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Chapter 1

Communication in the Information Age

Preamble

On the evening of April 2, 2003, the television networks' nightly news aired a brief night-vision video, supplied by the Defense Department, of US forces carrying Private Jessica Lynch to safety after rescuing her from behind enemy lines in Iraq. The next day, in an exclusive on its front page that read like a Hollywood screenplay outline, the *Washington Post* reported her heroic story. Written from Washington, DC, and based on information supplied by unnamed officials, it told how, after "fighting to the death" and shooting several enemy soldiers, the young maintenance clerk was seriously wounded, captured, and taken to an enemy hospital. A few days later she was daringly rescued by US commandos. Susan Schmidt and Vernon Loeb, "'She Was Fighting to the Death': Details Emerging of W. V. Soldier's Capture and Rescue," *Washington Post*, April 3, 2003, A1. The story echoed through the broadcasting and print news media in the United States, throughout the world, and on the web. The television networks' morning news shows sent reporters to West Virginia to interview Lynch's family and friends. A website was established to receive and share tributes to her gallantry and feats. Scott Drake, webmaster of Jessica-Lynch.com, e-mail to Tim Cook, March 6, 2005.

Although the *Post*'s report mentioned that the story had yet to be confirmed, the Pentagon reaped favorable publicity for the war with this tale of a Rambo-type exploit by an ordinary American girl in the battle against tyranny. This frame, or point of view, was widely used in many accounts of the event. (We explain frames and framing in detail in the section "Media Influences on Politics, Government, and Public Policies" in Section 1.3 "Opinion and Commentary").

Media companies bargained for the rights to Private Lynch's story. Viacom offered her a package: a prime-time news interview on its CBS television network; a book deal with its publishing house, Simon and Schuster; a music-video host spot on its cable channel MTV2; and a movie contract. Jim Rutenberg, "To Interview Former P.O.W., CBS Offers Stardom," *New York Times*, June 16, 2003, A1. Eventually she signed with NBC, which had indicated that it was going to make a TV movie about her whether it had the rights to her story or not. NBC aired its made-for-TV movie *Saving Jessica Lynch* soon after the Veteran's Day publication of a book about her

ordeal written by a former *New York Times* reporter with whom she split a \$1 million advance. Rick Bragg, *I Am a Soldier, Too: The Jessica Lynch Story* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003). Promoting the book, Ms. Lynch appeared on ABC's *Primetime Live* for an interview with Diane Sawyer, NBC's *Today Show*, the CBS *Late Show* with David Letterman, and on CNN's *Larry King Live*. She was the subject of a cover story in *Time* magazine and was featured in *Glamour* magazine as one of its women of the year.

Accounts in both mass and new media, statements by Private Lynch herself, and a commentary by the *Post*'s ombudsman (the individual at the newspaper charged with evaluating its stories) almost three months after the original story, indicated that the facts, to the extent they could be verified, were far less heroic. Dana Priest, William Booth, and Susan Schmidt, "A Broken Body, a Broken Story, Pieced Together..." *Washington Post*, June 17, 2003, A1 and Michael Getler, "A Long, and Incomplete, Correction," *Washington Post*, June 29, 2003, B6. Lynch's gun had jammed and not been fired. She did not fight or shoot at any enemy soldiers. The rescue may not have been necessary because the Iraqi army had fled from the hospital the previous day, although it probably still controlled the town. Hospital staff had escorted the commandos to her ward. Blogs dissecting and arguing about the media's rethinking mushroomed. Over two years after the initial event, a former deputy commander at the United States Central Command wrote an op-ed column in the *New York Times* reminding people that Private Lynch had never claimed to be a hero and denying that the military had played up her rescue for its publicity purposes. Michael DeLong, "Politics During Wartime," *New York Times*, April 27, 2007, A7.

The Jessica Lynch story graphically reveals the interconnection of communication, information, and the media, as well as their significance for government and politics. These are the subjects of this chapter.

1.1 Communication, Information, and the Media

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this section, you should be able to answer the following questions:

1. What are communication, information, and mass and new media?
2. How do economics, government and politics, and technology shape the media and their contents?
3. What are the main criticisms directed at the media industry?
4. What are the types of mass media?

Communication¹ is a central activity of everyone engaged in politics—people asserting, arguing, deliberating, and contacting public officials; candidates seeking to win votes; lobbyists pressuring policymakers; presidents appealing to the public, cajoling Congress, addressing the leaders and people of other countries. All this communication sparks more communication, actions, and reactions.

1. The process of transmitting or exchanging information. It can involve asserting, arguing, debating, deliberating, contacting, pressuring, appealing to, cajoling, and addressing.
2. Facts, knowledge, and views that people communicate about subjects and events. It encompasses news, opinion and commentary, and the contents of entertainment.
3. Well-established communication formats, such as newspapers and magazines, network television and radio stations, designed to reach large audiences.
4. Forms of electronic communication made possible by computer and digital technologies.

What people communicate is **information**² about subjects and events, people and processes. This section draws on Bruce Bimber, *Information and American Democracy: Technology in the Evolution of Political Power* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), especially 9–12. It can be true or false, fiction or nonfiction, believable or not. We define it broadly to encompass entertainment, news, opinion, and commentary.

The bulk of information that Americans obtain about politics and government comes through the mass and new media. **Mass media**³ are well-established communication formats, such as newspapers and magazines, network television and radio stations, designed to reach large audiences. Mass media also encompass entertainment fare, such as studio films, best-selling books, and hit music.

New media⁴ are forms of electronic communication made possible by computer and digital technologies. They include the Internet, the World Wide Web, digital video cameras, cellular telephones, and cable and satellite television and radio. They enable quick, interactive, targeted, and potentially democratic communication, such as social media, blogs, podcasts, websites, wikis, instant messaging, and e-mail.

The media, old and new, are central to American politics and government in three ways that we highlight throughout this book. First, they depict the people, institutions, processes, issues, and policies involved in politics and government. Second, the way in which participants in government and politics interact with the media influences the way in which the media depict them. Third, the media's depictions can have effects.

Economics, Government and Politics, and Technology

Three interrelated factors are central to the development of the US media industry and its political contents. They are economics, government and politics, and technology.

We start with economics. Journalist A. J. Liebling wrote, "The function of the press...is to inform, but its role is to make money." A. J. Liebling, *The Press* (New York: Ballantine, 1964), 7. Even when profit is not the motive, the media need financing to survive. The commercial media rely on advertising, sales, and subscriptions, and so the content of their diverse products is aimed at attracting audiences desirable to advertisers. Unlike other countries, the United States has no media primarily financed by government.

Government is involved with the media as a regulator, censor, and enabler. Regulation often involves decisions on technology: the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has given away approximately \$70 billion worth of digital spectrum, the wireless airwaves that carry television and radio broadcasts, to major media companies. Government censors by restricting content it deems obscene or by punishing media for producing such content. Government enables when, for example, it waives the antitrust laws for media companies or subsidizes and thus lowers the postage costs for mailing newspapers and magazines.

Technological innovation can change media economics, relations with politicians and government, and the media's political contents. Thus the development of television made it easier for candidates to communicate directly with voters and temporarily reduced the importance of political parties in elections.

Economics, government, and technology interact. The degree to which a technology influences politics depends on the way in which the technology is used. This in turn is shaped by the economic realities of the marketplace and by government policies concerning who can use a medium and for what purpose. Although the technology of television, even before cable, could have allowed for multiple and diverse channels, the economic search for a big audience to attract advertising revenue, paired with government regulation that favored private for-profit ownership,

created the “three-network system” that endured until the 1980s. This system provided airtime for presidents to present their programs to a huge national audience. When cable television offered more alternatives for viewers, it became harder for presidents to be heard above the clamor of competing programs—a difficulty furthered by the emergence of new media.

The Media Industry

A few multinational conglomerates dominate the mass media; indeed, they are global media empires. Between them, they own the main television networks and production companies, most of the popular cable channels, the major movie studios, magazines, book publishers, and the top recording companies, and they have significant ownership interests in Internet media. Other large corporations own the vast majority of newspapers, major magazines, television and radio stations, and cable systems. Many people live in places that have one newspaper, one cable-system owner, few radio formats, and one bookstore selling mainly best sellers. C. Edwin Baker argues for the importance of media diversity in *Media Concentration and Democracy: Why Ownership Matters* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Furthering consolidation, in January 2011 the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) approved the merger of Comcast, the nation’s largest cable and home Internet provider, with NBC Universal, one of the major producers of television shows and movies and the owner of several local stations as well as such lucrative cable channels as MSNBC, CNBC, USA, Bravo, and SyFy.

Some scholars criticize the media industry for pursuing profits and focusing on the bottom line. They accuse it of failing to cover government and public affairs in depth and of not presenting a wide range of views on policy issues. Ben H. Bagdikian, *The New Media Monopoly* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004).

The reliance of most of the mass media on advertising as their main source of revenue and profit can discourage them from giving prominence to challenging social and political issues and critical views. Advertisers usually want cheery contexts for their messages.

Nonetheless, the mass media contain abundant information about politics, government, and public policies. Here is the essential information about the main types of mass media and their political contents.

Newspapers

The core of the mass media of the departed twentieth century was the newspaper. Even now, newspapers originate the overwhelming majority of domestic and foreign news.

