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AMERICAN JOURNALISM

AND THE DISMANTLING OF DEMOCRACY;

A CITIZEN'S CRITIQUE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN POLITICAL SCIENCE AUGUST 1978

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ABSTRACT

The dissertation is titled: "American Journalism and the Dismantling of Democracy; A Citizen's Critique."

The study is an analysis and critique of the institution of American journalism. It attempts both theory building and policy analysis, and does so within an explicit epistemological framework which draws from democratic theory and the philosophy of science.

It seeks to determine and explain to what extent the institution of American journalism is fulfilling criteria for a democratic communication system. The argument, made from the perspective of the citizen, identifies several norms as prerequisites to democratic citizenship and assesses the degree to which the norms are met in journalism as an institution located within the American political culture.

Historical analysis reveals that American journalism has steadily moved away from an initial assumption of those criteria, as it has progressed from the economics of decentralized, small-enterprise craft technologies to the economics of large, centralized corporations using the technologies of mass production. Journalism has moved from explicit political and partisan arguments characterized by the knowledge requirements for rational action and access for diverse perspectives toward a narrow market conception of individual and social knowledge that is defined by the journalistic criteria of "news," "objectivity," and "balance." Consequently, our contemporary public
information system is biased toward official viewpoints and the content is devoid of both causal explanations of social reality and the value perspectives which dominate the policy choices of our major institutions--particularly journalism itself, i.e., elitist and irrational. Two of the political effects of these developments are, first, to encourage the periodic emergence of democratic populism and, second, to create barriers against the organization of rational policy objectives in the public interest. The essay raises doubts about the ability of profit-dominated and corporate-organized journalism to fulfill even modest requirements of a democratic political communication system. This is most marked in connection with those requirements that define individual and social political rationality and also those which define politics as a moral and responsible activity.
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During his campaign in 1976, Jimmy Carter, like Tennessee William's Big Daddy, smelled the odor of mendacity in the air. "I will never lie to you," he said. What Carter may have sensed is the mustiness of impotence that comes from our public political discourse.

Most of us are prone to dismiss Carter's rhetoric as no more than cant. Indeed, nearly all political rhetoric seems hypocritical to us. Yet it was the power of Carter's campaign rhetoric to touch what had been exposed and lacerated since the days of John Kennedy, the central nerve of the body politic: its ability to know both its ideals and its condition. Commenting on Carter's campaign language, Henry Fairlie said:

In all great rhetoric there is this sense of command, of command in an individual that is then transmitted to a people and an age: the sense of command that says "it ain't necessarily so."   (1976)

Rhetoric is indispensable. It is a unique product of the human brain and it is the essence of politics:

Politics is the use of words. It is the art of moving people by language, instead of by bayonets or tanks. . . . Politics is the persuader, the mover, the changer, the inspirer; and its main instrument is rhetoric.

( Ibid)

Rhetoric powers our political engine and directs its course. It is the verbal expression of our ideals and our knowledge. It provides us with crucial collective symbols and it provides us with the means of ordering our thoughts by which we note and explain, justify and condemn, our relative progress toward those goals. Consequently,
our public communication system assumes a unique and primal political function. In Joseph Tussman's words, "the integrity of communication is the wellspring of a community's life." (1960,106)

Yet our present frustration with political rhetoric comes from its inability to account for the continuing distance between our common values and our common circumstances. We are confused because our public discourse on our common goals is unproductive and our institutions of public knowledge are unenlightening. "We are poisoning the wells, and we cannot live on antidotes." (ibid) Simply, we Americans are not in command of our political rhetoric, and we may never have been if we accept the arguments of Louis Hartz and Mark Roelofs. (1955;1976) For instance, we commonly use the word rhetoric to mean hypocrisy. And the word politics has nearly always meant such a miserly estimate of private motives that we are not able to find language by which we can publicly define common values. We have great difficulty in mapping out any definition of the public interest, much less charting a course toward some destination.

I think we can point our public finger at American journalism. This essay is an analysis of the causes and consequences of the particular rhetoric that the institution of journalism imposes on our public discussions. My argument is that journalism, in large part, sterilizes the fecundity of our brains to make intelligent distinctions, as well as keeping us from conceiving, giving birth, and establishing the social credit of our own ideas. Journalists systematically edit out or ignore not only most substantive
information about political power and policies but also that which deals with the symbolic and the emotional. They do so by labeling such information as uninteresting, subjective, imbalanced and unfair. In particular, journalism makes all values seem equally relevant, or equally irrelevant, because it "is helpless to understand values except as events." (Aldrich, 1976)

What we must understand is that those features of American journalism which are subverting our ability to rule ourselves in a democratic and rational manner are themselves best understood as conventions. They are convenient fashions which were derived from and, in turn, serve to perpetuate the economic structure and political independence and, thus, the political irresponsibility of American journalism. We need to see them as self-fulfilling prophecies capable of being judged and altered.

There is considerable journalistic criticism published by the media. The public commentary flows so freely that we stand to be taken in by it. Nearly all the bitching is hortatory, and being so it allows the system to perpetuate itself. This debate is ironic because both partisans and critics alike are doing to each other what journalism does to all of us: broadcast the good (or bad) intentions of individual political actors which distract us from the causes, performance and consequences of our social institutions. (see for example: Sevareid, 1976) Whether the polity is populated by scalawags and bounders or by men of good will, their successes and failures may not be entirely of their own making. The tunnel-vision
focus upon individual motives and individual behavior is important, even crucial to Western political ideals, but it is insufficient and by itself misleading. It is a historical American trait to selectively perceive and glorify a society of rampant individual egos, but the blind side of that selective perception is an indifference toward the impact of our institutions upon our individual and collective well-being. Institutional arrangements are not only presumed fixed but unaccountable. We are left without meaningful causal explanations and points of access for structural improvements. We cannot properly assign responsibility, and as a result, we are left powerless.

So the failure of journalism and its public critics is the failure to hold themselves and their institutions up to the standards of intelligent public discourse. There is not an explicit evaluation of individual and institutional performance against the values embodied in our democratic ideals within the context of a commitment to self-improvement. It is a failure personally and self-consciously to discover those anti-democratic, anti-intellectual and narrowly defined economic values that I shall argue are realized most consistently by the institution of American journalism. The function of ignorance is to avoid the responsibility by those who reap the rewards of decision-making. (Lowi, 1976, 284)

That criticism, indeed any criticism, is made from a moral stance. It is a matter of intellectual honesty that requires the moral position of the critic be made explicit and primary in the exposition. This paper will both assert and exemplify that the
exposition of our values is crucial to the realization of any pretension we might have toward politically intelligent behavior, toward political understanding and rational political action. This is a statement of what I accept as an epistemological strategy which is both unavoidable and useful. It has a crucial bearing on any analysis of political communication, indeed upon any political analysis at all, and it will be elaborated in the latter part of the first chapter. Because it structures the whole essay, it deserves some brief mention in this preface.

    Newton Minow, who once charted the vast wasteland, says if you are not watching television you are "not interested in life. Television is where the bulk of American attention is focused." (Terry, 1976)

    Minow touched an important truth, but sidestepped its lesson. Television is not life. But it, together with the other media, defines so much of what we think life is, they are so much a part of our culture, that to study them is to confront the classic psychological dilemma of seeing ourselves clearly. The problem is precisely that of gaining knowledge about the subtle and pervasive effect of our institutions upon our own lives, of stepping back from the habits we learned as we go along to get along. One strategy to see what we have is to expose what we do not have.

    We can do that in two ways. First, by comparing our present practices against those we find in our history. At the very least, this may yield a perception that institutions are, indeed,
malleable. But this historical technique may not yield a critical consciousness. As Hartz said of the Progressive historians, for example, they "have not produced a study of American political thought; they have produced a replica of it." (1955,101) Hartz, himself, attempts to reveal the peculiar American irrational and consensual Liberalism by comparison with Europe—which not only spawned American Lockeanism but continued to develop it as America did not. (see also Roelofs,1976,252) Yet, even the comparative approach seems to have its limitations. It is significant that both Hartz and Roelofs are unable to come to any positive policy recommendations. And, in fact, both are explicitly pessimistic about the ability of the American political culture to understand and adapt to changing internal and external forces. (Hartz,1955,32; Roelofs,1976,242)

While their conclusions may be empirically substantiated by the results of their analyses, and I believe they are, I want to argue that their pessimistic conclusions are an artifact of the research protocol they use. That is to say, they adopt the conventional purposes of theory building and testing without explicitly regarding the policy implications which they or others may see in their work. As Theodore Lowi argues, "Without careful and well-cultivated self-consciousness, it is but a short step from the hypotheses of regularity to the assumption of immutability." (1976,290) In a similar fashion, the conventional media pretention is that being "informed" (in their terms, to be sure) is
equated with being possessed of intelligence. I will argue to the contrary, that intelligence as a characteristic of the human brain requires more than gaining knowledge. It carries the burden of utility, the capacity and commitment to rational action. Consequently, the epistemological strategy for this essay is to begin with an explicit set of political values which are relevant and significant to the political culture that we are studying. The question is: What do we profess as our goals? Then, our purpose comes down to measuring and explaining the distance of our extant political institutions and their processes from those goals, which is itself a step toward some kind of positive policy alternative. (C. B. Macpherson argues that democratic theory requires a similar strategy of measuring men's present powers down from the maximum. His purpose is to reveal the shortcomings of utilitarian liberalism, to make the important distinction between a descriptive and an ethical conception of power. 1973, 58)

If any motive dominates this essay, it is a desire for public knowledge in a pragmatic sense, knowledge that is clearly instrumental to the realization of some set of values we hold dear, knowledge for our own rational political use. Theory building and testing are political work, as this essay will make explicit. (see Cahill, 1972) For those citizens who would like to know what is to be done, this essay is explicitly designed to provide a policy direction.
This motive reflects my belief that our political culture lacks conceptions of community values and community action. For example, the ideal conception of political communication in our society is generally reduced to the tattered slogan of "freedom of the press," which we find pinned here and there like last year's bumper stickers. But that phrase, and in fact the whole First Amendment if taken literally, is a recast of the old laissez faire ideology. We are saddled with a market conception of public political discourse which is devoid of both individual and social purpose. The American political culture cannot fathom the meaning of the present system because we do not know what we want to look for nor what to measure absence against. We cannot envision substantive changes because we do not know what it is we want. What we need first is a political consciousness, for both knowledge and rational action must begin and end with values, with a causal theory in the middle.

So, the first chapter of this essay is a brief for the particular set of social values which are relevant and significant in our culture--"the authentic theory of democracy," in Tussman's phrase. (1960) The purpose of the first chapter will be to derive a definition of the political communication in the public interest which is logically inherent within the philosophy of democracy because it does contain a theory of knowledge and rational action at both the personal and social levels. The second chapter is a sketch of the history of American journalism and its development of several operating conventions which have become defining features
of twentieth century American journalism. The third chapter is an analysis and critique of the logical political consequences of those conventions from the perspective of the public interest criteria developed in the first chapter. The fourth chapter briefly suggests some logical alternatives to consider if we seriously intend to work toward a public political communication system which is in the public interest of a democratic society. And finally, the epilogue is a brief case study of one other analysis of American journalism which asserts that the profit-motivated processes and anti-democratic consequences of American journalism are not only consistent and characteristic, but also immutable. A concept of the public interest is irrelevant. The particular argument for political quiescence is an example of how hidden premises leave us powerless.

There is one final word to be said in this preface. This essay is not a "balanced" presentation. Neither is this an apology nor a sentimental incapacitating celebration. It is intended to be a critical examination--a critique. It is my particular version of what I consider to be a political argument. At the same time, this work represents my own profound respect for much of what journalism stands for, and for what some of the journalists I know have tried to do. This argument is addressed to those high ideals and to those individuals who worry about the effects of American journalism.
CHAPTER I

A DEMOCRATIC CONCEPT OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION
IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

Introduction: the test of legitimacy

American journalism plays a large and crucial role in American politics, perhaps more so than any other social institution outside the formal boundaries of government. The media comprise and control the central nervous system of the body politic. They are the institutionalized political education system for the adult population of this country. It is through them that we know ourselves--discuss our political values and understand our political realities.

The legitimacy of American journalism in this role is very nearly unquestioned. Television and radio are licensed and regulated and thus protected by federal and state governments--to operate in the public interest. Newspapers are incorporated economic entities, and they too are protected from federal and state anti-trust prosecution by recent law. Significantly, journalism itself specifically claims legitimacy. CBS founder and Chairman of the Board, William S. Paley, said in 1937, "He who attacks the fundamentals of the American (broadcasting) system attacks democracy itself." (Skornia,1965,60) More recently, the Los Angeles Times claims journalists are "trustees acting in behalf of the public." (1977)
Of course, there is considerable public commentary and even criticism of journalism and recent polls show a declining public confidence in the performance of American journalism. Kevin Phillips, for instance, who takes not of the public debate, responds by repeating the rationalizations of Teddy Roosevelt. Writing in Harper's magazine, he argues that the problem of the media is a problem of monopoly and of conglomerates. (1977) His solution is to effectively enforce anti-trust legislation. Phillips manages to ignore the failure of anti-trust legislation to counter the rise of monopoly capitalism as a dominant feature of the American economy. (By 1970, the top 500 corporations employed 72 percent of the total industrial workforce. In the period 1950 to 1967, the Justice Department achieved only 48 divestitures in anti-trust cases, and filed only 199 cases. Greenberg, 1977, 178ff) More significantly, Phillips does not make a persuasive case that more competition will improve, or even change, the product of American media. He not only sidesteps the question of legitimacy, he does so quite explicitly as he argues for "the need to set aside notions of the communication industry as a sacred cow." His argument is an illustration of the function of anti-trust legislation (as well as its negligible enforcement) which was to avoid challenging and measuring the legitimacy of private solutions to public problems. The question is: would the political consequences of the broadcast content by WTOP-TV in Washington, D.C., be any different if it were independent of The Washington Post? Little evidence suggests that it would.
Phillips' argument seems representative of our public discussion on the political role of journalism. On balance, nearly all of the public debate (and some of the literature by social scientists) is a kind of polite harangue, which is indicative of the irrational dogmatic political consciousness in America that constrains us from raising these fundamental questions. The studies by Hofstadter, Hartz, and Roelofs analyze that "vast and almost charming innocence of mind," in Hartz' splendid phrase. (1962, 1973; 1955; 1976) By and large, the consequence of this self-induced abortive debate is that the process, content and impact of journalism as a medium of political communication is not an identifiable political issue; it is not a continuing focus for public scrutiny and discussion. I think that the question of legitimacy should be raised and debated about all social institutions, periodically, as an exercise of enlightenment. The purpose of this essay is to ask: what do we learn if we raise the question of legitimacy of American journalism? In answering that question, we will discover that the institution of American journalism operates in a consistent and characteristic fashion to suppress most of the important political questions, especially those that would lead to the evaluation of journalism itself.

In a cursory examination, it might seem to the casual observer that American journalism is legitimate because it does measure up to our accepted standards. The cherished and formally defining characteristic of public political communication in our
democratic rhetoric is that of a "free press," free of governmental censorship. That is the common and literal translation of the First Amendment. Nevertheless, on October 27, 1972, one week before the Presidential election, Walter Cronkite and CBS News aired a fourteen minute story on Watergate, their first significant coverage of a slow breaking newspaper story. Chuck Colson of the White House staff complained to Paley who, in turn, pressured his News Division to drop the second and concluding segment. Richard Salant, president of CBS News, did approve broadcast of the second part, after it was edited down from fourteen to eight minutes, which abbreviated the impact of the report. Walter Cronkite, the "dean" of American journalism, concurred in the decision.

