and destructive role.

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Media critic Katherine Hall Jamieson (1992) has suggested that, when it comes to politics, journalists should get themselves a new definition of news. Instead of emphasizing events and conflict, Jamieson believes news stories could equally revolve around issues and multiple policy perspectives. Fallows and others insist that implicit in the right to report on politics is that successful governing is an outcome for which the media are partially responsible. The cynical assumptions that government can never act for the public good, and that journalists and the media are somehow outside and perhaps even above the political system, are almost nihilistic. Ethical practice allows journalists and their media consumers to become more conscientiously involved in the American democratic political system.

MODERN PROBLEMS: TERRORISM AND HATE

Terrorism is, at its most fundamental level, an act of communication; it communicates hatred toward the target. Scholars suggest that terrorism was not possible (or effective) before the modern mass media was capable of amplifying the message of hate. Terrorists and the media have a symbiotic relationship: terrorists need the media to communicate their messages, and the media garner ratings and increased readership when terrorism is in the news, even while deploring the violence. Simultaneously, the media must perform a dual role: acting as filters of the terrorists' message and as watchdogs of government response.

Terrorism presents journalists with what philosophers call "hard questions." Terrorism is news, but news coverage furthers terrorists' ends and makes more terrorism likely. How to break that cycle has been the subject of much professional anguish throughout the world, with some governments resorting to censorship of news. And objectivity is often antithetical to the situation. In the face of some forms of terrorism such as genocide, journalists must take the side of humanity, even if it means abandoning objectivity. CNN correspondent Christiane Amanpour argued on air with former President Bill Clinton about America's reluctance get involved in the racial and civil war after the former Yugoslavia disintegrated. Amanpour was not alone in her views, and after extensive debate the United States and NATO did engage in the conflict.

Terrorism also presents nation-states with hard problems. Nations under attack almost reflexively clamp down on their citizens—particularly those who question or dissent. Democracies pass laws, for example the PATRIOT Act, that enhance government's powers over its citizens. The PATRIOT Act not only increased the government's powers of search and seizure (unchecked by the courts), but also allowed incarceration of suspected terrorists without bail or public notification. What made the Act more devastating was the inclusion of a provision that made it impossible for journalists to get information needed to evaluate the effectiveness of the Act. If truth is the first casualty of war, then independence of thought and action is the first casualty of terrorism.

Journalists perform another role in such historic times—that of moral witness. Ethicist Patrick Plaisance (2002) suggests that when journalists report on such



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events as terrorism, its causes, its execution and its results, the journalist functions as a “moral witness” because such news stories cannot be understood or reported outside of a moral framework. Plaisance and others assert that to be detached and objective about genocide and hate is to condone it. When journalists write the first draft of history of the early part of this century, they must deal with competing claims about justice, community, truth and power. Such reporting requires excellence in both ethical reflection and professional technique. It has seldom been more difficult—or more important—to do both well.

SOCIAL JUSTICE IN A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

Just as there are members of a power elite, there also are those who feel excluded from political society. One popular interpretation of U.S. history has been to track the gradual extension of power to ever more diverse publics. But the process has been uneven and contentious. All minority groups seek access to the political process and, since the mass media have become major players in that process, they seek access to media as well.

Media ethicists suggest these political and social outgroups provide the mass media with a further set of responsibilities. They assert that the mass media, and individual journalists, need to become advocates for the politically homeless. Media ethicist Clifford Christians suggests that “justice for the powerless stands at the centerpiece of a socially responsible press. Or, in other terms, the litmus test of whether or not the news profession fulfills its mission over the long term is its advocacy for those outside the socioeconomic establishment” (Christians 1986, 110).

This socially responsible view of the media suggests that journalists have a duty to promote community and the individuals within it. Those who are in significant ways outside the community—economically, socially or culturally—need a voice.

Christians's argument can be amplified beyond democracy's racial, ethnic and economic outgroups. In contemporary democratic society, clearly some "things" also are without political voice. The environment, ethnic issues, poverty and human rights violations beyond American shores all have difficulty finding a powerful spokesperson. These issues cross traditional political boundaries. Those who will be affected by them also need a voice.

Communitarian thinking takes social responsibility to the next level. It urges that justice is the ethical linchpin of journalistic decision making. If justice becomes the fundamental value of American journalism, then the media have the goal of transforming society, of empowering individual citizens to act in ways that promote political discussion, debate and change (Christians et al. 1993).

What makes journalists uneasy about either the communitarian or social responsibility approaches is that they smack of a kind of benevolent paternalism. If individual human beings carry moral stature, then assigning one institution—in this case the mass media—the role of social and political arbiter diminishes the moral worth of the individual citizen. The mass media become a kind parent and the citizen a sort of wayward child in need of guidance. Such a relationship does not promote political maturity.

While the weight of recent scholarly opinion sides with Christians, the view is not without risk. If accepted, it means a thorough change for the mass media in the U.S. political system. That change would bring about other changes, some of them not easy to anticipate. But whether change is what's needed, or merely a return to the strict libertarian view, both call for some sophisticated ethical reasoning. As Thomas Jefferson said, being a citizen of a democracy is not easy—to which journalists might well add, neither is covering one.

Suggested Readings

- CHRISTIANS, C., T. GLASSER, D. MCQUAIL, and K. NORDENSTRENG. 2009. *Normative theories of the media: Journalism in democratic societies*. Champagne, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- DIONNE, E. J., JR. 1991. *Why Americans hate politics*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
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- JAMIESON, K. H. 2000. *Everything you think you know about politics . . . and why you're wrong*. New York: Basic Books.
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