During recent years, sales have plummeted as many people have given up or, as with the young, never acquired the newspaper habit. Further cutting into sales are newspapers' free online versions. Revenue from advertising (automotive, employment, and real estate) has also drastically declined, with classified ads moving to Craigslist and specialist job-search sites. As a result, newspapers have slashed staff, closed foreign and domestic bureaus (including in Washington, DC), reduced reporting, and shrunk in size.

Nonetheless, there are still around 1,400 daily newspapers in the United States with estimated combined daily circulations of roughly forty million; many more millions read the news online. Chains of newspapers owned by corporations account for over 80 percent of circulation.

A few newspapers, notably the *Wall Street Journal* (2.1 million), *USA Today* (1.8 million), and the *New York Times* (877,000), are available nationwide.

The *Wall Street Journal*, although it has erected a pay wall around its Internet content, claims an electronic readership of 450,000. Its success suggests that in the future some newspapers may go completely online—thus reducing much of their production and distribution costs.

Most newspapers, including thousands of weeklies, are aimed at local communities. But after losing advertising revenue, their coverage is less comprehensive. They are being challenged by digital versions of local newspapers, such as AOL's Patch.com. Verne G. Kopytoff, "AOL Bets on Hyperlocal News, Finding Progress Where Many Have Failed," *New York Times*, January 17, 2011, B3. It has seven hundred sites, each in an affluent community, in nineteen states and the District of Columbia. AOL has hired journalists and equipped each of them with a laptop computer, digital camera, cell phone, and police scanner to publish up to five items of community news daily. Some of their stories have achieved prominence, as, for example, a 2009 report about the hazing of high school freshmen in Millburn, New Jersey. But the most popular posts are about the police, schools, and local sports; and "often the sites are like digital Yellow Pages." Ken Auletta, "You've Got News," *The New Yorker*, January 24, 2011, 33.

Magazines

There are roughly five thousand magazines published on every conceivable subject. Five publishers account for around one-third of the total revenue generated. Political and social issues are commonly covered in news weeklies such as *Time* and also appear in popular magazines such as *People* and *Vanity Fair*.

To survive, journals of political opinion usually depend on subsidies from wealthy individuals who support their views. The *Weekly Standard*, the voice of Republican neoconservatives and one of the most influential publications in Washington, with a circulation of approximately 75,000, loses around \$5 million annually. It was initially owned and funded by media mogul Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, which makes big profits elsewhere through its diverse holdings, such as Fox News and the *Wall Street Journal*. In 2009, it sold the *Weekly Standard* to the conservative Clarity Media Group.

Television

People watch an average of thirty-four hours of television weekly. Over one thousand commercial, for-profit television stations in the United States broadcast over the airwaves; they also are carried, as required by federal law, by local cable providers. Most of them are affiliated with or, in fewer cases, owned by one of the networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox), which provide the bulk of their programming. These networks produce news, public affairs, and sports programs.

They commission and finance from production companies, many of which they own, the bulk of the entertainment programming shown on their stations and affiliates. The most desired viewers are between eighteen and forty-nine because advertisements are directed at them. So the shows often follow standard formats with recurring characters: situation comedies, dramas about police officers and investigators, and doctors and lawyers, as well as romance, dance, singing, and other competitions. Sometimes they are spin-offs from programs that have done well in the audience ratings or copies of successful shows from the United Kingdom. "Reality" programming, heavily edited and sometimes scripted, of real people put into staged situations or caught unaware, has become common because it draws an audience and usually costs less to make than written shows. The highest-rated telecasts are usually football games, exceeded only by the Academy Awards.

Unusual and risky programs are put on the air by networks and channels that may be doing poorly in the ratings and are willing to try something out of the ordinary to attract viewers. Executives at the relatively new Fox network commissioned *The Simpsons*. Matt Groening, its creator, has identified the show's political message this

way: “Figures of authority might not always have your best interests at heart....Entertain and subvert, that’s my motto.” Quoted in Sanjiv Bhattacharya, “Homer’s Odyssey,” *Observer Magazine*, August 6, 2000, 19. The show, satirizing American family life, government, politics, and the media, has become one of television’s longest running and most popular series worldwide.

Cable is mainly a niche medium. Of the ninety or so ad-supported cable channels, ten (including USA, TNT, Fox News, A&E, and ESPN) have almost a third of all the viewers. Other channels occasionally attract audiences through programs that are notable (*Mad Men* on American Movie Classics) or notorious (*Jersey Shore* on MTV). Cable channels thrive (or at least survive) financially because they receive subscriber fees from cable companies such as Comcast and Time-Warner.

The networks still have the biggest audiences—the smallest of them (NBC) had more than twice as many viewers as the largest basic cable channel, USA. The networks’ evening news programs have an audience of 23 million per night compared with the 2.6 million of cable news.

Politics and government appear not only on television in news and public-affairs programs but also in courtroom dramas and cop shows. In the long-running and top-rated television show (with an audience of 21.93 million viewers on January 11, 2011), *NCIS* (Naval Criminal Investigative Service), a team of attractive special agents conduct criminal investigations. The show features technology, sex, villains, and suspense. The investigators and their institutions are usually portrayed positively.

Public Broadcasting

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) was created by the federal government in 1967 as a private, nonprofit corporation to oversee the development of public television and radio. William Hoynes, *Public Television for Sale* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994); and Marilyn Lashley, *Public Television* (New York: Greenwood, 1992). CPB receives an annual allocation from Congress. Most of the funds are funneled to the more than three hundred public television stations of the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) and to over six hundred public radio stations, most affiliated with National Public Radio (NPR), to cover operating costs and the production and purchase of programs.

CPB’s board members are appointed by the president, making public television and radio vulnerable or at least sensitive to the expectations of the incumbent administration. Congress sometimes charges the CPB to review programs for objectivity, balance, or fairness and to fund additional programs to correct alleged

imbalances in views expressed. Twentieth-Century Fund Task Force on Public Television, *Quality Time* (New York: Twentieth-Century Fund Press, 1993), 36. Conservatives charge public broadcasting with a liberal bias. In 2011 the Republican majority in the House of Representatives sought to withdraw its federal government funding.

About half of public broadcasting stations' budgets come from viewers and listeners, usually responding to unremitting on-air appeals. Other funding comes from state and local governments, from state colleges and universities housing many of the stations, and from foundations.

Corporations and local businesses underwrite programs in return for on-air acknowledgments akin to advertisements for their image and products. Their decisions on whether or not to underwrite a show tend to favor politically innocuous over provocative programs. Public television and radio thus face similar pressure from advertisers as their for-profit counterparts.

Public broadcasting delves into politics, particularly with its evening news programs and documentaries in its *Frontline* series. National Public Radio, with an audience of around twenty-seven million listeners weekly, broadcasts lengthy news programs during the morning and evening with reports from domestic and foreign bureaus. NPR has several call-in current-events programs, such as *The Diane Rehm Show*. Guests from a spectrum of cultural life are interviewed by Terry Gross on her program *Fresh Air*. *On the Media* analyzes the news business in all its aspects; and Ira Glass's *This American Life* features distinctive individuals delving into important issues and quirky subjects. Most of these programs are available via podcast from iTunes. Public Radio Exchange, PRX.org, has an abundance of programs from independent producers and local NPR stations.

Commercial Radio

Around ten thousand commercial FM and AM radio stations in the United States broadcast over the airwaves. During the 1990s, Congress and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) dropped many restrictions on ownership and essentially abandoned the requirement that stations must serve the "public interest." This led to the demise of much public affairs programming and to a frenzy of mergers and acquisitions. Clear Channel Communications, then the nation's largest owner, bought the second largest company, increasing its ownership to roughly 1,150 stations. The company was sold in 2008 to two private equity firms.

Most radio programming is aimed at an audience based on musical preference, racial or ethnic background and language, and interests (e.g., sports). Much of the news programming is supplied by a single company, Westwood One, a subsidiary of media conglomerate Viacom. Even on all-news stations, the reports are usually limited to headlines and brief details. Talk radio, dominated by conservative hosts, reaches large audiences. We discuss it in more detail in [Section 1.3 "Opinion and Commentary"](#).

Music

Four major companies produce, package, publicize, advertise, promote, and merchandise roughly 5,000 singles and 2,500 compact discs (CDs) each year. A key to success is getting a music video on MTV or similar stations. Around twelve million CDs used to be sold nationwide every week. This number has significantly decreased. The companies and performers now make music that is cheaply available online through services such as Apple's iTunes store. Many people, especially students, download music from the Internet or burn CDs for themselves and others.

Music often contains political content. Contrast Green Day's scathing 2005 hit song "American Idiot" and its lyric "One nation controlled by the media" with Lee Greenwood's patriotic "God Bless the USA." Some rap lyrics celebrate capitalism and consumerism, promote violence against women, and endorse—or even advocate—attacks on the police and other authority figures.

Films

The movie business is dominated by six major studios, which finance and distribute around 130 feature films each year. Mass-market logic usually pushes them to seek stories that "are sufficiently original that the audience will not feel it has already seen the movie, yet similar enough to past hits not to be too far out." Mark Litwak, *Reel Power* (New York: Morrow, 1986), 74. Superheroes, science fiction and fantasy, sophomoric comedies, and animation dominate. Sequels are frequent. Special effects are common. In Robert Altman's satire *The Player*, the protagonist says that the "certain elements" he needs to market a film successfully are violence, suspense, laughter, hope, heart, nudity, sex, and a happy ending.