Paley was furious, in a special rage after it was broadcast. He and Salant went around one more time and he made clear what he felt: this must never happen again. But it was done, or almost done. (Halberstam, 1976, 88; also Crouse, 1972, 187)

Thus the notion of a "free" press as we ordinarily think of it does not apply to television. American television is vulnerable to that kind of censorship because, among other reasons, the stations are licensed by the Federal government. The broadcast industry itself sought and received governmental regulation back in the 1930's. Consequently, television operates within parameters established by the FCC: the Fairness Doctrine, the Equal Time Rule, etc.

Neither does a simple notion of a "free" press apply to our newspapers. The New York Times accepted governmental censorship of their story on nuclear explosions in the upper atmosphere
(Project Argus) even when knowledgeable scientists were arguing that the government's purpose was merely to avoid embarrassment. (Sigal, 1973,80)

More insidious and devastating than overt censorship is the irony that "while resistance to direct forms of control has hardened in the press, susceptibility to news management has spread." "Apart from when a subject makes the news, what the Times and Post report about it will reflect to a considerable extent what officials say about it. News is . . . a selection of what officials think--or want the press to report--is happening." (Sigal, 1973,195,188)

(On occasion, the collusion is deliberate. See Ben Bradlee's autobiography, 1975, and Taylor Branch's book review, 1975.)

So even when we uphold the letter of the law by prohibiting the direct control of the printed press by government, we lose the spirit of the law. The doctrine fails as an accurate description of contemporary American journalism. As a statement from the primal American political document, it fails at the minimum to provide a voice independent of government; and at the maximum, it is devoid of purpose. The doctrine is in the form of a prohibitive law: thou shalt not. It is not a standard by which we can measure desired behavior and consequent political effects. By itself, the doctrine of a "free" press is important, but it is insufficient. It does not answer the question: free for what purpose.

The First Amendment, taken literally, is a restatement of the laissez faire market conception applied to the political arena.
It guarantees freedom without attaching any responsibility. The fact that such an important doctrine is silent about intent, within the context of a complex society where powerful groups contend for differing interests, inevitably results in confusion when the concept of freedom is discussed and when the question of legitimacy is closely examined.

Thus, for example, Leon Sigal, in a notable study of The New York Times and The Washington Post, is unable to delineate the obligations of journalism because "the theory of democracy has so ambiguously specified them." (1973,85) Similarly, William Rivers struggles to define the responsibilities of an adversary press. (1970,237-253) And Edward Jay Epstein, in what should be read as a persuasive critique of network news, considers the question of legitimacy irrelevant: "The point is not to change news, but to understand its limitations." (1973,273)

What Americans have always vaguely understood, and what English philosophers J.S. Mill and T.H. Green articulated over a century ago, is that the freedom to pursue private goals in a social context unrestrained by community purposes leaves the powerful in control. Said another way, the claim for socially guaranteed freedom without the attendant assumption of responsibility for the social welfare which justifies that claim for freedom is, simply, a claim to protect power and privilege. (see Sabine,1950,729)

In America, the major prevailing institutionalized power, outside government, is that of corporate capitalism. For specific
historical and ideological reasons (which I shall develop in Chapter 2), American journalism has always been a business for profit. Thus, it should come as no surprise that what does seem to describe and explain contemporary American journalism, whether print or broadcast, are the economic considerations that govern large-scale enterprise in America. That evaluation is echoed by every analyst cited to this point. (see for example, Sigal's and Epstein's conclusions, 1973 and 1973; Rivers,1970,202; also Tuchman,1974) And, as Kevin Phillips argues, journalistic capitalism has functioned so successfully in the American environment that it is assuming oligopoly and monopoly control. (The six largest chains now control 214 newspapers.)

This essay will argue that: (1) American journalism has adapted its original democratic political role to fit the requirements of capitalism. In a pervasive and subtle fashion, narrowly economic "imperatives," or perhaps ideological premises accorded the status of imperatives, dominate any other definition of journalistic ethics. (2) The modern role conventions of contemporary American journalism operate to increase the access of the establishment elite and to decrease access by dissenters. (3) Further, I will argue that the modern conventions of American journalism have corrupted the definition and practice of intelligent social discourse. Thus the legitimizing and control messages from those in power get garbled and become unintelligible. Similarly, the messages are also garbled from those few dissenters who do gain access to the public podium intending to correct the misinformation of those who govern and to
publicly question their policies. In short, the institution of American journalism works against some of the important virtues promised by our democratic ideals—effective stability, rational change and public accountability.

These conclusions are not obvious because we do not have a purposeful and measurable standard of public political communication which relates in a coherent fashion to the larger political philosophy which America claims. We should feel insulted and demeaned with an argument that suggests we "set aside notions of the communication industry as a sacred cow," so we can deal with it as just another name on the Fortune 500 list. It is precisely because we lack the political conception of what it might be to act as a citizen in a democracy that we find ourselves powerless.

I submit there is a conception of the public interest with regard to political communication which is greater than that of journalism as just another business, one that is useful to all members of society. The question for this chapter is to define that evaluative norm and to justify it as in the public interest. We may then judge the legitimacy of American journalism, analyze it, and substantiate those conclusions mentioned above.

Choosing the criteria

Gunnar Myrdal made a persuasive epistemological argument for criteria to be used in choosing the value premises for research. (1944,1060) There are three which deserve our attention here, and which are suggested by the "public interest" conception of the
research problem: relevance, significance and feasibility. First, the norm (or values, or ideals) must be a relevant part of the American political culture. It is no accident that the standards I have chosen do represent my personal political preferences. But as a social scientist, I also assume the responsibility for speaking to a set of values that do exist, in this case, within the American political culture. Even a narrowly limited purpose of causal explanation must be focused upon values that do exist within some category of persons. When we extend the purpose of the investigation to include some kind of policy analysis, then the concern for relevance redoubles since we intend to offer advice to those who claim to hold the particular set of values. This study, then, can be seen as a claim for the attention of those others.

Secondly, the set of values for this study should be significant within the American political culture. They should be widely held and highly esteemed.

Thirdly, Myrdal recommended a value premise that is feasible. It is worth considering that the question of feasibility rightfully belongs at the conclusion of research, as criteria for alternate policy recommendations, and by its nature as a criteria that can never be applied but tentatively. Instead, I would argue for a conception of ideals that seem beyond feasibility.

The fundamental justification for both science and politics, and indeed all of society, is not the survival of one particular species, but the affirmation and improvement of the
uniqueness of that species we call humanity. In Bronowski's elegant concept, our purpose is "the ascent of man." (1973) Our problem is that of revealing the potentials of man's life, of discovering those directions and limits yet to be explored for their satisfactions. The fundamental premise is: there is a better life yet to be gained with imagination and exertion. Consequently, by selecting a set of values that may not be realizable without radical reform, or may not be realizable with any reform, we begin to see how much remains to be done, as Dennis Thompson clearly shows. (1970) We not only put ideological pressure against the status quo, he argues, but we also gain an explicit epistemological advantage. As we account for the possibility of radical reform we are forced to treat constants as variables. On the other hand, if we unquestionably accept the values "given" in current political practices that are concerned with feasibility, we defeat science and risk self-destruction as Glenn Paige illustrates in his remarkable retrospective autobiographic review of his own book, The Korean Decision. (1977) I will have much more to say about the role of values in gaining knowledge in the latter part of this chapter. For the moment, I propose to substitute "idealistic" for Myrdal's "feasibility" as the third criterion.

Each of these three criterion for selecting an explicit value base for this study of an American political institution are fulfilled by one value system: the philosophy of Liberalism. Liberalism was the founding philosophy of America and has remained its dominant philosophy. That assertion, truthful on the face of it,
nevertheless demands some immediate distinctions because the concept is not well understood in American politics. Without close examination, the conception is morally ambiguous, mainly due to its composite historical geneology.

For example, Edward Greenberg, in an otherwise intelligent and well-documented textbook, seems to set up liberalism as a strawman: "To liberal theorists ... equality is relevant only to civil, political, and juridicial rights, and has nothing whatsoever to do with equality of material condition." (1976,25) Yet, Abraham Kaplan in 1961 characterized liberalism as "first of all, a philosophy of social protest . . . receptive to social planning . . . predisposed toward a socialized economy." (41-42) And Kaplan was echoing the Fabians of England, circa 1884, who defended their program as an extension of liberalism with assertions like "The economic side of the democratic ideal is, in fact, socialism itself," and "Socialism is merely individualism rationalized." (Sabine, 1950, 739-740)

A little history may serve to clarify the apparent confusion. America was formed as a functioning political institution based largely on what John Locke had written, without considering what Locke was assuming. As Louis Hartz reasons, when Americans moved from Locke's "basic social norm, the concept of free individuals in a state of nature . . . to the contractual idea of organizing the state, they were not conscious of having already done anything to fortify the state, but were conscious only that they were
about to limit it. One side of Locke became virtually the whole of him. The "master assumption of American political thought" became "the reality of atomistic social freedom." (1955,60,62) His main thesis is that Americans took the liberal philosophy out of the context which caused its development--feudalism--and thus ignored the concept of community which was at least implicit. America institutionalized a simplistic individualist conception. This truncated liberalism forestalled conscious consideration of community purposes and action on the part of the government that it feared. It prevented American political thought from appreciating definitions of freedom that explained and predicted emerging social relation problems outside of government--such as those caused by the trusts around the turn of the century and the rise of democratic socialism in Europe. (ibid,239,306) Other examples which come to mind are the rise of the labor unions within the context of industrial corporate capitalism as well as the limited self-conception of the purposes of those labor unions.

Thus it is not difficult to appreciate the moral ambiguity that comes from an "irrational" political philosophy. Further confusion stems from the fact that the philosophy of liberalism did continue to develop in Europe, particularly through John Stuart Mill, Thomas Hill Green and, today, C.B. Macpherson. There was a related development of the liberal philosophy in America (distinct from the American liberal practice which more closely characterizes Greenberg's description). The American variant is best seen in Dewey and the
philosophy of Pragmatism (to which Kaplan was addressing his essay). Recent American political thought has elements of diverse philosophies—democrats, pluralists, capitalists, socialists, Marxists, etc.—all of which variously claim or attack some parts of liberalism. Noteworthy of this intense political discussion is that little or none of it reaches the public's attention. Why this is so will be one of the major questions for this essay.

For our immediate purposes, we must define the conception of liberalism that will be used to analyze and evaluate the character of public debate. Contrasted with that must be some characterization of the practice of political communication in America. What this chapter is not intended to do is to distinguish between the various political philosophies represented in American political thought, nor is it intended to explore sidepockets of American political practice which represent those diverse philosophies. Neither is the purpose of this essay to argue for some new conception of liberalism, nor for that matter some new conception of political practice. The purpose will be to extend our understanding of the consequences and implications contained within contemporary political practices from the standpoint of a familiar political philosophy. The definition of the political ideal which I assert is relevant, significant, and by definition, beyond our political practice is that of normative democratic theory. It is a conception of society at large. I stand with Macpherson who wants to hold on to, or recover, "the humanistic values which (Western) liberal democracy has always claimed." (1973,vii)
"Western Liberalism" or "Pragmatism," as Kaplan defines it (1960), or the "authentic conception of democratic political life" in Joseph Tussman's phrase (1960), seem equally valid synonyms. The practice of American politics will be characterized as that of a market place (democratic capitalism), and justified as such in Chapters 2 and 3. Synonyms that are related but do not seem to carry quite the same meanings are pluralism, democratic elitism and American liberalism. The latter part of this chapter will be concerned with spelling out and justifying a conception of the public interest with regard to political communication as contained within the political and social philosophy of Western Liberalism.

We need not restate the entire philosophy of democracy, if that is possible. Our focus is narrowed by the immediate purpose of evaluating the public political communication system. By "system" I mean the observable and regular means by which the public discusses its politics.

By "public" I mean to focus on the most widespread communication system in the polity. "Public" could be presumed to mean some purely normative characteristic of democracy. I do not intend it at this point (though I tend to use it as a pragmatic concept which carries both normative and empirical meanings). In any political system, no matter how far removed from democracy in either fact or purpose, there is some kind of command and control system by which the general populace is connected to itself and to those who do exercise authority and power. One could make a case for the
American political system being best explained by elitist or pluralist or primarily electoral or even bureaucratic models of politics. My purpose is not simply to describe the system, but to measure and explain its distance from the ideal. The criteria that will be developed in this chapter could be used to determine if any such public political communication system is in fact democratic, or to what extent it is democratic. Similarly, I do not propose to evaluate any "private" system such as those peculiar to corporations, trade unions, intelligence agencies, political parties, legislatures, military organizations, etc., though the criteria could be used to evaluate any such communications system and should be used to do so. One of the interesting but unexplored conclusions to this chapter is that there is a fundamental impulse in any organization toward communication characteristics which I shall define as democratic.

By "political" I mean, in general, the "authoritative allocation of values for a society," following Easton's definition. (1953,129-134; see also Cahill and Goldstein, 1964,360) This essay does not focus on the political system as such, particularly not on government as such, but upon the communication aspect of politics--the institutions and processes by which a political culture discusses its values and understands its own authoritative allocations.

In the contemporary American scene, because of specific historical reasons, the "public," "political," "communication," "system" is primarily the mass media: television, radio, newspapers and newsmagazines. It is that which I will analyze and evaluate in
chapters 2 and 3. The media are characterized by two essentials: the economic structure of corporate capitalism managing a communication system which is directed to the public in general and claims to transmit public political information. (There are important alternatives--PBS, for example. They will have to wait for another essay.)

On the one hand, the media have features not unlike other corporate entities that operate within the American economic system with the protection and support of the government. (see Greenberg, 1977,210-237; Navaro,1977) On the other hand, they have a feature which is unusual among American corporations: they claim to be operating in the public interest. (A justifiable argument for the relevance of the public interest standard could similarly be made for those corporations we call conglomerates or multi-nationals, and for those in oligopoly and monopoly positions, and perhaps for all corporations which now usually possess unrestricted charters. See Greenberg,1977,178,212; Best and Connoly,1976) American journalism is specifically an admixture of public and private interests, of public policies created and carried out by private economic entities.

So the exposition of our ideals with regard to American journalism will be an exposition of the political/economic philosophy which justifies that admixture, namely: the Western liberal tradition. Although the responsibilities that journalism has politically assumed are historically different from other economic institutions, I will argue that those responsibilities are no different in some
fundamental sense from those of individuals or institutions as they act in a political role within a polity that claims to be democratic. That assertion, along with others already stated, depends, in brief, on our understanding of the role of the citizen in a democracy. The definition of the public interest with regard to political communication depends upon the role of the citizen. What would democracy look like if we saw someone doing it? If we saw a community doing it?
I was observing a negligible portion of something incredibly more distant than any sun; something more unimaginably huge than the most prodigious of all universes--
Namely?
The individual.