It can cost well over \$100 million to produce, advertise, and distribute a film to theaters. These costs are more or less recouped by US and overseas box office sales, DVD sales (declining) and rentals, revenue from selling broadcast rights to television, subscription cable, video on demand, and funds received from promoting products in the films (product placement). Increasingly important are Netflix and

its competitors, which for a monthly charge make movies available by mail or streaming.

Many independent films are made, but few of them are distributed to theaters and even fewer seen by audiences. This situation is being changed by companies, such as Snag Films, that specialize in digital distribution and video on demand (including over the iPad). Michael Cieply, "A Digital Niche for Indie Film," *New York Times*, January 17, 2011, B5.

It is said in Hollywood that "politics is box office poison." The financial failure of films concerned with US involvement in Iraq, such as *In the Valley of Elah*, appears to confirm this axiom. Nonetheless, the major studios and independents do sometimes make politically relevant movies. We refer to many of them in this book and provide a list at the end of each chapter. The five nominees for the 2005 Oscar for best picture all contained political content—*Brokeback Mountain* (homosexuality), *Capote* (a fiction writer's complex relationship to two murderers he befriends and writes about), *Crash* (racial tension in Los Angeles), *Good Night and Good Luck* (CBS's response to the Red Scare of the early 1950s), and *Munich* (Israeli-Palestinian relations).

Books

Some 100,000 books are published annually. About "seventy percent of them will not earn back the money that their authors have been advanced." Ken Auletta, "Publish or Perish," *The New Yorker*, April 26, 2010, 24–31, is the source for much of this discussion; the quotation is on p. 30. There are literally hundreds of publishers, but six produce 60 percent of all books sold in the United States. Publishers' income comes mainly from sales. A few famous authors command multimillion-dollar advances: President Bill Clinton received more than \$10 million and President Bush around \$7 million to write their memoirs.

E-books are beginning to boom. The advantage for readers is obtaining the book cheaper and quicker than by mail or from a bookstore. For publishers, there are no more costs for printing, shipping, warehousing, and returns. But digital books could destroy bookstores if, for example, publishers sold them directly to the iPad. Indeed, publishers themselves could be eliminated if authors sold their rights to (say) Amazon.

Books featuring political revelations often receive widespread coverage in the rest of the media. They are excerpted in magazines and newspapers. Their authors appear on television and radio programs. An example is President George W. Bush's former press secretary Scott McClellan, who, while praising the president in his

memoir as authentic and sincere, also accused him of lacking in candor and competence. Scott McClellan, *What Happened: Inside the Bush White House and Washington's Culture of Deception* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The subjects of this section are communication, information, and the media. We have explained how economics, government and politics, and technology shape the media and their contents. Market domination by a few conglomerates limits competition and, arguably, the wide availability and range of media contents. The main types of mass media are newspapers, magazines, television, public broadcasting, commercial radio, music, films, and books. Their contents relevant to politics and government are entertainment, news, and opinion. They are largely aimed at a vast, undifferentiated audience.

EXERCISES

1. Where do you get most of your information? How do you think the type of media you consume affects the kind of information you get?
2. How does the need to attract a large audience for advertisements influence media content?

1.2 News

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this section, you should be able to answer the following questions:

1. What is news?
2. What is objectivity?
3. How do journalists acquire the news?
4. How is the news presented?
5. How do people in public life try to influence their depictions by and in the media?
6. What are three common ways journalists cover people in public life?

Information about or relevant to politics, government, and public policies commonly appears in the mass media in the form of news. **News**⁵ is a selective account of what happens in the world. Common subjects are violence (wars), crime (school shootings), natural disasters (earthquakes, hurricanes), and scandals (sexual, financial). The statements and actions of powerful or prominent people are news. So are human interest stories, such as the rescue of Private Jessica Lynch.

News is timely, a breaking event, like an assassination attempt on a president. Or newly revealed information, such as a presidential candidate's drunk-driving conviction, even if it happened years ago. Slow-moving processes that may be of vital importance (e.g., the spread of AIDS or global warming) take time to become news, often requiring a "peg"—the release of an alarmist study, a congressional hearing, or presidential speech—on which to hang the story.

Journalists

News is reported by journalists. They work under time pressure with tight deadlines to come up with stories around the clock. This job has become more difficult in recent years as budget cuts have led news organizations to demand more stories for more outlets from fewer reporters.

5. Reports by journalists of selected events commonly involving violence, conflict, disasters, and scandals.

A majority of journalists are white, middle class, middle-aged, and male. Women now compose about one-third of the press corps and racial minorities around one-tenth. In a survey, 36 percent identified themselves as Democrats, 33 percent as

Independents, and 18 percent as Republicans. For journalists' backgrounds, see David H. Weaver, Randal A. Beam, Bonnie J. Brownlee, Paul S. Voakes, and G. Cleveland Wilhoit, *The American Journalist in the 21st Century* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2007), 20. Reporters tend to be pro-choice, for gay rights, and in favor of protecting the environment. But they try to refrain from showing their preferences in their stories.

Any influence of reporters' characteristics and opinions on their stories is limited by the norms of **objectivity**⁶ they learn in journalism school or on the job. Specified in the profession's code of ethics, these include reporting accurate information, not deliberately distorting or plagiarizing, and separating reporting from advocacy. Society of Professional Journalists, Code of Ethics, adopted September 1996. Journalists are expected to report different sides of an issue, be impartial and fair, and exclude their personal opinions. David T. Z. Mindich, *Just the Facts: How "Objectivity" Came to Define American Journalism* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

If they are found out, journalists who deliberately and blatantly violate the profession's ethics are punished. *New York Times* reporter Jayson Blair was dismissed after it was discovered that he had fabricated or plagiarized around forty of the six hundred articles he had written for the paper; editors resigned in the wake of the discoveries. Jack Kelly was the star foreign correspondent for *USA Today* and had worked for the paper for over twenty years when he resigned in January 2004, accused of plagiarism and of inventing parts or all of some of his stories.

6. In news reporting, impartiality and fairness, and the reporting of facts without opinion and including different sides of an issue.

Comparing Content

Depictions of Journalists

Many of our impressions of journalists, their behavior, importance, and trustworthiness come from the media. For a study of movie depictions of American journalism, see Matthew C. Ehrlich, *Journalism in the Movies* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2004). Media depictions repeat two types best captured in the classic film *His Girl Friday*: reporter Hildy Johnson (Rosalind Russell) and her editor Walter Burns (Cary Grant).

The first type exemplified by Hildy is the journalist as intrepid seeker after truth and crusader for justice. The most famous real-life equivalents are Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, the *Washington Post* reporters who helped uncover the Watergate scandal and wrote a book about it, *All the President's Men*, which was turned into a popular Hollywood movie. Even some caustic satires of the news business contain versions of the journalist as noble loner. In *Network*, Peter Finch plays a television news anchor who begins to go insane on camera, shouting "I'm mad as hell, and I'm not going to take it anymore." In the movie, his pain and anguish are exploited by amoral network executives. In real life, his battle cry became the theme of citizens' tax revolts in the late seventies and could be heard at Tea Party rallies thirty years later.

The second type of journalist, characterized by Walter Burns, is more common in the entertainment media. At their worst, as in Billy Wilder's classic *Ace in the Hole*, such reporters cynically and callously exploit the disasters of the human condition. But even less bitter films show reporters as inevitably led astray from their devotion to the truth to the point that they destroy lives and reputations in their reckless search for an exclusive story ahead of other reporters (a **scoop**) that is dramatic and shocking. In *Absence of Malice*, Sally Field plays a reporter who ends up besmirching a good man's (Paul Newman) reputation. In *Broadcast News*, William Hurt and Albert Brooks compete to become a news anchor. Hurt—good-looking, smooth, unscrupulous, and none too bright—wins out over the dumpier, knowledgeable, and dedicated Brooks.

A contemporary example of the second type is Rita Skeeter. Introduced by J. K. Rowling in her vastly popular Harry Potter series, Skeeter writes for the *Daily Prophet*, *Witch Weekly*, and other publications. She is untrustworthy, unscrupulous, vindictive, and vile. She justifies her behavior with the motto

“Our readers have a right to the truth.” But her news stories are error-strewn and full of lies. They destroy friendships, inflict pain and suffering, and deprive decent people of their jobs. Rita Skeeter gets scoops by turning herself into a bug. The moral is that such journalists are nasty bugs. J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (New York: Scholastic Press, 2000), especially 433–53, 511–15, 611–15, and 726–28; the quotation is on p. 450.

Acquiring the News

Journalists follow standard procedures to obtain the news. They go to the scene, especially of wars and disasters. They talk to people who have participated in, witnessed, or claim to know what happened. They dig into records. Easing their job, many events, such as press conferences, trials, and elections, are scheduled ahead of time.

Beats

News organizations guarantee stories by assigning reporters to cover distinct **beats**⁷ such as the White House or specific subjects such as environmental policy. Institutions and subjects not on reporters’ beats (off the beaten track, so to speak) generate few stories unless they do something to become newsworthy. Sometimes events thrust them into prominence, as when the banking crisis of 2008 raised questions about the regulatory effectiveness of the Securities and Exchange Commission.