Sometimes a great notion: man as a citizen

The thrust and power of Western liberal philosophy has been to explain and justify man's flight from hegemony. Beginning with John Locke and drawing from pre-feudal conceptions of natural rights, liberalism in the 17th and 18th centuries worked to dissolve the power of the authoritarian church and the mercantilist monarchs. It uniquely defined the Western Civilization by legitimizing the importance of the individual. It literally reversed the old order of priorities, replacing the Supreme Rulers of Heaven and Earth with Everyman. More recently, with J.S. Mill, T.H. Green, and C.B. Macpherson, the philosophy became more explicitly democratic, reasserting a fundamentally optimistic conception of human nature over the pessimistic and narrowly utilitarian conceptions of classical liberalism and the industrial revolution. The purpose of society and its institutions has come to be defined by modern democratic theory in more egalitarian terms: enhancing every individual's power to develop and use essentially human capacities for creative and rational and moral action. (Macpherson, 1973, 32-33)
It frees him for his own purposes as it makes him responsible for his own conduct.
The philosophy not only emancipates the individual from complete subservience to one or another institutionalized group, it seeks to establish social processes which protect him from arbitrary external restraints. Consequently, the Western liberal philosophy came to redefine ideal economic and political institutions.

Origins

The origins of the liberal philosophy, in the 17th and 18th centuries, were in the European middle-class demands for individual freedom and security. The philosophy broadened its scope during the 19th and 20th centuries to include the right by all members of society for those same values. This concern for economic freedom and security is vital to modern democratic philosophy because it was early seen as directly supporting the ability of the individual to define his own life. More recently, the later awareness was that it allowed the individual a secure base from which he may consider and organize political alternatives. (Best and Connolly, 1976,5,81)

John Locke, who dates the beginnings of liberal philosophy, considered the individual rights of liberty and property (economic security) to be natural and indefeasible. The social institution by which individuals achieved these individual and private values was to be the marketplace. The free market would allow individuals to pursue their own self-interests within an exchange economy. The consequences of this competition between buyers and sellers, between producers and consumers, would be the motivation of individuals by
their own powerful personal motives, the reward of the individual according to his own efforts, and the generation of production and equitable distribution by competitive market demands. This classical liberal economic argument for the free market received its most celebrated formulation in Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations, published in the auspicious year of 1776. He argued that each individual, motivated by his own gain, would be led to promote the public interest "by an invisible hand"—free choice operating in the market according to the price mechanism. This is a crucial point: the free market was legitimate because it gave the individual sovereignty over his own productive life. It maximized his freedom of choice.

On the face of it, this classical liberalism seems to be based upon a utilitarian conception of the individual. He operates according to simple notions of pleasure and pain. Pleasure comes from infinite consumption, power comes to be defined as the ability to maintain consumption, and the social scene becomes composed of individuals competitively struggling, each for his own personal pleasures. It is a doctrine of "seize, have, and hold" in Roelof's incisive phrase. However, as both he and others note, this law of the jungle could not have logically produced such a well-functioning productive society unless it was done within a context in which each individual did consider the responsibilities of trust and respect toward others in the community of which he was a member which attended that market freedom. (1976,69; Best and Connolly,1976,3)
Roelofs draws our attention to the fact that Locke in his time was writing for the English gentleman who did not need to be told of his family and social responsibilities.

Free enterprise in 19th century England quickly developed into industrial capitalism in which the excess profits were used to expand the productive capacities of private industry. The doctrine of classical economics began to create a society which in fact did not distribute economic tangibles according to skill and effort. At the very time when classical liberal economic theory was becoming state policy in England, both public consciousness and liberal philosophers such as John Stuart Mill began to recognize that unhindered capitalism appeared to distribute goods "almost in an inverse proportion to the labour involved." (Macpherson, 1973, 63 n.)

Simply, the capitalist market was losing its justification as a legitimate social institution for providing individual freedom and security. The consequences were to result in a political and theoretical reconsideration of the role of the market as well as of the role of government, both of which forced a revision of the underlying conception of man.

In the 19th century, England was the greatest industrial power on the earth. But its marketplace with unrestrained industrial and commercial capitalism was disintegrating the society, depriving many of both freedom of choice and economic security, degrading the condition and the conception of man.
In 1841 the report of a Royal Commission, appointed to investigate the coal-mining industry, shocked all England with its revelation of the brutality that existed in the mines: the employment of women and children, barbarously long hours of work, the absence of safety devices, and the prevalence of revolting conditions both sanitary and moral. (Sabine, 1950, 701)

Because capitalist market society was based not only upon property as being privately owned but also upon capital being privately owned, the utilitarian conception of man as infinite consumer was really a surrogate for man as an infinite appropriator. (Macpherson, 1973, 35) This accumulation of capital in the hands of a few, placing them in control of the work of the increasing industrial labor force, was justified by classical liberalism. The philosophy counseled the encouragement of enterprise, the widest possible freedom of contract, and reliance upon the market as a natural condition which would maximize production and distribute commodities (utilities) equitably. But, the unavoidable empirical evidence was that the market was satisfying the interests of one class--the capitalists--at the considerable expense of those without capital--the workers and the farmers. Both English politics and political thought became conscious of the fact that the market was not a natural condition; it was, according to Green, just another social institution that was then effectively creating the conditions of hegemony which had given the original impulse to liberalism.

But a doctrine which justified the economic exploitation of unmitigated industrial capitalism would eventually fail to be supported by the majority who were on the debit column of the social
cost-accounting ledger. The focus of remedies was initially upon the
government, and later the philosophy would begin to make clear the
logical imperatives.

The role of government, under classical liberalism, was
largely passive and consequential. It was to be the umpire of the
marketplace, enforcing the lawful contracts, restraining violence and
unlawful exploitation. This political policy of economic laissez
faire was determined in part by the fact that government was
controlled by the upper and, later, middle classes. Unhindered
freedom was a policy preferred by those who stood to benefit by it.
But by the rhetoric of natural rights, which Locke had drawn from,
the individual had inalienable rights: freedom of choice and economic
security (property). And government was established, in the course
of English political history and by Locke's widely accepted
reasoning, as the only legitimate institution for creating and
enforcing public policies. It was legitimized as an authoritative
institution because it was to operate by consent of the people—the
social contract. The monarch and the aristocrats had been severely
limited. The church had been separated from the political power of
the state, and it had been largely redefined under Protestantism as
an aggregate of individuals, precluding conceptions of collective
social action. (see Roelofs, 1976, 51-60) On the other hand, Locke
limited this power of the people merely to the establishment of the
legislature, who would then act as the trustees for the people.
(Sabine, 1950, 531-536) The legislature would retain its legitimacy
so long as it acted in the interests of the people. Further, he conceived the legislature as acting in concert with the other vested interests: crown, nobility and the church. Locke was attempting to justify the English Revolution of 1688, which established the legislature as the supreme body in government. But the unforeseen consequences of his confused logic—which history and philosophy began to make coherent—was that tacit consent did not guarantee those inalienable rights. The rights were not self-evident, nor were they sufficient. And they needed representation. Consequently, the rhetoric of popular consent was used to justify progressive widening of the franchise, and eventually a democratic theory of politics which calls for participation by all citizens as a means for insuring that all interests are taken into account, as well as a means for acceptance and support of the resulting policy.

The rhetoric allowed, first, a means for the middle class to translate their economic power, and then for the lower classes to gain political power. The franchise was increasingly widened to include, first, the middle class with property qualifications, then the working men, and then women. Paralleling this widening political representation came, first, reform legislation designed to ameliorate the social costs of industrial capitalism—child labor laws, safety regulations, working hour limits, etc. Later would come labor unions and collective bargaining. The state thus moved progressively from unhindered individualism to state supported collective action and then to collective control of certain economic enterprises—as a
means to enhancing economic freedom and security for the increasing numbers of individuals in industrial society. It was "frank recognition of the need for collective action to solve the class problem." (Hartz, about Green, 1955, 231)

What was being worked out in practical English politics was a conception of government as a positive instrument, and a more egalitarian conception of the public interest. Economic and political freedom and security were indeed indefeasible rights of all members of society, and they were pragmatic reasons to keep society cohesive. The old idea of government non-interference in the freedom to contract was, in effect, sanctioning economic coercion and deprivation; it was replaced by a conception of positive government. In a situation where the bargaining power of individuals or groups was grossly unequal (as between Irish landlords and tenants when eviction meant starvation), the lawful restriction of the landlord's freedom was the lesser evil. And it was a more desirable coercion because it came from the government. It was under public scrutiny and public control. T.H. Green used this example in his analysis of parliamentary legislation in 1880 to argue that liberal philosophy justified government abridging the right of contract by free enterprise. The purpose of liberal philosophy and liberal politics, Green argued, was to "open a humane way of living to a larger number of persons." (Sabine, 1950, 730) This was a conception of the public interest which was inclusive, it was capable of being shared by all, and it could be used as a standard for legislation.
The original intent of liberalism had been to reduce the hegemony of authoritarian government. As liberalism developed within the new context of industrial capitalism, it became apparent that the economic institution was also important as a variable in the achievement of liberty. It seemed both idle and cruel to expect men to determine their own well-being and to contribute to society if the real social context of their lives allowed little or no freedom to do so. What was required was more than just legal freedom which, in fact, allowed other social institutions to constrict real opportunities. Mill, in his critique of representative government, had democratized the concept of freedom. It was a legitimate claim for all members of society. Green added that freedom depended upon the social context in which it was exercised. He made explicit the context which Locke had assumed, arguing that freedom was a social value as well as an individual value.

J.S. Mill had begun the modernization of liberalism; T.H. Green later made it more explicit. They reintroduced an ancient moral dimension, revising the conception of man from a consumer of utilities as an end in itself, to that of man who used utilities as "mere means to using and developing human capacities" for such purposes as rational and socially responsible conduct. (Macpherson, 1973,59) Mill's optimism replaced Hobbes' pessimism. The essence was of a man as a unique creator, whose highest pleasures come from doing and participating. The basic postulate, both in a value and an empirical sense, is of man possessing the capacity of exercising
uniquely human attributes. The concept of power then becomes a developmental one, measuring the ability of man to exercise his unique capacities. (Macpherson, 1973, 52-53) And, in Macpherson's elegant logic, power must be measured in terms of the absence of impediments, or as a deficiency from a maximum. (Note the identity of this assertion with the epistemological argument made earlier concerning idealistic value premises.) Political power, the power over others, is thus only part of man's total power; it is essentially descriptive since it "embodies no standard of essentially human needs or purposes." (ibid, 41) This moral dimension can be clearly seen in T.H. Green's conception of positive freedom: Individuals have, first, a claim to freedom of action to realize their own inner capabilities. The claim is morally justified, not merely by the individual's desire, but by the rationalized desire which takes account of the claims of other persons. It is also a claim to participate and contribute. In consequence, the second element is society's recognition that the claim is warranted, that the individual's freedom really does contribute to the general good. (Sabine, 1950, 731-2) The appropriate label for this idealistic conception of man is that of the citizen.

From that concept of citizen, we can derive a definition of political communication which is in the public interest, a definition which is both inclusive (consensual) and capable of being used as a standard for evaluation and policy. We can do that because, at its core, and unlike Locke and the utilitarians
(Bentham and James Mill), the concept of citizen in modern liberalism contains within it a theory of individual and community (collective) knowledge in the very best sense of that word. (see Sabine, 1950, 699)

It also meets other criteria of the Western liberal tradition: it is concerned with individuals, first, and then with social institutions, including government, as empirical contexts for individuals. It is as concerned with democratic process as it is with democratic goals, "hostile to the utopian mood" in Hartz' phrase. (1955, 270) It retains a faith in private property as a necessary part of economic and political security and freedom. It is suspicious of too much state power. At the same time, it demonstrates a faith in a sense of community that is capable of organized and democratic action to fulfill individual and community goals, particularly to overcoming those impediments to developmental power that Macpherson categorizes: scarcities of the material means of life necessary to support participation in the community, restrictions on access to the means of labor, and lack of protection against invasion by others--civil liberties and due process. (1973, 59ff)

Liberalism to democracy: a logical imperative

Before I analyze that conception of citizen which is central to democratic theory, and that conception of political communication in the public interest which logically flows from that
of the citizen, I think we should focus on an important argument that was implicit in my historical development of the concepts.

The question is: to what extent can we substantiate that classical liberalism a la Locke, Smith, Bentham, Ricardo and James Mill contains within it an imperative for development of the egalitarian participatory democracy of John Stuart Mill, Green and Macpherson? The philosophy, itself, has developed by drawing from many sources, including external critics, to improve its coherence and relevance. The development has been neither accidental nor linear. When we consider what the ideal conception of citizen entails, its moral and especially its epistemological connections with democratic political communication, I will argue that there is some kind of imperative for the development of democracy in practice. Perhaps not determinant, maybe only conditional, but an imperative nonetheless.

The question here is in the broader sense: why did the conception of citizen arise at all, and why has it not been realized in England or in America? To be more precise, why did American political practice never achieve, in fact, the promise of its liberal theory? When we think of political practice, I think it is foolish to think in terms of a completely determined historical pattern. Yet that is the very same logic, and equally faulty, if we accept the argument that democracy is an impossible dream. The small number of humanly frail experiments in man's history will not justify that assertion. (see Kaufman's excellent analysis, 1969) Yet the argument
persists in American political thought. Consider two examples, from different perspectives.

Earlier, I quoted from Edward S. Greenberg, who argues that American liberal theory is concerned only with due process, "the laissez-faire liberal theory of justice." (1977,26) Greenberg is saying that liberalism is not concerned with economic quality, much less political equality. One can read the same argument in Dye and Zeigler's textbook, *The Irony of Democracy*, now in its fourth edition. (1978) They say that it is "political maturity to know that democracy remains an ideal, and that nations are governed by elites, not masses. . . . Elitism is a necessary characteristic of all societies. There is no 'solution' to elitism, for it is not the problem in a democracy."

Underlying both analysis is a fundamental pessimistic conception of human nature, particularly an unwillingness to rely upon the democratic process as a means by which majorities may move effectively. Dye and Zeigler are more obvious about it. They begin their concluding chapter by stating the elitist imperative, by equating leadership with oligarchy and elitism—an assertion that is neither logically nor empirically justifiable. (cf Barber, 1975; Kaufman, 1969,195-199) They specifically exclude political action as an effective remedial process. Their final counsel is one of irony; they recommend an attitude of detached awareness of the incongruities in American politics, which of course guarantees the persistence of those incongruities. And that is ironic, considering their title.
Greenberg's bias is less obvious, especially if one were to read his last chapter first. Nevertheless, there is considerable evidence in his book to suggest that he is so filled with a clear conception of the just society that the process for achieving that goal is not to be judged. He argues that his evaluative standards arise "naturally" from the data. (1977,17,20) He does not consider that revolution might be immoral, only impractical. (468-9) He argues that government is a dependent variable in the political equation, which is itself a determinate equation, and that the only independent variable is the economic structure of society. (15) Note that this hypothesis contradicts his later prescription for first raising the political consciousness of the workers, and thereby change the economic structure through political action. (471) Curiously, there is only one paragraph devoted to political communication as such. (418) Finally, Greenberg places his concern for social action before his concern for political justice. (Part 4 after Parts 2 and 3 in his order of contents.) What appears is a solution to a problem of political tactics. By setting utopian goals, and then emphasizing ends over means, he is able to criticize both the system and its justificatory rhetoric as being all bad.

It all depends upon reducing Locke and liberalism to a strawman: "Locke constructed a moral justification for unlimited concentration of wealth, wage labor, and class inequality . . ." (92) Yet Sabine found more humanitarianism in Locke: "The monopoly of power by the landowning class was contrary not only to Locke's
theory of individual rights but also to his theory of the importance of property in general." (1950,539) Greenberg identifies John Stuart Mill with classical liberalism, which is not true. (76ff) Mill marks the movement of liberalism away from its narrow utilitarian conceptions. Greenberg does not mention T.H. Green at all, and he avoids Macpherson's argument for the democratic extension of liberalism even though he cites Macpherson's criticism of Locke. (92) Unfortunately, all of this serves to weaken Greenberg's otherwise excellent criticism of American political and economic practices, and an otherwise reasonable exposition of the socialist alternative in his last chapter.

The underlying question that Dye and Zeigler and Greenberg do not raise is: does the tradition and practice of liberalism contain within itself the means and the justification for improving upon itself? I think it does.

Sabine characterizes liberalism's beginning with Locke as a humanitarian motivated, superficially simple theory with underlying confusions. (1950,519,537ff) The classical liberals, Smith, Malthus, Bentham, Ricardo and James Mill, narrowed Locke's revolutionary philosophy into utilitarianism, and eventually focused on institutional reform. It was John Stuart Mill who began to recognize that the dogmatic egoistic individualism of classical liberalism was preventing it from recognizing and restoring the general welfare that was being destroyed by unrestrained industrial capitalism. Mill saw that classical liberalism was ignoring the role of
social institutions and working with a falsely schematic conception of human nature. (ibid,698-9) But Mill himself began by accepting the utilitarian theory. His revisions to that theory came in his qualifications to it. (ibid,706-7) It was the idealist, Thomas Hill Green, who reconstructed the philosophy into a positive instrument by largely making "coherent and explicit the qualifications by which Mill had in effect explained away the individualism and the egoism of Bentham's form of liberalism." (ibid,726) More recently, it has been C.B. Macpherson who argues that the liberal-democratic tradition of Mill and Green attempts to combine two contradictory claims: the individual freedom of liberal society with the equality of democratic society. He argues that the latter idealistic conception is capable of being realized and, in so doing, dispenses with the justification for the former. (1973,3-6,32ff)

Liberalism progressively developed from "the ideology of the middle class interests into the philosophy of a national community whose ideal was to protect and conserve the interests of all classes." (Sabine,1950,674) What powered that development was, first, the politicization of the economic interests being deprived by the middle class. Yet we are still left with the question of why the political consciousness arose and why its communitarian solution. Liberalism developed into a conception that was broader than politics as class struggle; it came to offer both a consensual process and purpose. (Sabine,1950,672,740ff) England had remnants of feudal institutions--the aristocracy and the landed gentry--which were
already politically conscious and willing to articulate their political interests, and forced by the rhetoric of liberalism to argue in terms of the public interest. Further, England was developing its liberalism in the intimate political environment of continental Europe with its own diverse political movements and philosophies. Underneath all of this was a strong sense of humanitarianism which is meant by an individualist philosophy, and which had its ties to both Christianity and to natural law. (see Roelofs, 1976,49ff; Sabine,1950,536) And, in contrast with France and Germany in particular, English liberalism was developing within a community which perceived itself as such, and acted in a manner which made so. (Sabine,1950,547,703)

Essentially, the community could afford to be tolerant of diversity, particularly political diversity and conflict, because it appreciated and valued variety for its contribution to the community, which was able to spark the philosophy and make it more viable and coherent. (Sabine,1950,746; Hartz,1955,14,55-57)

Liberalism: the American variant

In America, liberalism did not progressively develop, for identifiable reasons. To begin with, the American founding fathers read Locke "literally, word for word." (Roelofs,1976,69) Man was seen in utilitarian terms, which justified the individualism of a market society. Government's role was consequential to that: a limited role of protecting the relatively unencumbered individual entrepreneur. The Constitution was the document which
institutionalized that conception of government's role. Hofstadter has nicely summarized the American version of classical liberalism which justified that particular constitution. (1973,3-20)

He describes the founding fathers' dominant conception of man as selfish and contentious. Therefore, not only did they distrust man singular, they distrusted man plural in majority movements they called democracy. Yet, the founding fathers also had recent experience which justified their distrust of monarchy and of military governments. They could find no better source of governmental power than its base in public consent. Since they did not consider that man's nature was adaptable and capable of being enlarged, their solution to this dilemma was to construct constitutional restraints for the majority: checks and balances of a federated government (pluralism), centralized representation instead of decentralized participation, and independent branches. A "harmonious system of mutual frustration," in Hofstadter's phrase. (1973,10) Government was to be an honest broker among a variety of propertied interests, giving them all protection from common enemies, and preventing any one of them from becoming too powerful. Thus, government based upon widespread ownership of property would lead to widespread responsibility for an orderly society. They wanted the same economic freedom and security that Locke wanted. (With remarkable vision, Madison foresaw property moving into the hands of a minority, in which case democracy would be all the more threatening. ibid, 17) The Constitution became a self-fulfilling
prophecy; it underwrites rapacious self-interested economic man, while it establishes a government to control that "avaricious transactionism," in Roelof's wry phrase.

The founding fathers, according to Hofstadter, perceived democracy as a threat to liberty. Liberty was founded upon property, that is the relative unrestricted freedom to appropriate property. He characterizes the Convention as "a fraternity of types of absentee ownership." (1973,14) However, the more egalitarian participatory perception that democracy was necessary to liberty was also widely held in America.

Egalitarian democracy did not have to develop out of a struggle in America, she was born with it. The Declaration of Independence was its formal manifestation, and men pledged their lives, fortunes and sacred honor to it. Jefferson is known for his expectation that a nation of small farmers would yield a stable, secure, and free society. But there were others more radical than he. The first Kentucky convention in 1784 expressed the frontier sentiment:

That to grant any Person a larger quantity of Land than he designs Bona Fide to seat himself or his Family on, is a greevance, Because it is subversive of the fundamental Principles of a free republican Government to allow any individual, or Company in their own right as may at future Day give them undue influence.

(Main, 1961,1)

The Antifederalists who argued against ratification of the Constitution recognized that equal property was a necessary condition for popular control, as they recognized the need for local self-rule
and responsible government, according to Main's research. (1961)
And because the Antifederalists represented the majority of public
opinion, they were given a directly elected House of Representatives
and a Bill of Rights. But they lost the struggle with the commercial
interests, in part, because the foundering economy affected them as
well. Congress was given unlimited power, including that of taxation,
and a national sovereign government was established. The federation
of states, established by the earlier Articles of Confederation, was
obliterated. The Constitution institutionalized a conservative view
of man and his government, moving back from the developing American
practice of egalitarian participatory democratic society and
government.

The struggle between the American Whig and the American
Democrat would continue until the Civil War when the "law of Whig
compensation" would be worked out and realized by a virtual unanimous
consent.

If the (Whigs) gave up Hamilton's hatred of the people, they
retained his grandiose capitalist dream, and this they combined with
the Jeffersonian concept of equal opportunity. The result was to
electrify the democratic individual with a passion for great
achievement and to produce a personality type that was neither
Hamiltonian nor Jeffersonian but a strange mixture of them both:
the hero of Horatio Alger.

(Hartz, 1955, 111)

The idea of the democratic capitalist was born, and one can
read the analysis of his achievements in the works of Hartz,
Hofstadter, Roelofs, Greenberg, and Best and Connolly. Their
histories make a persuasive case that the practice of democratic
politics has declined. For instance, the combination of progressive
reforms at the turn of the century began the destruction of the political parties and the political machines as effective representatives of identifiable interests. FDR saved the Republican party, and at the same time coopted it into concurring in the new idea of welfare government. Teddy and Franklin together legitimated big business while turning government into a positive instrument for maintaining the social conditions necessary for corporate survival and success. This combination of welfare government and monopoly capitalism has institutionalized the American citizen within the 20th century version of the motorized squirrel cage: stagflation. (see Best and Connolly, 1976) The rise of monopoly capitalism and multi-national corporations which are, in many ways, outside the effective control of political entities such as nations, have so submerged the original justification of economic freedom and stability that the ghosts of Locke and Smith have retired to some hospice we call "university." My present purpose is not to recount this American political purpose, but to drive a wedge of rationality through it, in Hartz' pointed phrase.

America is unable to rationally deal with such emergent problems because of one dominant and self-defeating characteristic of our political culture--the inability to articulate and move toward any conception of the public interest. Simply, the operative political philosophy of America, which seems best labeled as American liberalism or pluralism, does not contain a conception of the public interest which allows us to deal with the social and institutional
causes of our problems. We are thus prevented from realizing
national goals that we have professed but never made coherent and
operative. More accurately, we seem to be unable to articulate a
conception of the public interest beyond that which does in fact
dominate American politics--government policies which give primacy
"to the capitalist economy as a whole" in a consistent fashion.
(Navaro, 1977) Navaro argues that it is the appearance of neutrality
in this process which makes it all work. But as a reading of Hartz
suggests, it is the reality of an underlying consensus, with its
origins in American Whiggery, which allows the contending pluralist
groups to accommodate themselves to government policies which
consistently support a market society. To paraphrase Melville's
comment on slavery: were the truth be known, there is a small part
in each of us that would be a capitalist. That epigram begins to
suggest why capitalism as a dominant ideology, or as a significant
part of the dominant ideology, remains unarticulated.

The problem, in brief, is that the American political
consciousness suffers from a defective conception of freedom.
Americans took Locke at his word and based the society on a
conception of absolute unqualified egalitarianism, a radical
individualism. Man was seen in utilitarian terms, whose happiness
was achieved through consumption, rather than as a citizen whose
fulfillment was in participation within a community of equals. This
truncated conception blinds Americans to the potential for enhancing
freedom through social action, blinds Americans to the social
responsibilities which freedom entails. Said another way, the utilitarian conception of man as a consumer within the heretofore abundant wilderness tends to focus our attention on the degree to which he is improving his acquisitions and consumptions, rather than upon whether he is free to create individual and social alternatives.

The utilitarian conception articulates freedom in the market sense—freedom to consume. And behind that, as Macpherson has pointed out, is the assumption of the freedom to accumulate wealth. (1973,35) But the utilitarian conception, particularly in the American simplistic reading of it, does not contain a conscious awareness of, and a concern for, the community. There is no social conception, no social responsibility, at best it is "elusive" in Roelofs analysis. (1976,61)

Consequently, the responsibility of both individuals and social institutions is arbitrarily limited to that of providing the means of consumption. We fail to see the political implications of institutions, particularly the degree to which they narrow the boundaries of creative choices for both individuals within the institutions and external to them. Macpherson's distinction between two conceptions of power is at the core. (1973,39ff) If we conceive of power as the ability to procure satisfactions, which is a pessimistic conception of man, then we are led to view society and politics in marketplace terms. Politics is limited to a contentious zero-sum game and the public interest becomes limited to a concern for the process. A responsibility for substantive social values seems irrelevant and utopian.
We stumble onward because Americans really are larger than
the utilitarian conception. We are in fact optimists about human
nature; we are public-spirited. At the very least, we are generally
law-abiding. It all works because Americans are motivated, in part,
by the same sense of community that John Locke assumed about his
English gentlemen. And this explains much about why Americans are so
law-abiding, even though the law itself "is stripped of any moral
anchoring, becoming instead the product of specific political
institutions enjoying power under the Constitution . . . market
oriented capitalists." (Levinson, 1977; see also Greenberg, 1977, 376-
413)

Yet America fails to adapt both its operating philosophy
and its political practices because it lacks one of those qualities
which in England was crucial to the development of the liberal
philosophy and to the development of the capacity for collective
action: the consciousness of community and conscious political
dialogue between diverse interests. Hartz argues that in England it
was the existence of the old feudal order, protecting its traditional
interests, which gave rise to a political consciousness. But America
has refused to import an aristocracy and she sent the union army
south to force legal egalitarianism upon the southern aristocracy.
Nevertheless, Hartz' insight holds if we raise it one level of
abstraction to a consideration of conscious political debate in
general between diverse and identifiable political interests.
In the absence of this condition, we have a political consciousness which Hartz and Roelofs characterize as "irrational." In brief, Hartz argues that the Whig seduced the democrat with the Horatio Alger myth: a lot of hard work and clean living will make anybody into an Andrew Carnegie. (Roelofs calls this the Protestant-Bourgeois Syndrome.) But if every democrat is at heart a capitalist, then the thing he most fears is the mob who might rise up and take it all away through some such device as majority political action. Therefore, the wise strategy is to hobble the majority with such constitutional devices as bicameral legislatures, representative centralized democracy, and an appointed Supreme Court whose duty is to enforce the Constitution. Hartz properly labels this as irrational because the fear of the mob is a neurotic fear. The objective reality is that there is no "them," no mob. There is only a pervasive moral unanimity. Horatio Alger seduces the American, Jeffersonian individualism terrifies him of being "un-American." Thus, the controls on any incipient majority work quite well. The rich get richer, but the middle class cannot afford a college education for their children. The majority are exploited by both government and corporate economics.

I began this section by raising the question of whether liberalism in America contains within it an imperative for democracy. Can it improve upon itself? I believe it does and it can. The persistence of democratic ideals as widely held symbols in the American political culture attest to that. Yet, both Hartz and
Roelofs explicitly argue that America cannot. Their fault, as I see it, and as I shall explain more fully in the latter part of this chapter, is a self-imposed and crippling conception of knowledge and of their role in its creation (as I mentioned in the Preface). By way of explanation, consider Roelofs' use of the concept "myth," which he distinguishes from ideology. (1976, 32ff)

He defines ideology as that form of consciousness which accurately explains political reality; it enables political action. Myth, he differentiates, as those ideas which legitimate the political system and define the community. The distinction is a powerful one and leads Roelofs into an enlightening analysis. But his definition of myth seems to be tautological and thus he cannot see any potential for change because he has excluded it by definition: "myth, in both definition and fact, is inoperative." (44, see also 38) The limitation flows, in part, from his acceptance of the natural lack of community and its origin in elites (shades of Hobbes!): "the ruling element must persuade the community at large that it is indeed a community . . ." (39) Underlying that assumption is a more basic one: the limited conception of power as only a relational one. Macpherson reminds us that the ancient conception of power is that ability for self-fulfillment, which includes, subsumes, and in some ways denies the more limited one of power over others or lost to others. Roelofs recognizes this more humane conception of power but dismisses it as being absent. (32)
My criticism of Roelofs is limited to his arbitrary dismissal of this function of myth: that it contains a set of ideals capable of generating purposive action toward their fulfillment. (Edelman, on the other hand, allows for the possibility that political myths "may be false." 1975,15) I suggest that the concept "symbol" be used, which can include both the myth sense and the ideal sense. While all ideals are not being realized, they are to some extent. And though they are not being realized and thus could be called "myths," to do so leaves out their capability for giving direction to political action. Similarly, political symbols contain mythical elements which serve to legitimate political authority and define communities, and thus are self-fulfilling prophecies. We can see that no polity could function without them, and at the same time we can explore the distance between ideals and practice to determine their justificatory and explanatory functions, their rational and irrational components, their purposive and rationalizing elements.