Sources

Journalists interact with and rely extensively on **sources**⁸—generally people in government and politics, especially those in high positions of authority—to provide them with **scoops**⁹ and quotations. Other sources are whistle-blowers, who reveal information they have about dubious activities, outrages, or scandals. Depending on their motives, sources either provide information openly and unreservedly or leak it subject to various conditions such as anonymity. Stephen Hess, *The Government/Press Connection: Press Officers and Their Offices* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1984), chap. 7.

Often the reporter-source relationship is symbiotic: they need each other. Reporters need sources for news. Sources need reporters to get their views and information into the news, to obtain favorable coverage.

7. Institutions, organizations, and subjects that a reporter is assigned to cover regularly.

8. People, often in government, who, for one reason or another, provide reporters with information.

9. News obtained ahead of other reporters.

Sometimes the relationship is adversarial, with reporters pressing a reluctant source for information. Sources must often respond to reporters' ideas of what is news. Information from one beat may inspire a news story that another beat wants to keep quiet. Refusal to reveal information may result in negative coverage and in sources becoming targets in reporters' and columnists' stories.

Government Reports

Legislative committees, regulatory agencies, and governmental departments and commissions conduct investigations, hold hearings, and issue reports and press releases. Journalists sometimes draw on these sources for their stories. Typical is a *New York Times*'s front page story headlined "Terror Suspects Buying Firearms, Report Finds" (in the United States), based on an investigation by the Government Accountability Office. Eric Lichtblau, "Terror Suspects Buying Firearms, Report Finds," *New York Times*, March 8, 2005, A1.

Investigative Reporting

Some journalists specialize in **investigative reporting**¹⁰, pursuing information that may involve legal or ethical wrongdoing and that is likely to be concealed. James S. Ettema and Theodore L. Glasser, *Custodians of Conscience: Investigative Journalism and Public Virtue* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998). This reporting requires detailed and thorough digging into a story. It is often time consuming and expensive. The *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, the *New Yorker*, *Rolling Stone*, and *Mother Jones* are some of the publications that still engage in it, as do the nonprofit Center for Public Integrity, which in November 2010 absorbed the Huffington Post's "Investigative Fund," Pro-Publica, and the Center for Investigative Reporting. Examples of award-winning investigative stories include exposure of secret Central Intelligence Agency prisons in Eastern Europe, the torture of Iraqi prisoners by US forces, appalling care in veterans' hospitals, and job-related deaths of Mexican workers in the United States.

News Services

10. Intensive research by journalists usually into subjects that those involved don't want exposed.

11. Agencies, particularly the Associated Press (AP), that cover and transmit news stories from throughout the world to their subscribers, resulting in similar coverage in many of the news media.

The mass media rely on the **wire services**¹¹ for much of their international and national news. Wire services cover and transmit stories worldwide from their own staff and from reporters who work for the many newspapers and other organizations that belong to the services. Prominent wire services are the Associated Press (AP) and Reuters. The AP sends news to approximately 1,700 newspapers, 5,000 radio and television stations, and 8,500 other media outlets in over 100 countries.

Video feeds supplied by the AP and Reuters are the source of much of the televised international news. Subscribers are sent video accompanied by natural sound without narration and brief printed informational scripts. Four of CBS's eight foreign correspondents are based in London doing voice-overs for these feeds for broadcast on the network's news programs.

Prominence and Presentation

As a result of widely agreed-upon criteria of newsworthiness, the process of gathering the news, and the use of news services, the news media often report many of the same stories. Only a few stories are featured prominently due to limitations in broadcast prime time and front-page print space.

Nonetheless, there are some differences among the media in the range and type of news on which they focus. For example, the *New York Times*, with its stable of reporters in Washington, DC, and foreign correspondents, emphasizes government and politics in the United States and abroad. Cable news channels focus more on crimes and celebrities. Aside from a few stories, such as the war in Iraq and natural disasters, they give short shrift to foreign stories. In fact, the Fox News Channel has a segment titled "Around the World in 80 Seconds."

The media also differ stylistically in how they present the news. The *Times* does it with relative sobriety. Cable channels dramatize their reports by announcing "breaking news," using graphic captions, accompanying stories with pulsating music, engaging in fast-paced editing, and repeatedly admonishing viewers to "stay with us."

Television news is picture driven: stories with appealing, dramatic, or even available camera footage are more likely to be played prominently than those without. Viewers are unaware of what is not shown, what happened before or after the picture was taken, and whether or not the shot was staged. Camera angles, distance from the subject, especially close-ups, length of shot, camera movement, and editing all influence viewers' impressions. A picture may be worth a thousand words, but it can also mislead, as [Note 1.17 "Enduring Image"](#) reveals.

Enduring Image

The Overthrow of Saddam Hussein

The toppling of a dictator's statue is an enduring image, symbolizing the literal collapse of a regime's authority and the massive uprising and joy of a population freed at last from tyranny. On April 9, 2003, a US mechanized vehicle using a cable pulled down Saddam Hussein's mammoth statue in Baghdad's Firdos Square. The square was sealed off by US marines. The few people in it were US soldiers, Iraqis from the United States, promoted "Free Iraqi Forces Militia" (comprising exiles who had recently been returned to the country by the Pentagon), and journalists.

On television the statue falls, the crowd cheers. On the front pages of newspapers in the United States and around the world, the Reuters news-agency photograph shows the toppling of Saddam Hussein's statue under the watchful eye of an American soldier. The images symbolize the US defeat of the dictator and his regime and the Iraqi people celebrating their newfound freedom. Wider shots of the square, revealing that only a handful of people were in the plaza, were far less common. The differences between the photographs was brought to our attention in the May/June 2003 issue of *Extra!*, p. 8.

News Reporting propaganda Baghdad Saddam Statue

[\(click to see video\)](#)

The first photograph of the statue being pulled down reflects news values of vividness, drama, and conflict. It spectacularly hearkens back to the removal of statues of Lenin and Stalin after the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union. The alternative photos, showing much more of the relatively empty square, lacked dramatic news values and thus their symbolic effects.

Because the news media found the dramatic image to be irresistible, they reinforced a frame, pushed by the Bush administration, of a jubilant Iraqi population welcoming its liberators. But the meaning of an image can change. Now, for many people, the falling statue represents the illusion of a US military success that turned into a quagmire of frustration.

Interactions and Types of Coverage

As we document throughout our book, people involved in public life understand that their election and reelection, their effectiveness in elected and appointed office, and their ability to achieve their policies often depend on how they and their deliberations and debates, disagreements and conflicts, cooperation and consensus, actions and inactions, and struggles for power, are portrayed by the media. They know that media depictions can influence people's opinions, understandings of policy problems and notions of solutions, and can encourage or discourage participation in politics.

They know that information is power. The more of it they have before others the better. They have aides who gather, synthesize, and summarize the news from newspapers and television, from talk shows, political publications (*Roll Call* and *The Hill*), polls, websites, and blogs. Ashley Parker, "Where News Is Power, a Fight to Be Well-Armed," *New York Times*, January 18, 2011, A14, 17. So they and their staff interact with media personnel to try to manage and manipulate the news and influence journalists' selection of stories and how they are framed. They present (**spin**¹²) their behavior, activities, and actions, and policies and decisions, as positively as possible; they conceal, minimize, or put the best gloss on their mistakes and blunders.

They engage in public appearances, make speeches, hold press conferences, and stage newsworthy events. They also deploy an arsenal of savvy techniques such as brief, pithy phrases known as **sound bites**¹³. Behind the scenes they bestow favors, such as giving access to sympathetic journalists; persuade; apply pressure; and engage in intimidation. Timothy E. Cook, *Governing with the News: The News Media as a Political Institution*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), and David L. Paletz, *The Media in American Politics: Contents and Consequences*, 3rd ed. (New York: Longman, 2012).

Despite these attempts at manipulation, the news media's coverage of people in public life is not necessarily favorable. Three common types of coverage are lap-dog, watch-dog, and attack-dog journalism.

Lap Dogs

Journalists usually rely on policymakers as knowledgeable and convenient sources of information. Much news, therefore, consists of the debates about issues and policies among officials and politicians. Political scientist Lance Bennett and his colleagues call this **indexing**¹⁴. The news media serve as **lap dogs**¹⁵ when the government's perspective dominates. This can take place when leaders of the

12. To interpret information to support one's point of view, or at least to put the best face on events.
13. Brief phrases uttered by candidates that are designed to be compelling and fit into news stories.
14. When journalists index the news to the debate about an issue and policy among officials and politicians.
15. Journalists when the government's perspective (overwhelmingly) dominates their news stories.

opposition party and other politicians do not continually criticize and challenge the government's policies or do not articulate an alternative viewpoint to reporters to include in their stories. W. Lance Bennett, "An Introduction to Journalism Norms and Representations of Politics," *Political Communication* 13, no. 4 (October–December 1996): 373–84.

A notable example of the news media as lap dogs was their coverage of the Bush administration's claims in 2002–2003 that Iraq must be attacked because it possessed weapons of mass destruction. Leaders of the Democratic Party did not forcefully challenge the White House's official story, plans, and rationale. Most of the news media then transmitted the administration's arguments without subjecting them to sustained analysis and criticism.