With similar logic, we can see that Roelofs and Hartz miss the connection between ideals (myths) and explanatory theory (ideology) as an epistemological tool. If we only confirm a hypothesis, we are left without leverage. Both Roelofs and Hartz counsel resignation. Roelofs writes in his introduction: "We must expect more of the same, more failure, more chaos and disintegration, but also more recovery and endlessly reasserted hope. To all appearance, American government is destined to go on forever, just as it is." (1976,7) And Hartz "tends to criticize and then shrug his
shoulders ..." (1955,32) I am arguing that intelligence is more than confirming causal theories, it carries the responsibility for rational action, which presupposes one's own conscious sense of purpose. Then we are led more explicitly into considering crucial conditions within the context of the study, as Roelofs himself says Burke did for Locke. (1976,69)

It may seem a paradox that on the one hand democracy requires an underlying sense of community, and on the other hand, America fails to develop its democratic ideals precisely because it suffers from unanimity. The key to that puzzle, as both Hartz and Hofstadter reveal, is that the American consensus has been an unconscious one, and that is when unanimity is dangerous.

America's historical burden has been to labor under a truncated philosophy, a dominant ideology of consensus which has escaped criticism and thus served to justify and perpetuate a system that was born conservative. The old theory continues to energize us to work harder, and we have labored hard for several centuries to maintain the status quo. But we have pursued a narrow economic conception of man and his society, and we have increasingly lost our capacity to adapt and to solve our looming collective problems. We suffer the consequences of a futile, self-defeating rationalization, because the American ideals have not been subjected to the test of public political cross-examination.

It is no accident that Louis Hartz dates the decline of American political debate in the 1840's, for that is the date which
marks a qualitative change in the nature of American political communication. American journalism, as I will argue in Chapters 2 and 3, can be seen as a crucial cause of our political unconsciousness. American journalism as our public political communication system can also be seen as a mechanism perhaps the only mechanism for achieving some degree of consciousness. But that, of course, depends upon us having a clear conception of what it is we want. I submit that the ideal of the citizen is the only one worth considering.

The public interest and its categorical imperatives

The question of legitimacy is, first, a question of purpose. If we are to support any institution, if we are to license its freedom, we must begin by asking what social responsibility it assumes. In order to evaluate American journalism, we must begin by defining the public interest with regard to political communication in a democracy. That concept of the public interest begins with the role of the citizen, which is to say with the conception of an individual who is acting in a legitimate manner to affect social policies--the political actor in a democracy.

For the sake of convenience, we can limit our discussion of politics to those preferences for the authoritative social policies of government. But, in so doing, we should keep in mind several related arguments that are part and parcel of democratic theory, but which may not have been distinct in the preceding discussion. First, democratic theory is concerned with the legitimacy of authoritative policies that are found in any social institution: family, university or corporation.
Political action—the assumption of a political role—can be directed toward changing the policies of those institutions as much as it can be directed toward government policies. (see Cahill and Goldstein, 1964)

Secondly, there remains a fundamental distinction between market roles and political roles. A better distinction might be that of public vs. private. The competitive free market was originally justified and remains justified because it gave a large measure of economic freedom to the individual. Society did not legitimately judge his intentions, only the process within which the individual sought fulfillment of his private interests. We should quickly note, however, that this did not absolve the individual of responsibility for his actions. (see Best and Connolly, 1976,3) The competition and bargaining of the marketplace must take place within the context of social responsibility, otherwise the meaning of a contract and the willingness to engage in bargaining in the future becomes undermined. The market disintegrates into the Hobbesian jungle.

The historical development of the market into the economics of corporate capitalism has created the conditions and the institutional imperatives for oligopoly and monopoly control. Under these modern conditions, their economic decisions have empirically assumed social form and consequence. (Best and Connolly, 1976,33-67) Which is to say that exchanges under the duress of the manipulated prices in these modern markets obviates the conception of fair market value. Hence, both the economic process and the behavior of these economic entities become subject to public moral scrutiny. In this kind of
context, we can see why democratic theory is skeptical of any
doctrinaire distinction between "public" and "private"; by the same
logic we can see that democratic theory has re-established itself as
a political/economic theory. This also explains the legitimate focus
of democratic political action on making those economic decisions
more publicly accountable, whether by labor unions, industrial
democracy, government regulation or government assumption. The free
competitive market of individuals retains its conceptual distinction
from other processes in which authoritative allocations are
controlled, and especially from that process of democratic government
in which authoritative policies are intended to be publicly
controlled.

Furthermore, there remains a distinction between government
and other institutions. Government is sovereign in establishing
authoritative social policies, and it retains the prerogative of
force. The marketplace, in democratic theory, is neither sovereign
nor the possessor of force. There also remains the fundamental
distinction between public and private roles. Private behavior is
that which, in fact, does not seek to maintain or change an
authoritative policy; consequently, it is not a matter for democratic
public scrutiny. Public behavior does have consequences for
authoritative policies and is always a matter of legitimate concern
for public judgement and public control, whether it occurs inside or
outside the scope of governmental policies.

Thirdly, it seems that democratic theory makes no
distinction between individuals and organizations in its standards
of perfection. Because organizations are justified by norms of efficiency, expertise, and stable fulfillment of definable goals, we could argue for subjecting them to higher standards. However, this essay will take the position that democratic theory applies equally to both, which is fundamentally an optimistic conception of human nature in both its individual and collective forms. (This position seems a logical conclusion to Kaufman's argument. 1969) Keeping these caveats in mind, I shall focus the discussion of politics around government, by and large.

The Western liberal conception in democratic theory is the conception of the individual as the decision-maker both in his private and in his public role as a member of institutions and society and government. It was the individual, rather than any institution, who was to be free to make the decisions about his purpose and performance, free from arbitrary external restraints. The faith and vision was in the rationality and humanity of the individual. That is the "authentic theory of democracy," in Tussman's words. (1960)

Democratic theory conceives of power as the individual's ability to use and develop essentially human capacities, which is an optimistic conception of man. This leads to politics as a positive-sum game, and to a conception of the public interest that includes both process and purpose. The public interest is a conception of freedom which can recognize man's social nature, freedom as a social value, freedom recognized as entailing a social responsibility. Concisely, it is T.H. Green's definition of positive freedom:
society's responsibility to maximize the freedom of the individual is a recognition that the individual, acting responsibly with consideration for others, is contributing to the social welfare. (Sabine, 1950, 732) The political role of the individual is properly called the citizen, a conception which explicitly includes both freedom and obligation.

Categorical Imperatives

If there is anything to be learned from consideration of the liberal tradition as we see developed in contemporary democratic theory--and from a belief in the worth of those ideals--it is that democracy is not a philosophy of moral relativism, or moral irrelativism. It does not sanctify the popular American liberal, or pluralist, or elitist conception of individual freedom as unhindered egoism, or merely hindered egoism. Those doctrines attempt to rationalize and legitimize the will of the ego.

The American slogan is that we are free to do our own thing as long as it hurts no one else. The qualification is usually cavalier. "Taken literally this would reduce freedom to a triviality, since an act that affects no one but a single person probably will not affect him very much." What personal liberty depends upon in reality and in democratic theory are "social and legal rights and obligations." (Sabine, 1950, 711-2) Democratic politics is unavoidably a moral politics. To lay claim to democracy is to assume the responsibility for individual and public morals.
We could say that all political philosophies enjoin some kinds of behavior, and disenjoin others, and that such obligations are moral injunctions. But pragmatism, the philosophy that stands behind modern democratic theory, states that moral injunctions, in the form of "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not," "repudiate either the world of causal connections or everything else in the realm of value," according to Abraham Kaplan. (1961,38) Neither are they hypothetical imperatives: "If you want democracy, then act . . ." Kaplan labels these hypothetical imperatives as the injunctions of technology, i.e., devoid of moral purpose. He distinguishes both of those injunctions from categorical imperatives: "Since you want democracy, then act . . ." Categorical imperatives specifically repudiate the possibility of final ends--ultimate and absolute. They are, instead, specific connections between ends and means, values and facts. Pragmatism views categorical imperatives as both value judgements and belief judgements. They are hypotheses that a contemplated action will prove to be satisfactory.

Thus, these behavioral imperatives for the assumption of moral responsibility come from and are programatically qualified by their expected contribution to our professed democratic ideal. More simply, since we want a democratic state we must work toward creating those processes which define a democratic state as well as creating those conditions which facilitate democratic behavior. The conception is John Stuart Mill's: "behind a liberal government there must be a liberal society." (Sabine,1950,709)
There are two major pragmatic categorical imperatives associated with the concept of citizen which seem especially necessary for defining and substantiating a democratic definition of political communication in the public interest. The two make explicit Green's indissoluble tie between individual and social freedom. For the momentary purpose of distinguishing them, I will label them: responsibility toward self and responsibility toward others.

Individual Responsibility

The citizen has an obligation to participate. That categorical imperative rests on two major arguments, both initially asserted by John Stuart Mill in his Considerations on Representative Government. (1882) The first, more radical and consequently less well understood, is that the citizen's participation in public life is a means to developing "his deliberative and moral character and to achieve the dignity of being ruler of the society of which he is a member." (Tussman,1960) It is one means by which man can develop his unique powers. (Macpherson,1973,4) Arnold Kaufman, in his incisive criticism of those who argue that democracy is either undesirable or impossible, notes that democratic theory as an optimistic conception of man "cannot be defended or explained on empirical grounds alone," that democracy also depends upon the relationship between faith and effort. (1969,194) Faith in social prophecies is one essential condition for their achievement. Yet as he notes, and as I shall argue with regard to political communication, there is substantial
evidence to support the assertion that participation does indeed lead to deliberative and moral individuals.

Let us consider here a more obviously "political" argument for participatory democracy, what Mill called the "maxim of prudence." The political justification for participatory democracy is that it gives to each citizen a roughly equal formal vote in the process by which the community is governed (as well as participation in the preliminary deliberation). (Kaufman, 1969, 192) The justification for an individual to participate in that process is, logically, to assure self-protection and a fair amount of freedom. As Mill said, the interests of those who do not participate is always in danger of being overlooked; they cannot be protected by tying up the hands of those who do participate. Only by their own hands can any positive and durable improvements of their circumstances be worked out. (1882, 66-68)

Mill was specifically criticizing the idea of a benevolent despot, under which "liberty is held on sufferance." (ibid, 59) The idea translates into more modern language: power cannot be "given," for then it can be "taken." It must be assumed and exercised. His century-old idea is not well understood.

A common conception in American politics, ironically called Libertarian, is to think of freedom as the absence of government policies because they apply authoritatively to all members of society, and interfere with the substantial benefits of the free competitive marketplace.
That interpretation, as many have argued, is simplistic and misleading. (for example, see Best and Connolly's analysis of Milton Friedman, 1976, 4-11) The Libertarian position is a market conception of politics. It narrowly conceives of man as a utilitarian, and steadfastly ignores three hundred years of Western experience with the growth of private economic institutions, who are willing and able to tyrannize large segments of society and create a class society--in the absence of government controls and participant politics. Market conceptions of politics, and we should call this one the laissez-faire type, ignore the basic creative impulse of Western liberal tradition: the fear of hegemony by any institution, including government. The other half of that emotion, as FDR convinced Americans to accept out of necessity, is that government can be respected for its ability to create wider freedoms through sovereign legislative action. The citizen prefers democratic authority to other kinds, in any context.

Thus, democratic theory does not arbitrarily prescribe a fixed position for the line of governmental authority, though its potential expansion is limited by a bill of rights. The line should expand, according to the democratic philosophy, when government is capable of reducing hegemony experienced by individuals in any given context with the substitution of governmental authority. By a similar logic, though I have not seen anyone else make the argument, democratic theory requires government to contract its scope of authoritative policy when there is no private institutional hegemony to justify its presence. (An extension of Green. Sabine, 1950, 731, 734)
Clearly an authoritative intervention by government does not guarantee greater freedom, even under a fully participatory process, if only because of unforeseen consequences. On the other hand, under less participatory processes, a lower net freedom does seem probable. It is unlikely that a participatory political system would have produced the American tax structure, for example. (In 1966, state and local taxes had an effective rate of 13.7 percent for the lowest ten percent of the taxpayers. The upper ten percent paid taxes on an effective rate of 6.6 percent. Greenberg, 1977, 146) The argument of democratic theory is that ultimately the benevolence of the state, from the standpoint of the citizen, cannot be insured or maintained or even defined without participation in some effective manner by the individuals who are significantly affected by its policies.

Both the experience of value and the use of intelligence are localized only in individuals; both the ends and means of social action can be defined only by reference to individuals. . . . The outcome of the pragmatist social philosophy, then, is to assign to each individual the ultimate responsibility for active participation in the process of dealing with social problems. (Kaplan, 1961, 43)

Responsibility toward others

Within the role concept of citizen is the second categorical imperative of democratic theory: that those who do participate in politics are obliged to do so with regard to increasing the freedoms of others. This is Green's ethical conception of democracy which conceives individual freedom in a positive sense: as a justifiable social value. (Green was addressing his philosophy toward society as a whole, not just to governmental politics.)
Political action, because it is intended to result in authoritative policies for the community as a whole, is public action. It cannot be sanctioned as legitimate, its resulting policies cannot receive public consent, unless it contributes to the general welfare in some justifiable manner. First and foremost, political proposals must be judged for their effect on the ability of other to take responsibility for their own political behavior--the participant process itself.

The concept of community is at the heart. An individual will act responsibly toward his fellows precisely because he values their trust and respect for his values and his contribution to the general welfare. As they similarly act toward him, and "he comes to expect this bargained-for reciprocity from a wide circle of group members, he has come to have a 'sense of system.'" (Cahill and Goldstein, 1964, 377) A democratic community is an integration of diverse individuals, and which benefits from the aggregation and interaction of their individual efforts. It conceives of individual power as the capability to add to the general welfare in a synergistic manner. In short, community is both a matter of experience and a matter of faith, of acting responsibly in order to insure future participation, as John Locke's gentlemen knew. The first categorical imperative for participation is thus inextricably linked to the second categorical imperative for responsible social behavior. Each is meaningless without the other one.
The alternative conception, that the freedom to influence political decisions is without the moral responsibility for others is no more than that, and a great deal less. It is a claim for legitimate freedom without regard for the welfare of others. It attempts to justify exploitive individual, institutional and governmental policies—to create tyranny. Irresponsible freedom is a marketplace conception of politics; it draws from classical liberalism, and it is, in theory, without regard for its empirically devastating consequences upon individuals and its effect on unspecified but ultimately limiting social values.

This market conception of politics—that everyone need not participate in creating and maintaining a society which enhances important social values such as freedom and security—has considerable support in America, as I have mentioned above. One obvious cause for this is the American political system.

The federal government was explicitly designed by Madison to forestall the potential for majority action and for policies clearly in the public interest. (see, for example, Dahl, 1956, 4-33) Madisonian democracy not only seduced the American democrat, as Hartz argued, with the glittering promise of democratic capitalism. It also seduced a host of political historians, political economists and political scientists. (see Roelofs, 1976, 243-254; Best and Connolly, 1976, 4-21; Macpherson, 1973, 77-80)

Market conceptions, as they are duly constituted in various political forms and theories, raise a host of questions. There are three of these issues which seem to especially bear on this second
categorical imperative: organization, representation, and its concomitant: voting. I shall speak to each briefly.

Organization is considered a necessity for effective political action. But Robert Michels argued that organization carries an empirically verified imperative: the iron law of oligarchy. Kaufman says that the iron law and all other elitist theories are only justified by a pessimistic conception of man's nature. (1969, 196-8) Kaufman also argues that the iron law does not hold in conditions where a strong sense of community is present. Instead, Kaufman asserts that the iron law is a conditional hypothesis, and his assertion is supported by the historical development and democratizing of liberalism. Both the conditions of community and optimism, which are synonyms, were present in England and can be seen as causal agents for democratic theory. Organization, itself, need not be considered antithetical to democratic theory. It may produce effects which are socially important to democracy, such as effectiveness and expertise. (see Kaufman, 1969, 204-6) The crucial variable is, of course, whether the organization is publicly accountable for its political effects—internally and externally.

Insofar as organization means leadership, democratic critics are equally unjustified. For leadership is a part of any democratic politics, no matter how egalitarian and participatory, because democracy is also a purposeful and moral system. There is always a need for someone to exercise leadership, to express a purpose and build a majority or protect a minority. Specifically, leadership does not imply anything less than roughly "equal power of formal
Leadership, in its democratic sense, is a merit rating, belying the dogmatic egalitarianism proposed by some critics and partisans alike. And it is antithetical to the concept of elite, which denotes unaccountable power. In Barber's excellent distinction, democratic leaders are authoritative, tyrants are authoritarian. Democratic processes are difficult and delicate work; they require perseverance and empathy, at the same time they develop the conditions for those characteristics. We can understand Barber's logic when he says that democratic leadership is a product neither of great men, nor great challenges, but comes from great purposes. Leadership is possible only when the polity has achieved a collective purpose. Thus it is participation that creates leaders. He also reminds us that the absence of leadership is a symptom of democratic decay.

The second issue, that of representation, receives much the same criticism and qualifications. It, too, has its place in democratic theory. Its legitimacy may depend upon how it is institutionalized. The American Congress, for example, was constituted by Madison, et al, so that any organized intense minority with "status, power and wealth" can usually veto positive legislation designed to reduce its own private freedoms at the expense of what might be, empirically, community-wide deprivations. (see Dahl,1956,9, 27-29,31; also Kaufman,1969,210-1)

All of the preceding issues are related to voting. The political act of voting in democratic theory is intended to be an expression of approval or disapproval of a policy proposal, after
participating in the creation and evaluation of policy alternatives. It also has its place under democratic theory as a mechanism for choosing representatives under conditions of absence or distance. It is not clear that democratic theory requires constant attendance and participation, though it certainly proscribes any knowable constraints on participation in deliberation and voting. Fully instituted representatives systems, which may have some practical justification in problems of size and dispersion of the citizenry, can be constitutionally created to emphasize or reduce democratic values.

For example, voting within a system of proportional representation seems to fulfill several requisites of democratic theory: it insures maintenance and legislative representation of organized diverse political ideological viewpoints, it allows for the creation of majorities and their effective political action, and most interestingly, it seems to promote authoritative merited leadership. (Storing, 1963, 66-72) However, the American representation system has been deliberately designed to frustrate these as well as other advantages of participatory democracy.

We should first note that it is not accidental that the Bill of Rights does not spell out the rights of the citizen as being ultimately responsible for public decisions with all the "rights or powers as a public official," in Tussman's language. (1966, 121) Just eleven years earlier, American democracy had correctly seen that Locke was justifying a revolutionary doctrine and had written their own document justifying self-responsibility.
However, the Constitution-makers limited the citizen to two functions: voting for some, but not all, of his federal representatives, and obedience to the law of an appointed Supreme Court and a sovereign national legislature. The constitution effectively limits the citizen's participation to that of consenting to legitimate authority. That is hardly a strong conception of political accountability. Furthermore, there is no recall provision for federal office-holders, nor a mechanism for voting on national issues.

The American system of winner take-all elections reduces the electoral contest to competition between individuals rather than between policies or ideologies. In fact, American elections frequently "prevent rather than facilitate policy choices by the electorate. Politicians postpone important policy decisions until after elections in order to avoid losing votes over something they did in the past." (Dahl, 1956, 128-9) This winner take-all system is inevitably biased toward a two party system. But the effect is to make it nearly impossible for one political party to differentiate itself from the other on substantive issues. The concept of accountability becomes nearly meaningless; the absence of participatory conditions which could give rise to authoritative leaders remains inchoate.

The constitution has, in fact, fulfilled Madison's expectations. The two house system, for example, creates pluralism: "The development of majority faction can be limited if the electorate is numerous, extended, and diverse in interests," i.e., structurally disorganized. (Dahl, 1956, 27; also Dahl, 1967, 51-52) The American
voting system thus defines severe limitations on the ability of the

citizen to participate. It substitutes the illusion of meaningful
competition for the reality of choice; it specifically excludes the
opportunity to participate in defining electoral choice.

Representation within the framework of countervailing power
is justified by "the extent to which it protects or stabilizes a
community"; it has to do "with what can be done for men." (Kaufman,
1969,184,188) It "treats democracy as a mechanism, the essential
function of which is to maintain an equilibrium" (of those who have
the power to countervail, obviously). (Macpherson,1973,78) It is a
tyrrany, but a tyranny that comes from the economic model of
oligopoly: "Thus the making of governmental decisions is not a
majestic march of great majorities united upon certain matters of
basic policy. It is the steady appeasement of relatively small
groups," says Dahl about contemporary American politics. (1956,146)
This is the consequence of Madison's constitution: "If the freedom
of some majority is already curtailed in such a way that only
positive governmental action will eliminate that deprivation, and if
a minority with a veto dislikes the measures proposed to increase
majority freedom, then by exercising its veto a minority can maintain
deprivations of the freedom of a majority and hence can tyrannize
over it." (ibid,28) The Supreme Court has acted in such a way as to
produce the identical effect. "In only four cases in the entire
history of the Court where legislation dealing with (the right to vote
and freedom of speech, assembly, and of the press) has been held
unconstitutional, then, the decisions prevented Congress, not from destroying basic rights, but from extending them." (Dahl, 1956, 59)

Democracy under such an institutional structure seems manifestly unattainable. For such a structure to survive requires the political unconsciousness that Hartz and Roelofs well describe. Democracy becomes unconceivable, leaders become elites, and elites become irresponsible to the public. The public is powerless.

Ironically, it is at one and the same time a strength and a weakness of cultures to establish practices as norms. American politics, as it has developed since 1787, has not only come to accept choice among competing elites as a legitimate and necessary measure of freedom, it has enshrined it as the common definition of democratic politics. And in so doing, the obligations of participation became something less than democratic. It is now commonplace to characterize our political behavior as that of competition in the marketplace.

Politics may be following the will of the people (majority or minority), or it may be progress (of a sort) through competition and conflict, or it may even be compromise as a reasonable way of dealing with controversy. (Tussman, 1960, 104-121) We would like to believe that we are doing the best we can. And as Tussman contends, we may be motivated to compromise because we recognize "our fallibility and partiality" and because we must retain support for the political process, i.e., maintain a sense of community by co-opting potential secessionists through slow rates of change. (see Minar and Greer, 1969, x)
But these market techniques, per se, sidetrack and undermine our ability to achieve the purposes of a democratic society. They allow politicians to maintain their legitimacy merely by playing honest broker between powerful interests. As such, they are amoral conceptions of politics, fundamentally different from any "authentic conception of democratic political life." They may "contain conflict" but they certainly do not "contain the art of governing." (Tussman, 1960) What happens when we ignore the moral basis of Western liberal society is that we tend to equate what is with what should be. We come to believe that we live in the best of all possible worlds, for we know of no other evaluative standards. And the value choices that are inherent in the political process remain shielded from public scrutiny. We are led to complacency and benign neglect, to what Myrdal in 1944 called a "do-nothing liberalism." (1046ff)

Consequently, the behavior of those in power and the performance of their institutions becomes legitimately irresponsible. Their ability to know what is best for us and their willingness to do what is best for the rest of us becomes a matter of faith. The poverty and the injustice and the political impotence that does exist becomes not only proper but seems deserved. Might becomes right. You get into politics if there is something in it for you. Conversely, you may not be able to get into politics if all you want is to be taken into account, to have a voice in the forum. Worst of all, the obverse of the categorical imperative for responsibility is that we work under the illusion that behavior has no public
consequences unless we say that it does. Hence, the social consequences of those acts are suffered voluntarily.

In summary

The concept of citizen contains two categorical imperatives: the obligation to participate and the obligation to be socially responsible for the political effects of that participation. I will use both standards to judge the legitimacy of the behavior of the institutions of American journalism. We also need a democratic categorical imperative for judging the substance of American political communication. In the remainder of this chapter I will define and justify a third categorical imperative: the democratic concept of political communication in the public interest. The first two are directly related to the third because democratic theory contains within it a theory of both social and individual knowledge. I named the first two: responsibility for self and responsibility for others, respectively. But their potential for achievement is meaningless without an underlying conception of knowledge. Conversely, I will substantiate the argument that intelligence in either individuals or society requires both the democratic purpose and its process. In short, I will argue that the unavoidable requirement of any human (and of any institution) for rational behavior contains within it a necessity for realizing, to some measurable extent, both self-responsibility and social responsibility, in their democratic theory senses. This participant epistemological theory, I believe, explains why democratic theory may be the only means by which man
can develop his uniquely human powers, or some of them at any rate. The theoretical assertion is that democracy is always a "natural" consequence, one among many to be sure, once we grant that man has uniquely human powers.

**Imperative number two: the liberated mind**

The purpose of this chapter is to develop a liberal definition of political communication in the public interest. I submit that the definition of the public interest can be found in the third crucial condition of democracy: the categorical imperative for intelligence within all individuals and as a characteristic of our public discourse.

Pragmatic liberalism is committed to democracy, not as a specific set of social policies, but as a method of arriving at policy. . . . the method is the application of intelligence to social problems.

A faith in democracy . . . is a faith, first, in the capacity of human nature to determine what--in the long run and in the widest set of contexts--will be experienced by man as good; and a faith, second, in the capacity of human intelligence to discover the actions by which, in the world as it is, this good can best be achieved.

(Kaplan, 1961, 42)

So the touchstone for democracy is more than individual liberty. Fundamentally, democracy is the freedom of the mind. Listen to the high ambitions of John Dewey:

. . . democracy is so often and naturally associated in our minds with freedom of action, forgetting the importance of freed intelligence which is necessary to direct and warrant freedom of action.

(Dewey, 1939, 404)

If there is any democratic definition of the public interest for public communication, John Dewey provided it: "whatever degree of freedom of action and experience is necessary to produce freedom of
intelligence." (ibid) And that, he suggested, explains the list of actions protected in the Bill of Rights: the freedom to hold a moral position and to judge society by that morality; to express opinions publicly; to assemble for public discussion of those ideas; and, to communicate them to government.

In other words, intelligence is the human ability to rationally pursue a course of action which is satisfying. What we call wisdom is the innate ability to learn how to do that better, even under changing circumstances. The role of the citizen, thus, encompasses more than action; it is the contemplation of action. It is the contemplation of the purposes and the consequences of that action. It is a commitment to the enterprise of thinking and a commitment to truth, to the particular kinds of truth we call knowledge and policy analysis. It is the attempt to predict the outcomes of possible actions so we may judge the significance of the process and outcomes for our well-being. It is how to make it happen, how to get there from here, how to go from what we have to what we want. It is the "fundamental cognitive task of integrating fact and value." (Kaplan, 1961,35)

In other words, the argument is that the moral commitment to democracy requires not just participation but participation grounded in intelligent thought and public discussion. Otherwise, our society is dangerous to us all.

Conversely, intelligence as a characteristic of individual thought and public discussion can only come from an egalitarian communication system. Certainly, the means by which the public is
able to continually educate itself--searching for better solutions to continuing and emergent problems--must be an egalitarian communication system. It is an obvious pragmatism. Who knows who will be the next inventor of the better mousetrap? It is beyond question that the widest variety of individuals in diverse conditions is needed to produce creative alternatives. Therefore, the Western Liberal tradition and its imperative for participation is not only a moral imperative in the sense of the redeeming commandment of Christianity to love our fellows. Nor is it only a moral imperative in the sense of responsibility that we in fact have for others because our political and economic actions do affect others in our community. The imperative for participation is also a pragmatic categorical imperative because it is in our own best interest and in the public interest of the community upon which we depend for our survival and identity.

That is the obvious logic. There is one other, equally important, and much more subtle. And that is that our values, those ideals we hold dear and consider immutable, can only be known through an egalitarian communication system. This is a different argument than individualism which posits each individual holding his own unique set of values. What I am saying here is that individuals do not know their own values nor see how they are implicated in the ongoing political process unless there is an open communication system. I am saying that truth, in any sense of the word, is something that is achieved to the extent that the social communication system approaches egalitarianism (as one necessary condition).
Intelligence, then, comes from a social communication system in which there are many voices but all are speaking a common language: a particular use of the fact and value concepts. Having introduced the "correct" epistemology, let me briefly explore the counterpressures against it, particularly in the American context. Why is it necessary to explain and justify a theory of individual and social knowledge? What are the inherent social pressures against rational public debate? There is a catch-22. We call it common sense or the conventional wisdom or the dominant ideology. It acts as society's inertia, rusting the self-correcting mechanisms.

The conventional wisdom

Politics is the process of deciding which, or whose values will be satisfied and whose values will be frustrated, who will receive the blessings and who will bear the burdens. What distinguishes politics from other processes like the market is the authoritative distribution of those blessings and burdens. There is the inevitable universal and compulsory aspect to governmental policies. And thus governmental policies are obeyed for very practical reasons--the costs of disobedience are usually very high. That kind of cost/benefit calculation is seldom considered, however. Governmental power is usually considered authoritative, i.e., there is an obligation to obey. Dahl provides us with a common definition: "Legitimate power or influence is generally called authority." (1970, 33) I think it is worth considering that legitimacy is not quite a synonym for authority, that legitimacy is a very abstract question
seldom raised by most people. I would argue that in America, at least, the question is hardly ever considered. Obedience to governmental policies comes from a desire (perhaps even conscious) for order and peace and predictable security. (As Hume argued. See Sabine, 1950, 603) In other words, authority may be consciously consented to, but legitimacy is habitually ascribed to governmental policies, regardless of the other purposes which those policies may serve. We will pay our taxes even though we may know that the tax system is a regressive one. This is not to say that legitimacy cannot become problematic under some conditions. Nor is it to say that legitimacy is not a constant concern for governmental authorities (which leads into Edelman's and Roelofs' concern for the symbolic nature of politics). What I am emphasizing here, as I have earlier, is the importance of a sense of community and its political function as a consensual legitimizer for government.

Legitimacy is a characteristic of a political culture which justifies the authoritative distributions; therein lies the magic and mystery of politics that makes both pain and pleasure seem proper. It is fortunate for our collective sanity that the process of politics takes place within a shared set of concepts about what the world is and what the good life would be. As humans, we are imbedded within and ineluctably guided by that prevailing culture and its dominant ideologies. But the catch-22 is that cultural values are not usually conscious ones. Common sense tells us that is the way things should be. But this conventional wisdom carries along with it prevailing myths that are so characteristic of society that they are beyond the
the pale of truth. Built in to the received wisdom are unseen rationalizations. We cannot distinguish the little white lies much less the terrible perjuries because they are part of our identity. "We are all cognitive and moral security risks," in Tussman's phrase. And so political demands--the right to decide or who should get what--tend to wrap themselves in the cloak of legitimacy. Ergo, it is useful to consider that all politics carries a basic generic impulse, that politics is the competition for hegemony of the mind. It is a struggle to get facts and values accepted without question. "And that's the way it is," Walter Cronkite says every evening.