Watchdogs

The news media are sometimes **watchdogs**¹⁶, holding people in government and other powerful institutions accountable by scrutinizing and reporting their statements, activities, claimed accomplishments, and failures. This type of coverage can be provoked by dramatic events, such as Hurricane Katrina, to which the Bush administration responded unconvincingly. Journalists went to the scene, saw the devastation and havoc for themselves, and showed it directly to viewers. Outraged reporters asked so many impassioned questions of administration officials about their inadequate response to Katrina that the Salon website compiled a "Reporters Gone Wild" video clip. See W. Lance Bennett, Regina G. Lawrence, and Steven Livingston, *When the Press Fails: Political Power and the News Media from Iraq to Katrina* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) for a thoughtful analysis of when and why the news media are lap dogs and watchdogs (the "Gone Wild" example is on p. 167).

Attack Dogs

The news media can be **attack dogs**¹⁷. President Richard M. Nixon observed, based on his many years in public life, that "for the press, progress is not news—trouble is news." Quoted in William Safire, "The Press is the Enemy: Nixon and the Media," *New York*, January 27, 1975, 44. The news about government and politics is often negative, about blunders and disasters, scandals and corruption. This "gotcha" journalism can provoke a feeding frenzy in which reporters, like a pack of dogs, search for, uncover, and chew over every morsel of the story. Larry J. Sabato, *Feeding Frenzy: How Attack Journalism Has Transformed American Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1991). News coverage of President Clinton's relationship with White House intern Monica Lewinsky exemplified such a feeding frenzy.

16. Journalists when their news stories hold people in power accountable by scrutinizing and reporting their statements, activities, claimed accomplishments, and failures.

17. Journalists whose stories about government and politics are highly negative and focus on blunders and disasters, scandals and corruption.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

In this section, we have explained how journalists decide what is news, how they acquire news (through beats, sources, investigative reporting, and other ways), and how they present news. We have described the techniques that people in public life use to manage and manipulate the news media to obtain positive and avoid negative depictions. And we have specified three ways that the news media can behave toward people in government and politics: as lap dogs, watchdogs, or attack dogs.

EXERCISES

1. What makes something news? How do journalists decide what to report as news?
2. Why was the close-up photograph of the statue of Saddam Hussein being pulled down so much more widely used in the media than the wide-angle shot? How does the need to tell an interesting story affect how the news gets reported?
3. What factors determine how journalists cover politics? When is their coverage of politicians more likely to be favorable, and when is it more likely to be critical?

1.3 Opinion and Commentary

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this section, you should be able to answer the following questions:

1. Where in the media can you find opinion and commentary?
2. What are the leading conservative and liberal cable news channels?
3. What are the leading comedy programs about the media and politics?
4. What are the four leading influences of the media on politics and government?

The media do far more than report the news. They are full of pundits, talking heads, and partisans who are busy expressing opinions and commenting on the news. These reactions and responses can contribute to a marketplace of ideas, informed public discussion, and greater understanding of politics, government, and public policies. Often, however, they result in conflict and cacophony: topics are broached too briefly in too little time, assertions dominate analysis, and shouting and squabbling drown out thought.

Location

In this section, we tell you where to find opinion and commentary in the media about politics, government, and public policies.

Print

Most newspapers contain editorials expressing opinions about the events of the day. The *New York Times*'s stance is liberal; the *Wall Street Journal*'s is conservative. They supplement their editorials with opinion columns from regular contributors. A few newspapers add op-eds. These are opinions from people unaffiliated with the paper. Some newspapers carry a range of opinions, others are ideologically monolithic. Cartoons, when the newspaper features them, often comment critically on public officials, policies, and current events. Comic strips are sometimes politically provocative, for example Gary Trudeau's sardonic *Doonesbury* and Aaron McGruder's scathing *The Boondocks*. These strip writers first published their work in their campus newspapers at Yale and the University of Maryland, respectively.

The nonpartisan magazines *National Journal* and *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* cover government and politics focusing on Washington, DC. Other magazines provide a spectrum of analysis and opinion, ranging from the conservative *National Review* and *Weekly Standard*, through the *New Republic*, to the liberal *Nation* and *Progressive*. All have relatively small readerships.

Television

After much debate among members of Congress, televised coverage of floor proceedings via the Cable Satellite Public Affairs Network (C-SPAN) was established in the US House of Representatives in 1979 and in the Senate in 1986 (C-SPAN2) to transmit gavel-to-gavel coverage of floor action. These channels plus C-SPAN3 also air an array of political events, including election debates, political advertisements, press conferences, discussion forums, and interviews with news makers, journalists, and authors.

The television networks' Sunday morning interview programs usually feature prominent policymakers, including government officials and well-known politicians. There is *Meet the Press*, *Face the Nation*, and *This Week*. In the face of sometimes aggressive questioning by the host and interview panelists, guests strive to set the news agenda and get their messages across to viewers. The programs, which have small audiences, are influential because they are widely watched in Washington, DC, otherwise known as "inside the beltway," and by people interested in government and politics.

There are also shows featuring journalists discussing current events among themselves, whether more combatively (*The McLaughlin Group*) or less (*Washington Week*).

Twenty-four-hour cable-television news channels report the news. For example, CNN has *The Situation Room* with Wolf Blitzer. But they have a lot of time to fill and only a limited number of reporters and news-gathering resources. So they employ opinionated anchors and fill their news programs with commentary and opinion, often from pundits, political consultants, party strategists, and people from interest groups and ideological think tanks. These guests, many of whom appear regularly (no matter how wrong their past observations), disagree forcefully with each other, speak in sound bites, and are adept at memorizing and delivering "spontaneous" quips. David Brooks, "Live from 400," *The New Yorker*, November 13, 2000, 122. Even though these shows have relatively small audiences, the people watching "are the news junkies, the ones who get the buzz going." Marlin Fitzwater quoted in Martha Joynt Kumar, *Managing the President's Message: The White House Communications Operation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 197.

For a mainly conservative, pro-Republican, anti-Democrat perspective there is cable's most popular news channel, Fox Cable News. A documentary film exposing what it sees as the pro-Republican and Bush administration coverage by the Fox News Channel is *Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch's War on Journalism*. Despite its claims to separate news from opinion, the two often blend together. The channel features partisan, opinionated talk-show hosts and commentators, notably the combative Sean Hannity, the sophistic Glenn Beck, and the pugilistic populist Bill O'Reilly. Stating his opinions bluntly and skewering some of his guests, O'Reilly has made his Fox show cable television's most popular public affairs program. All three use multiple media platforms in addition to the Fox News Channel—radio talk shows, books, and websites—to spread their messages. *Media Matters for America* attacks the programs and positions of Fox News, especially Glenn Beck, and is attacked in return.

MSNBC is cable's liberal opposition to the conservative Fox News. Its leading programs are *Hardball* with the disputatious Chris Matthews and *The Rachel Maddow Show*.

Radio

Over two thousand radio stations employ a news-talk format. Hosts have ample time to vent their opinions and cultivate, cajole, and castigate their callers and listeners. Annie M. Brewer, *Talk Shows & Hosts on Radio*, 2nd ed. (Dearborn, MI: Whitefoord Press, 1993). The bulk of the talk-radio audience listens to hosts who express conservative opinions, are pro-Republican and hostile to liberals, Democrats, and feminists. The most conspicuous is Rush Limbaugh. This caustic conservative is the most widely heard (on more than six hundred stations with an estimated weekly audience of more than 13.5 million) and influential of all radio commentators. Promoting the conservative side, he castigates liberals with humor, often sliding into insult, sneer, and exaggeration. For a study of the similarities and relationships of Limbaugh, Fox News and the *Wall Street Journal*, see Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Joseph N. Cappella, *Echo Chamber: Rush Limbaugh and the Conservative Media Establishment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

From a countervailing, liberal-radical perspective, there is the Pacifica Network, particularly its evening news program *Democracy Now*, hosted by Amy Goodman and Juan Gonzalez and heard on approximately nine hundred stations. It reports stories and interviews people rarely hear on mainstream, let alone conservative, media.

There are approximately 1,500 Christian programming stations. In addition to their inspirational religious content and music, they broadcast programs on marriage and family issues and advice for the troubled. Some of their content is relevant to

politics and public policy, especially their espousal of and support for traditional views and values.

Comedy

Comedy can venture where other entertainment forms fear to tread. Comedy has a point of view, presents an argument, and often lacerates, usually from a liberal perspective (as, for example, *Saturday Night Live's* fake news segment).

Comedy Central's *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* satirizes the news media and the politics and government they depict, especially the president. Jon Stewart, the acerbic yet charming host, confronts and analyzes the dissembling pronouncements of people in government. The show's fake correspondents parody the behavior of real reporters to reveal the limitations of news formats and of objectivity. The show's effects are achieved through Stewart's comments and interjections, the incisive writing, and the clever editing of videos. For a thoughtful analysis, see Geoffrey Baym, "The Daily Show: Discursive Integration and the Reinvention of Political Journalism," *Political Communication* 22, no. 3 (July–September 2005): 259–76; and Jeffrey P. Jones, *Entertaining Politics: New Political Television and Civic Culture* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

On rare occasions, Stewart has tried to influence public policy. In December 2010, he effectively pushed (embarrassed, shamed) congressional Republicans to pass a bill they had been blocking that would approve funding for medical benefits to firefighters, police officers, and health workers who had become sick from working at Ground Zero on and after 9/11. In one program he interviewed four of the first responders who had become ill.