The illusions of right thinking

Consider, first, the hegemony of one conception of social goals. When we have only one set of appropriate values we are led to judge means by their ends and we have no choice but obedience to the true faith. The definition of morality becomes located within the state rather than within the individual. Social science and policy options become irrelevant. Dissent leads to repression and final solutions. This is the Byzantine form of true faith and obedience, "the sacrifice of freedom to perfection," in Kohak's analysis. (1976)

No one describes contemporary American life in those terms. Yet our vaunted common sense approach to life does contain some strains of that virus. One of the dominant characteristics of our culture is a continuing anti-intellectualism--the "resentment and suspicion of the life of the mind"--which has corrupted the American perception of knowledge, in Richard Hofstadter's telling phrase.
(1962,7) (It is an interesting sidelight that both Presidents Ford and Carter profess a strong faith in evangelism, which Hofstadter has identified as one of the early sources of American anti-intellectualism.) Hofstadter, along with Hartz and Roelofs, characterize the American political culture as that of an unconscious consensus. The assumption is that all important value questions have been settled. In the language of this essay, Hofstadter is saying that the American culture is uncomfortable with tentative values, with conscious consideration of competing values, and it avoids "evaluating evaluations" as Myrdal, a Scandinavian, described our culture in 1944:

Basic to the eagerness in trying to drive valuations underground is the rationalism of our Western culture. Even the man in the street, when he wants to appear enlightened, will attempt to avoid expressing primary and personal evaluations. He wants to be "objective" and to avoid arbitrariness. He will, therefore, give "reasons" for his desires, and he tries to make the reasons appear purely "factual" so that they will be acceptable to any "rational" man. He wants, in other words, to suppress his valuations as valuations and to present them as systems of rational beliefs concerning reality. (1046)

In the same vein, Hofstadter argues that the American culture is best at intelligent behavior, but not intellectual behavior. (1962,24-38) Our culture is a well-oiled machine working to achieve limited and clearly stated goals. He suggests that the changing social context of politics is perpetuating our condition, that the increasing complexity of modern life does give practical grounds for resenting the intellect—a wrong idea for the right reasons. The social pay-offs are going to the professionals, men who live off ideas but not for them. It is not the intellectuals (who may possess
some degree of consciousness about the tentativeness of values), but the professionals as experts and "mental technicians" who represent the power and privilege of ideas to the public. It is they who force the public to confront the failure of the liberal dream, the ideal of the common man intelligently ruling his own life. They confirm his helplessness. (see also Roelofs, 1976, 201-210; for an example, see Lowi, 1976, 1-20, 281-296)

Extending Hofstadter, the argument here is that this consensus is dangerous unless the communication system exposes those values to the challenges of a changing reality. Such a continuing exposure would keep them alive and meaningful. Otherwise, we are committed to the livelihood of an illusion. "Socrates, when he said that the unexamined life is not worth living, struck the essence of it," Hofstadter said. (1962, 27) My point is that Socrates was moralizing. The unexamined life is a form of decadence. It is the victory of a body that must decay over a mind with its unique potential for growth.

Before we approach the question of how we may escape that hegemony of values, let us consider, secondly, the domination of one common perception of reality--the hegemony of beliefs. If professionals have considerable influence over official definitions of appropriate values, they also commonly dominate the definition of reality. When the facts are unquestioned and unchanging and determinant, then we are operating under a myth. We are deceiving ourselves with an illusion, which is the official version as advertised. Our social institutions become legitimate,
unquestionably so. Social science and policy options in this instance become embarrassing and disloyal. We do not look to our historical experiences to correct our theories, we just work harder and expect that things are bound to turn out for the better. If and when we do perceive things going to hell in a handbasket we are not led by force of cultural habit and the institutional environment to check the original theory. We are led to confusion and hostility and the private behavior of contemplating our navels. (see Marin, 1975) We think we need only clean the lint from our navels to achieve a higher state of awareness and transcend ourselves right out of this recalcitrant reality. Meanwhile, back at the ranch, it is politics as usual, politics in private for those who have the habit of, and the access to, knowledge and who have the temerity to use it. It becomes politically useful to label the dominant values as irrefutable facts and disputatious facts as unfounded opinions, i.e., "biased."

The ability of the public to continually clarify this kind of semantic camouflage, this expedient deception, depends upon the ability of the public to sustain a public debate within the fact and value precepts of truth.

**Facts and values: the components of knowledge**

I have argued that much of our conventional wisdom is antithetical to the conception of what is knowledge. Yet, our own dominant patterns of thought do carry some of the mechanisms of truth, as well as clues to our social motivations. And because those
mechanisms are psychological, we can foster them and perhaps even improve the ability of public communication institutions to liberate our political minds.

Our culture is characterized by its concern for what works (or for who can make it work). "We just want the facts, Ma'am," Sgt. Friday used to say in "Dragnet." Americans know full well that facts are just facts and not values. And it is common knowledge that facts are to be accepted as facts if I can point them out to you and you see the same thing. (Our use of the word "fact" is a misnomer. It is a synonym for a more useful concept: causal theory. But of course, a common use of "causal theory" instead of fact would tend to lead us into a more self-conscious political debate, which is the point of this essay.)

Similarly, we all know that values are not facts, that values are the way things ought to be. And it is an assumption of the American culture that some values are more important and widely held than others. So if we just sit down and talk about it, we will be able to negotiate a compromise between our differences. There is some higher ground that we will discover and occupy in common. (Myrdal, 1944, 1029)

Indeed, it is the democratic conception of politics that while we may disagree on some values, we do in fact agree on some others. Because we do have faith in the ideal of individual integrity, we have accepted the process values inherent in the democratic theory by which we may publicly debate and decide more immediate, more temporal and more tangible value differences.
Americans know these differences between facts and values; but they know them as rigid distinctions. What has been lost by the conventional wisdom is the interplay of the two concepts as we humans use them. Usually, it is just a one-way connection that is made. It is a most American trait to expect that ideas, above all, be made to work. Always, the first test of an idea is its practical utility. Put another way, values are judged as relevant or irrelevant by the facts.

Democratic theorists (and pragmatic philosophers) have a provocative perspective on this connection. They argue that facts do more than judge among competing values; they argue that facts in the form of experience create values, or at least make them apparent. Participation is intrinsically rewarding because it is the road to wisdom. It is the empirical school for consciousness-raising. It induces men "to identify their interests and test their values" through the consequences decreed by public experiences. (Kariel, 1970, 3; also Kaufman, 1969, 185) "Every actual case of knowing is one in which we are involved with what we know." (Kaplan, 1961, 28) Less abstractly, it is a means for exposing those self-justificatory and contradictory values by which we all rationalize our political prescriptions for others.

The myth of objectivity

If it is typical of our common orthodoxy for us to see that facts have a bearing upon values, it is a matter of common heresy to argue that our values create the facts. For example, if there is
any one complaint that people, and particularly politicians, have about the media, it is that the media is "biased." That word—bias—as it is used in the U.S.A. today means that the public is not getting just the facts. What the public does think it is getting are opinions. Somebody's values have skewed and slanted the truth as white light beamed through a liberal red filter, or through a true-blue lens. Dominating public opinion is the ideal of the blinded lady of justice using her scales and sword to measure and cut away the biases that warp the truth. Explicitly, there is the assumption that facts should be and can be untrammeled by values. We are in the powerful grip of a stupifying idea.

Yet, consider what one wordsmith called the "blooming buzzing confusion of reality" and another labeled "the chaos of possible data" competing for our attention. Which things do we see? And which do we ignore? The irrefutable logic of the matter is that our values frame, screen and tint our perceptions. Simply put, it is our values, the way we want things to be, which decide for us what the facts are. It is our values that choose some facts as important, relevant and interesting. And it is our values which ignore other facts as irrelevant. (The epistemology dates back, at least, to Hume. Sabine, 1950, 598-601; see also Myrdal, 1944; Thompson, 1970)

If we could destroy the objectivity myth, we would commit a liberating apostasy. The inevitable coloring of the facts with our values seems to me a stunning scientific confirmation of the Western view of man as an inner-directed and purposeful being. Nevertheless, it is a perverse confirmation:
Perception is polluted by implied hypotheses. To look, to listen, to taste, means to ask questions; and mostly they are leading questions.

(Koestler, 1964, 515)

This dependence of the facts upon the values of the observer raises a major dilemma: How do we know when we are operating on the basis of reality or upon some private world of delusion? For most of us, within whom rationality ordinarily prevails, our daily experience with manifold reality shapes our perceptions into some semblance of accuracy, close enough to get by in the tangible world. The difficulties arise when we consider the intangibles of social relations: power, authority, etc.

Because man is a symbol-creating animal, interpreting reality with symbols in his head and expressing those mental processes with another set of externalized verbal and written symbols, his dilemma of value-loaded facts becomes crucial. How do we know that we are not simply seeing what we want to see, fulfilling our own prophecies?

In other words, the things we call biases are those beliefs about reality that are not usually open to reality tests. They are the hidden baggage of prejudices that we all carry. Every culture inculcates them in us as we grow up within it. They are preconceived judgements about the way the world works and they are maintained because they justify a behavior pattern. They "rationalize" our behavior. So, we can never be sure about the ability of folk wisdom to explain and predict social behavior precisely because it may be designed more to reduce anxiety about reality than to provide
analyses for solutions. (Edelman,1975) The individual's common sense about the world out there may also be true, false, a best-guess, or even self-contradictory. (Deutsch,1959) By definition, prejudices are irrational. They define a reality which is at heart oblivious to evidence.

Professional truth-seekers have worked out a process by which information about reality is validated. They call it the scientific process. This conduct of inquiry holds that while truth is a product of the individual mind, the validation of knowledge comes from a "determination to live in the world as it is and not as we might fantasy it." (Kaplan,1964,380) Facts become accepted as such when we publicly demonstrate the evidence, when we show others that the facts are indeed grounded in empiricism. Scientists call this the canon of intersubjectivity which is the mark of objectivity. It is public testimony that the observation of reality is uncontaminated by one's personal vested interests. We must ask: "Do you see what I see?"

It follows that one indispensable ethic for the citizen is the professional scientist's commitment to open discourse. Only through public discussions can we solve several questions of ascending importance, moving from private knowledge toward public wisdom.

The most immediate result of public discussions is the correction of erroneous beliefs about reality. More importantly, the hidden influence of values on beliefs about reality becomes apparent under cross-examination. And to the extent that public discussion
helps us become conscious of our dominating values, we can judge them for their worth. But worthwhile values and true facts are by themselves worthless currency. It is knowledge that is the useful currency, for it is the currency of power. And the source of knowledge is the integration of facts and values.

So, most importantly, open discourse answers questions pertaining to relevance: What are the facts made relevant by our values? Given the facts, to what degree are we achieving our values? Can our ideas be made to work? These questions reflect the integration of facts and values, the way that intelligent behavior moves from values to facts and back again as it creates and uses knowledge.

Biases are not eradicated by attempts to exclude values from the work of knowledge creation. Biases are only eradicated by controlling them. It is values that lead to knowledge; therefore, the values must be made explicit in order to control their influence upon the quest for knowledge. Similarly, there is the awareness that only conscious values can be realized through intelligent and public decision-making processes by means of policy analysis.

"Science" is usually thought of as knowledge creation. Indeed, science is a Latin word for the possession of knowledge. It begins with questions which reflect an underlying value premise and works toward systematically discovering the answers in the facts and the causal relations between those facts. In other words, values guide the formulation of those hypotheses and theories that science then attempts to validate as explanations of behavior. Adding the time dimension, science is in the business of discovering historical
and present trends in the facts. Consequently, science should be able to forecast the future by rational prognosis.

Policy analysis is the logic of causal theory building reversed; it is knowledge in use. Policy analysis sees the predicted future as one alternative among many. It uses the product of science, the knowledge about why things work, to make them work better. It makes value judgements explicit by evaluating the desirability of present trends, by holding those facts up to a moral yardstick. Policy analysis identifies those causal agents and conditions which might be altered by public policy to create more desirable trends. (see Myrdal, 1944)

Scientists have not in general been as concerned with "policy analysis" as they have with "causal theory building." That is, they have not concerned themselves much with the social use of the knowledge they have created. Yet, each is inherent in the other and there is a growing awareness of this truth among scientists.

I have been speaking of knowledge as though it were something to be created and manipulated by the intellectuals, by "professional" scientists. It is true that "the intellectuals' historical role has been and must be to protect the humane values of civilization." (Smith, et al, 1976, 23) What this means, pragmatically, is that "the society of scientists must be a democracy." (Bronowski, 1956, 80) Yet, the objective fact that the scientific community is not even unto itself a democratic community in practice does not undermine the imperatives of its ethics for science and for society at large. Furthermore, the scientific community exists within
society as a sectarian elitist sub-community. (for example: Lowi's devastating critique of the Atomic Energy Commission and its public policy consequences, 1976) I am not proposing that scientists be considered an authoritative elite; I am proposing that the ethics of science as a process for inquiry be adopted as a crucial condition for a humane society. The philosophy of science commands both independence and tolerance in its search for human truths. (see Bronowski, 1956, 88) Western culture professes a commitment to the intelligent and public pursuit of humane values as measured by every individual. It follows that the ethically pragmatic conditions and processes of science are, identically, those of a democratic society. We cannot contemplate the rational solution to any social problem without accepting the imperatives of an open communication system. Any conception of political wisdom, of the ability of a political system to effectively solve any social problem of any magnitude, is inherently a discussion of an egalitarian communication system. And the same imperative applies to those problems that seem to concern themselves only with the natural sciences or with technology, because those also carry inherent human values. In other words, to the extent there is an egalitarian communication system, there will be at least one necessary condition filled for the rational solution to the social problems. "The integrity of communication is the well spring of a community's life." (Tussman, 1960) The pursuit of truth can only be made in public. (The implications of this logic create a democratic pressure in every political system, so long as there are attempts to deal with social, scientific or technical problems on a
rational basis. Even non-Western nations allow their scientists to live in a democratic cocoon, though they may limit the privilege to natural scientists—for obvious reasons.)

Summary

I have come to the conclusion that the democratic society must contain a commitment to the ethics of scientific inquiry, namely: a public egalitarian communication system using the interrelated fact and value concepts. This is not a new argument. But it has not been entirely accepted by the scientific community, for reasons beyond the scope of this essay. Neither is the lesson well understood by other segments of our society. And it may never be, for the reasons I have labeled common sense and generic politics.

The conventional wisdom is a self-preservation mechanism. It operates within the individual and within a culture to conserve those thoughts which shape its identity. Yet the conventional wisdom is not fail-safe. It carries an unexamined premise: that what is, should be. It seduces us into believing that we live in the best of all possible worlds. Our complacency is the devil's tranquilizer.