The most irreverent and cogent critique of newspapers appears in the weekly *The Onion*. Susannah B. F. Paletz, "The Irreverent *Onion*," *Political Communication* 21, no. 1 (January–March 2004): 131–34; and for a collection of headlines, see Scott Dickens, ed., *The Onion Presents Our Dumb Century* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1999). January 2011 saw the debut on the IFC cable channel of the television version titled *Onion News Network*.

Link

The Onion

As headlines from *The Onion* show, this fake newspaper can produce an audacious commentary on the news media and American government and politics.

Learn more about *The Onion* and the *Onion News Network* at the following links:

<http://www.theonion.com>

<http://feeds.theonion.com/onionnewsnetwork>

Comedy focusing on government and politics also comes from *The Colbert Report* on Comedy Central and Bill Maher's *Real Time* on HBO. These two cable channels, although owned by a media conglomerate, are known for their edgy content. Bolstering these shows' impact, as with *The Daily Show*, are their appeal to young adults.

Media Influences on Politics, Government, and Public Policies

The media, old and new, influence politics, government, and public policies in five important ways, all of which we will apply throughout our book. We now introduce them.

Agenda Setting

A series of experiments has demonstrated that when television news places more attention and emphasis on certain issues, such as crime, the public tends to see those issues as more important problems requiring government action. The public then judges politicians according to how well they respond to the issues. Shanto Iyengar and Donald R. Kinder, *News That Matters: Television and American Opinion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

Consider the television show *24*. It told its viewers that terrorists were a constant threat to the United States and likely to strike with horrible destructiveness

anywhere at any time. At its peak, the show had a weekly audience of approximately fifteen million viewers and reached millions more through DVD sales.

This **agenda-setting**¹⁸ power of the media, in effect, tells people what to think about. The flip side of agenda setting is that when the media ignore issues or policy areas, so too does the public. Thus for people involved in government or politics, getting an issue in the media, or keeping it out of the media, is important; the agenda influences the public's understandings of what should be done by policymakers.

Framing

The media are not simply important in getting people to think about an issue; they influence *how* people think about it. Scholars refer to this media power as **framing**¹⁹. Brian F. Schaffner and Patrick J. Sellers, *Winning with Words: The Origins and Impact of Political Framing* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

Journalists bring a perspective to bear on events, highlight certain aspects at the expense of others, to create a coherent narrative. Stephen D. Reese, Oscar H. Gandy Jr., and August E. Grant, eds., *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2001). Such a narrative names protagonists and antagonists, identifies some of the causes of the event described, outlines moral judgments, and may suggest solutions. Framing is inherent in the process of selecting, editing, organizing, and presenting stories. It is often expressed in the television anchorperson's introduction and in newspaper headlines and opening paragraphs.

The meaning of an event can change dramatically based on how it is framed by and in the media. For example, the public understands a demonstration quite differently depending on whether the news frames it as an exercise of freedom of speech or as a threat to law and order.

Of course, some frames are more convincing than others. A frame's impact may depend on who is promoting it, what other frames it is competing against, and how frequently it is repeated.

Often, though, news frames are predictable. Daniel C. Hallin, *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 116–17. They express widely shared assumptions and values. The news media framed the events of 9/11

18. The power of the media to tell the public what subjects and issues to think about.

19. The central idea or theme with which media personnel organize a story and thus give it a point of view.

as terrorist attacks on the United States with a response from Americans of national heroism, horror, and mourning.

Out of habit and to simplify complex subjects, journalists tend to cover government and politics with a relatively small repertoire of familiar frames. Relations within and between the branches of government are typically framed as conflicts. Stories often frame politicians as motivated by partisanship and the desire for reelection. Stories about government agencies are frequently framed around bureaucratic incompetence, waste, and corruption.

Framing influences politics by reinforcing or changing what people think of an issue. Different frames call for different policy solutions. Thus *24* told its viewers that in the grim choice between security and liberty, coercion must prevail, that torture is essential to extract information from terrorists to forestall (usually just in time) their lethal schemes. According to Human Rights First, the number of acts of torture on prime-time television increased from fewer than four before 9/11 to more than a hundred. It used to be the villains who tortured, now it is the heroes. See Jane Mayer, "Whatever It Takes," *The New Yorker*, February 19 & 26, 2007, 66–82, esp. 66 and 68.

Priming

Media frames can provide criteria that audience members use to make judgments about government institutions, public officials, and issues. This is called **priming**²⁰. It can occur when news stories identify the person or institution to blame for an event, such as the damage wrought by Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans. The president is often held responsible for the nation's problems. Priming effects are strongest "when the news frames a problem as if it were the president's business, when viewers are prepared to regard the problem as important, and when they see the problem as entangled in the duties and obligation of the presidency." Shanto Iyengar and Donald R. Kinder, *News That Matters: Television and American Opinion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 97 and 110.

Because of its intrinsic importance, reemphasized by the news and entertainment media, fighting terrorism continues as a prominent issue. The president is seen as primarily responsible. Presidential candidates' competence to combat terrorism thus becomes an important criterion by which the electorate judges them. Note, in this respect, that some of *24*'s presidents could not be trusted to execute that duty and obligation effectively.

20. When media (news stories) ascribe responsibility for a problem to a person or institution.

Mobilizing

The media affect what people think about in politics and how they think about it. They also influence what, if anything, people do about politics, problems, and policies.

Media contents can **mobilize**²¹ individuals to engage in political behavior, from contacting public officials, to voting, to protesting, to committing violence. In the 1960s, television coverage increased participation in the nonviolent protests of the civil rights movement against segregation in the South. Taeku Lee, *Mobilizing Public Opinion: Black Insurgency and Racial Attitudes in the Civil Rights Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). Continuous coverage of the 2009 health care legislation contributed to generating a wide range of participation by the public. Partisan media particularly foster citizen engagement in politics, as Fox News did for the Tea Party.

The media can influence people in politics without the public being involved at all. Politicians are far more voracious consumers of the news than is the average American. When issues are heavily covered in the media, officials take such prominence as a sign that they may well be called to account for their actions, even if the public has not yet spoken out. And they speak and behave differently than they did when the issues were obscure. Media attention tends to encourage action and speed up the policy process, if only for politicians to get the issue off the table.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

In this section, we have identified the incidence of opinion and commentary in the media. They are prevalent in newspapers and magazines, on television and radio, and in comedy. We then described four leading influences of the media on politics, government, and public policies. These are agenda setting, framing, priming, and mobilizing.

21. To encourage, even inspire, individuals to engage in political behavior and action.

EXERCISES

1. What is the value of having opinion and commentary in the media? Do you think it makes it easier or harder for people to develop their own opinions about politics?
2. How do media set the political agenda by choosing what issues to focus on? What do you think the media treat as the most important political issues right now?
3. How can humor be used to influence public opinion? Why might satire be more effective than straight opinion in making political points?

1.4 New Media

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this section, you should be able to answer the following questions:

1. What are the four ways the new media are changing the relationship between communication on the one hand and government and politics on the other?
2. What is WikiLeaks.org?
3. What limits the ability of the new media to improve citizen education and enhance public life?
4. What is the political potential of the new media?

The early 1980s saw the development of what we call the new media: new technologies and old technologies in new combinations. They are muddying if not eliminating the differences between media. On the iPad, newspapers, television, and radio stations look similar: they all have text, pictures, video, and links.

Increasingly, Americans, particularly students, are obtaining information on tablets and from websites, blogs, discussion boards, video-sharing sites, such as YouTube, and social networking sites, like Facebook, podcasts, and Twitter. And of course, there is the marvel of Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia to which so many people (four hundred million every month) go to for useful, if not always reliable, information.

Changing Relationships

New media are changing the relationship between communication and government and politics in four significant ways.

Making More Information Available and Accessible

Julian Paul Assange founded **WikiLeaks.org**²² in 2007 to expose the secrets of governments, corporations, and other institutions. In 2010 he released a classified video showing a US helicopter killing civilians, including two journalists, in Baghdad—an edited version was viewed several million times on YouTube. See Raffi Khatchadourian, “No Secrets,” *The New Yorker*, June 7, 2010, 40–51. He has since

22. An organization that exposes the secrets of governments, corporations, and other institutions.

released thousands of intelligence and military field reports from the war in Afghanistan and from the front lines of the conflict in Iraq.

Assange followed up in November 2010 with a dump of classified cables sent by US diplomats from their embassies during the last three years. The cables detailed the diplomats' dealings with and honest assessments of both the foreign countries where they were stationed and their leaders, revealing the reality beneath the rhetoric: that Saudi Arabia has urged that Iran be bombed, that Shell dominates the government of Nigeria, that China launched a cyber attack on Google, and that the US State Department urged its employees to collect biometrical information on foreign diplomats serving at the United Nations.

WikiLeaks released the material to selected leading newspapers in the United States (*New York Times*), the United Kingdom (*Guardian*), and elsewhere, deferring to the journalists to decide which ones were news, which could be made public, and whether to redact names from them. Nonetheless, their release could damage the careers of some US diplomats and disclose the names of informants, thereby endangering them. The cables could be subject to foreign governments' and private companies' data-mining and pattern-analysis programs. Consequently, the US Justice and Defense Departments and other organizations tried to stop Assange, to avoid further leaks, and to punish the leakers.

News organizations, with their legitimacy and experienced journalists, have gone online. They often add details and links missing from their broadcast or published versions of their stories. Their sophisticated technology keeps their sites fresh with the latest news, photos, and real-time audio and video. In February 2011, Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation announced the arrival of *The Daily*, a general-interest publication for tablet computers. It will cost ninety-nine cents weekly or forty dollars for a year. Jeremy W. Peters and Brian Stelter, "News Corp Heralds Debut of *The Daily*, an iPad-Only Newspaper," *New York Times*, February 3, 2011, B1 and 4.

Journalists incorporate the Internet into their reporting. They read the sites of other news organizations, get story ideas, background information, check facts, search for and receive press releases, and download data.

The nonprofit investigative site Pro-Publica—which has exposed the involvement of doctors in torture, the contamination of drinking water through gas drilling, and other outrages—is generating and sharing content with many print publications that have cut back their investigative reporting.

Talking Points Memo was primarily responsible for tenacious investigative journalism, pursuing and publicizing the firing of eight US attorneys by the Bush administration's Justice Department. The result was a scandal that sparked interest by the mainstream media and led to the resignation of President Bush's attorney general, Alberto Gonzales, in 2008. The ideologically conservative Drudge Report came to fame when Matt Drudge used his web portal to spread the latest news and rumors about the relationship between President Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky. The site is now looked to by television producers, radio talk-show hosts, and reporters, for scoops, the latest leaks, gossip, and innuendo.

Andrew Breitbart, a former colleague of Matt Drudge, founded his site in 2005. It aggregates news from the wire services and is viewed by an average of 2.4 million people monthly. He is also responsible for the websites Big Hollywood, Big Government, and Big Journalism, which provide some original reporting and commentary from a conservative perspective by unpaid bloggers, as well as references to articles on other sites.

Breitbart made a splash with videos posted on Big Government in September 2009 regarding ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now). Since 2006, conservatives had attacked ACORN, accusing it of voter fraud. This became the dominant frame and set the agenda for media coverage of the organization. Now the hidden-camera, heavily edited footage (the complete original video footage has never been fully disclosed) showed ACORN employees offering advice to a man and woman, who were posing as a pimp and a prostitute, proposing to bring underage Salvadoran girls into the United States to be sexually enslaved. The footage became a top story on the *Glenn Beck Show*, the rest of Fox News, and conservative talk radio. In December 2009, the Congressional Research Service issued a report exonerating ACORN of any wrongdoing. A few months later, ACORN went out of business. Peter Dreier and Christopher R. Martin, "How ACORN Was Framed: Political Controversy and Media Agenda Setting," *Perspectives on Politics* 8, no. 3 (September 2010): 761-92; the statement that the complete original video has "never been fully disclosed" is on p. 780.

Narrowcasting

The new media can aim at more discrete, specialized audiences, narrowcasting rather than broadcasting. Often controlled by individual communicators, their content is usually aimed at smaller and more socially, economically, and perhaps politically distinct audiences than the mass media. This fragmentation of the mass audience means that the old mass-media pursuit of lowest-common-denominator content may no longer be financially necessary or viable.

There are cable channels devoted to women, African Americans, and Hispanics, as well as for buffs of news, weather, history, and sports. DVDs and CDs enable the cheap reproduction of a wide range of films and recordings that no longer have to find a mass market to break even. Although the recording industry is selling fewer and fewer CDs and is phasing out music formats with small audiences (e.g., classical, jazz), artists can produce their own CDs and find a far-flung audience, particularly through web-based commerce such as Amazon.

Satellite radio is the fastest growing radio market. It uses technology that broadcasts a clear signal from space to receivers anywhere in the world. Providers XM and Sirius offer uninterrupted programming for a subscription fee. Listeners have hundreds of program options. Broadcast radio stations are no longer limited by the range of a signal across terrain but through the web can reach listeners who make up an audience that is less bounded by geography than by shared cultural, social, and political interests.

For people interested in government, politics, and public affairs, there are web magazines such as *Slate*, *Salon*, and *Politico* with its staff of established political reporters.

Creating Content

As major news organizations have gone online, they have hired technologically skilled young people. At first, these people would primarily reprocess content. Now they create it, as they know how to take advantage of the technology. Thanks to cell-phone cameras, webcams, and social networks, ordinary people can create, store, sort, share, and show digital videos. YouTube is the go-to website for finding obscure and topical streaming video clips. Home videos, remixes, and television excerpts are posted by users (also by the television networks). YouTube has millions of videos and daily viewers.

People can use video clips to hold politicians accountable by revealing their gaffes, showing the contradictions in their statements and behavior, and thereby exposing their dissembling, their exaggerations, and even their falsehoods. Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton had to say that she had misremembered when her claim that she had been under sniper fire at the airport during her 1996 visit to Bosnia as First Lady was refuted by videos shown on YouTube that attained millions of views.

People can become citizen journalists and create contents by reporting on subjects usually ignored by the news media. Examples include *OneWorldTV*'s human rights and development site and short videos on subjects such as land expropriation in

Kenya, gang reform in Ecuador, and [LiveLeak](#)'s coverage of executions in Saudi Arabia.

People can become citizen journalists as eyewitnesses to events. Examples of their reporting include the earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan in 2011, Hurricane Katrina that hit the US Gulf Coast in 2005, and the massacre of students at Virginia Tech University in 2006. They showed some of what happened and documented the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the authorities' responses. Mainstream media have incorporated citizen journalism into their news products. CNN's "[iReport](#)," in which "you take control of the news," encourages average people to submit stories with accompanying images. Reports span numerous topics, including candidates on the campaign and pet stories.

The [Free Press](#) now has a site called MediaFail where people can post egregious examples of media derelictions and failures.

Blogging

Blogs²³ are online diaries whose authors post information, including ideas and opinions. Blogs may permit feedback from readers and provide hyperlinks to other online contents that may enrich the discussion. Many people blog; the most popular political blog sites, [Instapundit](#) and [DailyKos](#), claim over 75,000 visitors per day, but few are widely read. Nonetheless, there are thousands of political blogs on the web: the [Huffington Post](#), a news aggregator with some original material, claims more than eighteen hundred bloggers—none of them paid.

Blogging can be seen as a new form of journalism without deadlines or broadcast schedules. But it does not replace reporting. Most bloggers rely on material issued elsewhere for their information: domestic and foreign newspapers, government documents, academic papers, and other media.

Nonetheless, the "blogosphere" can hold public officials accountable by amplifying and spreading information, especially when many bloggers cover the same subject, a phenomenon known as "blogswarm." For example, Mississippi Republican senator Trent Lott, at a reception honoring his South Carolina colleague Strom Thurmond's hundredth birthday, spoke approvingly of the latter's prosegregationist 1948 presidential campaign: "When Strom Thurmond ran for president we voted for him. We're proud of it. And if the rest of the country had followed our lead we wouldn't have had all these problems over all of these years either." The journalists in attendance little noted his comment. Bloggers saw the quote in a story on ABC News's daily online comment "The Note." They highlighted and linked it to previous statements on racial issues by Thurmond and Lott. The bloggers'

23. Online diaries whose authors post information, including ideas and opinions.

comments were picked up by the news media. As a result, Lott subsequently resigned as Senate Majority Leader.

Bloggers can hold the news media accountable. One important way is by challenging the media's framing of a story. For example, conservative bloggers criticize reporters for framing stories about abortion, gay rights, and religion from a liberal perspective.

Bloggers also challenge the media's stories themselves. On the *60 Minutes Wednesday* segment of September 8, 2005, anchor Dan Rather presented documents purportedly showing that President George W. Bush had received preferential treatment in joining the Texas Air National Guard in the early 1970s and thus avoided military service in Vietnam. The report was a scoop that had been rushed onto the air. Conservative Internet forums and bloggers immediately pointed out that, because of their format and typography, the documents were forged. The accusation quickly gained national attention by the news media and was soon corroborated. Rather's long career at CBS was ended sooner than he and the network had planned.

Limitations

The ability of new media to realize their potential and promise for improving citizen education and enhancing public life is limited in five ways.

First, political websites and bloggers generally lack the resources of the news media and the knowledge and expertise of journalists to cover and investigate government, politics, and public policies in depth. They react to rather than originate the news.

Second, the new media encourage people to expose themselves to contents (people and perspectives) they already agree with. The audience for Fox News is overwhelmingly Republican, while Democrats gravitate to MSNBC and Comedy Central. Liberals find stories that support their views on the Huffington Post, conservatives on the National Review Online. Liberal blogs link to other liberal blogs, conservative blogs to other conservative blogs.

Third, the new media are rife with muddle and nonsense, distortion and error. When the journalist Hunter S. Thompson died, an Internet site reported President Nixon's opinion that Thompson "represented the dark, venal and incurably violent side of the American character." In fact, Thompson said that about Nixon.

Worse, the new media are a fount of rumor, innuendo, invective, and lies. The Indian wire service Press Trust quoted an anonymous Indian provincial official stating that President Obama's official state visit to India would cost \$2 billion (\$200 million a day). The story was picked up by the Drudge Report, other online sites, and conservative talk-radio hosts such as Rush Limbaugh and Michael Savage. Glenn Beck presented the trip as a vacation accompanied by thirty-four warships and three thousand people. Congresswoman Michele Bachmann (R-MN) repeated the claim to Anderson Cooper on his CNN program. This inspired him to track it down, reveal its falsity, and show how it had been perpetuated. Reported by Thomas L. Friedman in "Too Good to Check," his column in the *New York Times*, October 17, 2010, A27.

Even worse, the new media can promote and express anger, hatred, rage, and fanaticism. When American journalist Daniel Pearl was beheaded by his Al Qaeda captors in Pakistan in May 2002, the action was videotaped and distributed over the Internet on a grainy video titled "The Slaughter of the Spy-Journalist, the Jew Daniel Pearl." Mariane Pearl's memoir of her husband, *A Mighty Heart* (New York: Scribner, 2004), was made into a film released in 2007.

Fourth is the possibility of the new media falling increasingly under the control of media conglomerates and giant corporations. Google has purchased YouTube. This could eventually subject them to the same demands placed on the mass media: how to finance the production of content and make a profit. Indeed, advertising has become far more prevalent in and on the new media. Of course acquisitions don't always succeed: Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation bought and then sold MySpace after failing to make it a financial or social networking success.

Fifth, the new media are a threat to privacy. Google logs all the searches made on it and stores the information indefinitely. Relatedly, the new media tend to defer to government. AOL, Microsoft, and Yahoo, but not Google, have complied with requests from the US Justice Department for website addresses and search terms. Google in China omits links to sites that the Chinese government does not want its citizens to see.

In the United States there are Gawker and its network, including the gossip sites Jezebel and Deadspin. They have no compunctions about breaching people's privacy—even if it means violating journalistic norms by paying for information, as they did in the case of the sex diary written in the form of a thesis of a recent Duke University graduate and also a story concerning quarterback Brett Favre's sexual behavior.

Political Potential

Relatively few Internet users attend to politics or government or public policies. For a critical view of the political effectiveness of the Internet, see Matthew Hindman, *The Myth of Digital Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008). Nonetheless, the new media are rife with political potential. They can convey a wide range of information and views. There are sites for people of every political persuasion interested in any policy issue (e.g., drugs, education, health, environment, immigration). These sites can encourage discussion and debate, stimulate political participation, raise funds, mobilize voters, and inspire civic engagement.

The new media allow politicians, political parties, interest and advocacy groups, as well as individuals to bypass the traditional media and reach the public. They can try to control their image by deciding what information to release and selecting congenial media through which to communicate it—to their benefit but not necessarily our enlightenment. Sarah Palin, for example, uses Twitter, Facebook, appearances on Fox News (the network paid for a television studio in her home), a reality television show, newspaper columns, and two best-selling books to communicate her message. She usually avoids appearing on shows whose hosts may be hostile to or even critical of her. (The belief that public figures, including Palin, personally write everything issued in their names is questionable; President Obama has admitted that he doesn't write his Twitter feeds).

The new media offer people the potential opportunity to transcend the mass media. As newspaper columnist Thomas L. Friedman wrote rather hyperbolically, “When everyone has a blog, a MySpace page or Facebook entry, everyone is a publisher. When everyone has a cell phone with a camera in it, everyone is a paparazzo. When everyone can upload video on YouTube, everyone is a filmmaker. When everyone is a publisher, paparazzo or filmmaker, everyone else is a public figure.” Thomas L. Friedman, “The World Is Watching,” *International Herald Tribune*, June 28, 2007, 6.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

In this section we have seen how the new media are changing the relationship between communication on the one hand and government and politics on the other. They make more information than ever before accessible and available. They facilitate narrowcasting, the creation of content, and blogging. Despite limitations on their ability to improve citizen education and enhance public life, the new media are rife with political potential, particularly for civic education. On the importance of civic education for young people, see Peter Levine, *The Future of Democracy: Developing the Next Generation of American Citizens* (Medford, MA: Tufts University Press, 2007).

EXERCISES

1. How do new media make it difficult for governments to keep secrets? What effect do you think that will have on politics?
2. How does blogging differ from traditional journalism? What are the advantages of blogging as a form of journalism? What are the disadvantages?
3. In what sense do new media make everyone potentially a journalist? Do you agree that this also makes everyone potentially a public figure?

Civic Education

You Can Be a Journalist

The emerging communications system in the United States, with its heady mix of traditional mass media and new media, offers a startling array of opportunities for citizens to intervene and get something done in politics and government. The opportunities are especially rich for young people who are well versed in new technologies, and they are charting new paths in political discourse.

Scoop08.com, the “first-ever daily national student newspaper,” was launched on November 4, 2007—a year before the presidential election. The goal of the paper was to bring a youthful focus to campaign news and political issues, as well as to cover topics and political personalities that escaped mainstream media attention. There were almost fifty beats covering aspects of the 2008 election including major and minor political parties, gender and sexuality, the environment, technology, and even sports.

Reporters and editors came from over four hundred high schools and colleges nationwide. Their backgrounds were ethnically and socially diverse. All volunteers, students who wanted to become involved responded to an open invitation on the website’s homepage: “This is your newsroom—Get involved.” Scoop08’s web-based platform allowed its young reporters to file conventional stories as well as to post videos, blog entries, cartoons, and instant polls.

The online newspaper was founded by coeditors Alexander Heffner, seventeen, a senior at Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts, and Andrew Mangino, twenty, a junior at Yale University. The two met when they were interns on Senator Hillary Clinton’s Senate reelection campaign. With people aged eighteen to twenty-nine making up 25 percent of the 2008 electorate, Heffner and Magino wanted to provide a mechanism for generating student interest and activity during the election. “We noticed there was a void when it came to national, grassroots, student journalism that really could have an impact on issues of importance. This is an increasingly politically engaged generation that is able to network online and to work professionally, academically, and socially in this venue,” stated Heffner. Laura Smith-Spark, “Young US Voters May Get Scoop in 2008,” *BBC News*, November 4, 2007.

Contributors to Scoop08 found the experience fulfilling. Hadley Nagel, a correspondent from Nightengale-Bamford School, stated, “If our generation is the future, we who write for Scoop08 will be shaping history.” A comment by Zoe Baker from Kennebunk High School reflected the ideals expressed by many of the young reporters: “Scoop08 has the opportunity to reassert journalistic integrity.”

1.5 Recommended Reading

Bennett, W. Lance. *News: The Politics of Illusion*, 8th ed. New York: Longman, 2008. A lively, wide-ranging critique and explanation of the failure of the news media to serve democracy.

Bimber, Bruce. *Information and American Democracy: Technology in the Evolution of Political Power*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003. A sweeping overview of American politics in different “information ages.”

Chadwick, Andrew. *Internet Politics: States, Citizens, and New Communication Technologies*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. A thoughtful overview of the political implications, issues, and influence of the Internet.

Compaine, Benjamin M., and Douglas Gomery. *Who Owns The Media?* 3rd ed. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2000. A detailed account of the organization and financing of the media.

Edelman, Murray. *From Art to Politics: How Artistic Creations Shape Political Conceptions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995. A surprisingly upbeat account of political communication through art and fiction.

Hamilton, James T. *All the News That's Fit to Sell: How the Market Transforms Information into News*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003. A compelling and detailed application of economic theory to explain the contents of news.

Schudson, Michael. *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society*. New York: Basic Books, 1984. A distinctive discussion of the role of advertising in American society and economy.

West, Darrell M. *The Rise and Fall of the Media Establishment*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001. A brief history of professional journalism from its inception to what the author claims is its current loss of power.

1.6 Recommended Viewing

All the President's Men (1976). Through investigative journalism, two *Washington Post* reporters uncover the Watergate affair and bring down President Nixon's men. Based on their book.

Battleship Potemkin (1925). Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein's stirring tale of an incident in the abortive 1905 Russian revolution, a brilliant illustration of how to make a film with collective protagonists (notably, the people of Odessa).

Citizen Kane (1941). Orson Welles's investigation of the life of a media mogul is matchless moviemaking.

Duck Soup (1933). The Marx Brothers' anarchic send-up of the incompetence and hypocrisy of governments and of the folly of war. Groucho becomes leader of the country of Freedonia and leads it into a comedic war.

Good Night and Good Luck (2005). Based on the real-life conflict in the 1950s in which television newsman Edward R. Murrow defied corporate pressure and brought down demagogic senator Joseph McCarthy.

His Girl Friday (1939). In this wise-cracking comedy, cynical editor (Cary Grant) uses his wiles to keep his star reporter and ex-wife (Rosalind Russell) from leaving the newspaper.

The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance (1962). Director John Ford's meditative western in which the news makes the myth that establishes the wrong man as the hero and successful politician.

Network (1976). Television company executives exploit an anchorman's madness on the air to boost ratings.

The Player (1992). Robert Altman's delightful satire of Hollywood, its filmmakers, and its films.

Rashomon (1950). Four versions of an ambush, rape, and murder are shown in Japanese director Akira Kurosawa's famous exploration of the elusive nature of truth.

Shattered Glass (2003). Fictionalized version of the true story of a journalist who is fired from *The New Republic* magazine when it is discovered that he has fabricated many of his stories.

The Social Network (2010). A fascinating account, partly factual and partly fictional, of the founding of Facebook.

Star Wars (1977). The first of the multipart saga applies themes from the American Revolution to planetary political systems.

Sullivan's Travels (1941). Director Preston Sturges's tale of a director of mindless Hollywood studio films who wants to make films of social commentary but discovers the value of comedy.

Triumph of the Will (1935). Hitler's favorite filmmaker, Leni Riefenstahl, made this propaganda documentary of the 1934 Nazi party rally in Nuremberg, a celebration of the fascist state.