Sure we get by. Our commons sense can predict the very near future just by projecting the trends. But, we should clearly understand that the conventional wisdom gives us not one predictable shred of evaluative power. Like the human brain which can feel no pain from a lobotomy, all the social pain and political impotence that exists tends to appear legitimate and even deserved. We cannot
judge our society and its institutions unless we hold an ideal beyond our grasp.

More importantly, we cannot even consider altering the present trends unless we know our values explicitly and consciously, unless we know where it is we wish to go. Consequently, and most importantly, for social scientists and for any citizen who presumes to publicly act in a rational manner, we cannot alter our conditions and their trends unless we have facts and causal connections that have been discovered because they are relevant to our ideals. Descriptions and explanations are more than useless without a conscious set of values to guide their discovery. They may even be dangerous because they carry hidden valuations which may be contrary to the ones we profess.

Democracy begins and ends with values, not with just the facts. The willingness to continually force our slippery and self-justificatory minds to face reality and and those values implicated in every social issue leads inevitably back around to the requirements dictated by the categorical imperatives of democracy: the obligations of participation within the rhetoric of science.

It is only through public discourse and the application of these concepts to our present circumstances that we will find the better public policies for our survival and enjoyment of life. We have become too intricately interdependent upon one another to trust the future to those who know what is best for us. They cannot even be sure they know what is best for themselves without our participation.
So, the freedom to dissent is the primal definition of democratic politics because it is only in the forum of public debate that we can establish the influence of our values upon the facts as well as the meaning of those facts for our values. Therefore, the politics of democracy is a commitment to public intelligence.

Yet, public discourse is not only the means to pragmatic public policies, it is coexistentially the commitment to the democratic ethics of individualism. It is useful to consider politics as the authoritative distribution of values in a society. That definition should remind us that political behavior is satisfying somebody's values and doing it within a manner that is accorded legitimacy by most of the people in that society. Democratic politics is more than that, more than politics as usual.

The citizen/democrat sees the sense of value only from the perspective of the individual. It can be discovered only through his and others' participation in the debate. Consequently, social value, as the aggregation and distillation of the myriad individual values, and as the mechanism for a better community, can be defined only through public access to the podium. The democratic morality is a morality of process and a morality of conditions. The citizen evaluates the political process from the standpoint of that morality. He asks: Is there public consent to the authority? Did the public have a choice? Was the choice a product of an informed public debate?

The question for this chapter was: What is the democratic definition of political communication in the public interest? The
answer to that question is derived from the purpose of a democratic polity: to protect and enhance the ability and freedom and responsibility of the individual—both politically and economically.

The first criterion is that of participation. To what degree do the citizens participate in the polity? Is access to the decision-making process and to the debating forum egalitarian? And for those that do assume political roles, democracy judges their behavior according to its impact upon the processes and conditions of democracy. Does the political process widen participation and debate? Does it seek to mitigate the hegemony of the dominant public and private institutions upon the individual? If democracy does nothing else, it should remind us that institutions are subtle, pervasive and powerful forces in society. They cannot be seen nor can they be confronted easily. We are all practicing judges of our fellows, but institutions are amorphous. Consequently, the scrutiny of institutions must not only be constant, it must be done skeptically and publicly. The yardstick of these obligations is choice, but not choice per se. The choices created and proffered must always be measured by these ethics of democratic processes and conditions—responsible egalitarian participation and the fear of hegemony.

The second major criterion is rationality. The value of egalitarianism in the political process and particularly in the political communication system is the means to pragmatic thought and action. Only through an open forum may we consciously consider the interplay between our values and our factual circumstances. It is only through the exercize of dissent, not just the opportunity for
dissent, that we can hope to consider social causes and consequences, political evaluations and policy alternatives. Only public discussion supports the growth of the liberated mind. Our self education is not only a moral imperative for our freedoms, it is a pragmatic imperative.

The remainder of the essay is intended as a critique of the major institutions of journalism from the standpoint of these democratic criteria. For the purposes of evaluating the behavior of journalism, the pragmatic categorical imperatives of participation and responsibility are appropriate. For evaluating the substance of journalism, the categorical imperative of rationality is relevant—which, itself, includes the pragmatic prescriptions for participation and responsibility in the forms of access (the exercise of dissent), a concern for hegemony, the obligation to make political preferences (consequences) explicit, and the obligation to search for and employ empirically validated causal theories.
CHAPTER TWO

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT:

POLITICAL INFORMATION AS A COMMERCIAL COMMODITY

Introduction

Having exhumed the democratic definition of political communication in the public interest, we are now in a position to assay our progress toward fulfilling that promise, because America is an experiment in democracy. We are one of the historical experiences of Western Liberalism in practice; we are living the consequences of an attempt to make the philosophy work. So we can now look at those values within the American scene, sketching some of our realities made relevant by those democratic values.

We need to know how well journalism fulfills the democratic definition of political communication in the public interest. What explains its relative successes and failures? What are the relevant causes, and the conditions for those causes? What are the measurable trends? And finally, what options can be imagined? And their costs and benefits?

This essay does not presume to answer those questions with exhaustive unconditional certainty. What the essay does presume to do is to focus on some of the major answers to those questions, answers that seem fairly obvious from the democratic perspective. Because I am
looking for broad characterizations about the media which do appear rather easily supported, the answers to those questions speak very loud in their claim for our political, and scientific, attention.

To begin to answer those kinds of questions about journalism, or any institution for that matter, there is a certain utility in tracing the lineage of journalism through American political history, through each generation in the evolution of that institution. Television, for example, was fathered by the economic organization of radio in the 1930's, and by the establishment of government regulation over the broadcasting industry. But, broadcasting journalism traces its functioning definition of the public interest and the means to achieve those purposes back to the mid-nineteenth century. What is fascinating in my brief survey of the history of American journalism is the evidence that suggests early American political communication, in part, fulfilled the democratic definition of communication in the public interest, and that it has steadily departed from, and worked against, its own heritage.

Pre-Constiution: the voice of the people

In the years leading up to and including the American revolution, the purpose of the press was to print public political/economic intelligence. Eighty percent of the labor force was then self-employed, so business news and advertising was an important part of public information. (data from Greenberg,1977,134) Political freedom was also a matter of intense concern. The influence of the Radical Whig ideology from England led many to believe the Boston
town meeting assertion that a "deep-laid and desperate plan of imperial despotism has been laid, and partly executed, for the extinction of all civil liberty." (Burner, 1974, 100) These presumed natural tendencies of the monarch toward tyranny were to be restrained by publishing dissents against his political actions.

The colonials were, in fact, working out a definition of a democratic society. First, the perspective of the press was consciously political. The newspapers, in addition to the almanacs, broadsides and pamphlets, "were crowded with columns of arguments and counter-arguments appearing as letters, official documents, extracts of speeches, and sermons." (Bailyn, 1967, 1) The pamphlets, themselves, contained a real national debate in the form of "chain-reacting personal polemics." (Ibid, 4) Secondly, access was egalitarian, which was a radical change from early colonial days when the "Publick Printer" was contracted and controlled by the royal government. (Boorstin, 1958, 329-340) Third, the authors were political actors. "John Adams noted that he and other Boston (revolutionaries) spent an evening 'preparing the next day's newspaper--a curious employment. Cooking up paragraphs, articles, occurrences, etc.--working the political engine.'" (Burner, 1974, 100) Fourth, the rhetoric was that of sweet reason. In his analysis of the pamphlets, Bernard Bailyn emphasized this quality.

The American writers were profoundly reasonable people... They sought to convince their opponents, not, like the English pamphleteers of the eighteenth century, to annihilate them. In this rationality, this everyday, businesslike sanity... they were products of their situation and of the demands it made in politics. For the primary goal of the American Revolution... was not the overthrow... of the existing social order but the preservation of political liberty.
threatened by the apparent corruption of the constitution, and the establishment in principle of the existing conditions of liberty. The communication of understanding, therefore, lay at the heart of the Revolutionary movement, and its great expressions . . . are consequently expository and explanatory: didactic, systematic, and direct, rather than imaginative and metaphoric. . . . The pamphlets aim to persuade.

(1967,18-19)

The social and technological conditions of that time supported a democratic communication system. The technology and economics were small scale. Consequently, low capital and labor costs kept the price reasonable. In 1762, there were about forty presses; in 1775, there were about 38 newspapers. (Boorstin, 1958, 303; Bailyn, 1967, 1) Since none of the newspapers were dailies, they were capable of publishing other material, such as 400 pamphlets between 1750 and 1776. (Bailyn, 1967, 8) The social context of the colonies supported an extended communication system. The relative scale of society was small and decentralized, with thirteen capitals. News was scarce and useful, so the newspapers and pamphlets were passed from hand to hand. As Rev. Samuel Miller wrote in 1785:

A spectacle never before displayed among men. . . . not of the learned and the wealthy only, but of the great body of the people; even a large portion of that class of the community which is destined to daily labor, having free and constant access to public prints, receiving regular information of every occurrence, attending to the course of political affairs, discussing public measures. . . . Never, it may be safely asserted, was the number of political journals so great in proportion to the population of a country as at present in ours. . . . so cheap, so universally diffused, and so easy of access. (Boorstin, 1958, 327; also Burner, 1974, 130)

Naturally, the context of the pre-revolutionary press was that of a politicized society. Revolution raises the political question. By asking what shall constitute the definition of ourselves, it casts an irresistible spell that attracts people to the political
machine. The American revolutionaries raised and answered the question of identity because they perceived the British government as persistently oppressive. The press was seen initially as a necessary hedge on that royal power and then, later, as a means to gaining the necessary support for the independence movement.

Those experiences of the 17th and 18th centuries provided a working definition of political communication in the public interest. Yet because so much of the definition was self-evident, given the technology and social structure at that time, only that part of the definition that was problematic was given voice: "Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press." Two of those crucial assumptions went unexamined: the obligations of participation and the structure and function of public discourse.

The First Amendment was worded for obvious reasons as a prohibition on the Federal government rather than as a prescription for affirmative action on the part of all citizens. In so doing, Jefferson may have been making the assumption that the obligations of citizenship --the obligations of freedom--were understood. Indeed, they probably were at that time. The leadership of the colonies was a patrician elite, broadly cultivated intellectual gentlemen with an inbred sense of social ethics. (Hofstadter, 1962, 145ff) And that sense of obligation was accepted by the citizenry as well. The New England town meetings functioned because the obligation was widely felt and cherished. At the same time, democracy as egalitarian participation was a radical philosophy then, so there was good reason not to endorse it. (see Main, 1961; and my comments in chapter one, above)
The second assumption was equally as self-evident as the first: newspapers were a matter of private business. Since the experience of liberalism was a flight from the hegemony of both the church and the state, neither of those institutions could be trusted to give voice to the people. Furthermore, the prevailing opinion of that time was that the government should be given as little responsibility as possible. Thomas Paine wrote in Common Sense that "Government, even in its best state, is but a necessary evil." (Girvetz, 1974, 848) And Jefferson had said that government is best that governs least.

Thus, it was obviously in the public interest that the locus of political information be outside the government. That was clear. What was assumed was that free enterprise could be responsible for both the definition and the execution of the public interest. And so the First Amendment established constitutional protection of one particular form of private enterprise—"the press." The first successful daily newspaper, established in 1784, carried this public/private connection in its title: the Pennsylvania Packet and General Advertiser.

Very early the American newspaper had to justify itself as a commodity rather than a purveyor of orthodoxy. ... For most of the history of American journalism, the independence and high quality of the American press have been tied ... to the commercial spirit and the need to offer his money's worth to a purchaser in the open market. (Boorstin, 1958, 328)

The logical consequences of these two fateful assumptions concerning the obligations of participation and the character of public discourse would not be felt till the mid-19th century. They would become clear in the late 20th century with Commercial Vision.
Post-Constitution: the voice of the parties

In the half-century following the Republic's constitution, it would seem that American journalism represented a different character. "For an interlude of about a half-century after 1790 . . . the American press (was) dominated by a bitterly partisan spirit." (ibid) American politicians were working out one of the profound implications of democratic theory: that the act of choosing in the voting booth meant competition among political candidates. The natural consequence was to differentiate among candidates on the basis of their respective political perspectives. Thus, the organized political party was born, publicly organizing both political interests and political conflict. As Burke had foreseen in 1769, "Party divisions, whether on the whole operating for good or evil, are things inseparable from free government. (Hofstadter, 1969,30) The newspapers mirrored this evolving political structure: they entered the era of the party press, assuming the role as mouthpieces for the parties.

President Washington spoke to the people through the first party organ, the Gazette of the United States, which represented Hamilton's Federalists. Thomas Jefferson published his own paper, the National Gazette, which severely criticized Washington and the Federalists. Jefferson continued publication while he variously occupied several positions as Washington's Secretary of State, Adams' Vice President, and as President himself.

The National Gazette was created and edited in Philadelphia by Philip Freneau, who was persuaded to do so by a government sinecure as Jefferson's translating clerk. When the capitol was moved to
Washington, D.C., Jefferson persuaded Samuel Harrison Smith to establish the National Intelligencer by means of a government printing contract. Jefferson also offered to counter any public prosecutions against a third Jeffersonian newspaper, The Aurora. Madison and Monroe used the National Intelligencer as their official voice. Jackson established Duff Green and his United States Telegraph with government printing contracts, then later brought in Francis P. Blair to print the Washington Globe. (Rivers, 1965, 1-8; 1970, 7-33; Gill, 1974, 2-3)

It was no accident that the First Amendment to the Constitution guarantees freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Thomas Jefferson, in his "incessant anxiety for the individual as against the states," had written the First Amendment as a codicil to the original document, arguing that the press must be protected in order to restrain the strong central government created by the Constitution. (Cooke, 1976, 150) He convinced the men of the first Congress that the sanctity of the rights of individuals could not be presumed. Those liberties must be specified and written into the Constitution; and they were, patterned after the Virginia Declaration of Rights which had been written by George Mason (who himself had found the Constitution too conservative a document to affix his signature).

Half a century before the American Revolution, the Radical Whigs in England had seen tyranny in the Royal incursions upon the freedom of their press. In the colonies, the first newspaper, Publick Occurences, had been suppressed after its first issue in 1690.
Fourteen years passed before a regular newspaper, the *Boston News Letter*, could be established. So it seemed obvious to the Americans that "the stamp tax upon colonial newspapers indicated a general assault upon liberty of the press." (Burner, 1974, 100)

The colonials were working out their moral truths. They had come to realize that the power of the people depended, in part, upon their freedom to communicate among themselves. So the function of their press was to institutionalize the voice of the people. The press enabled public dissent, which was the only restraint they had upon the monarch, the only institution that impinged upon their liberties.

The clear implication of that liberal philosophy was that the choice of values which would be implemented by the government was a matter for public debate. And further, government actions were always to be viewed with a healthy skepticism. The position of the incumbent could be nothing but uncomfortable.

But the conception of legitimate public political criticism within a democratic state, and especially criticism coming from the political faction out of office, was a new idea and a difficult one to accept by those who held an elected office. (Within a broader historical context, it seems reasonably accurate to argue that Madison's constitution created an insurmountable barrier to politically conscious, program-oriented parties, by undermining any incipient majority. And, that the natural evolution would be toward two parties--one "in" and one "out," which could not represent very divergent and conscious political orientations. Of course, there were
additional specific historical steps taken, such as the creation of the civil service and the government printing office, which contributed to the demise of parties as means for realizing organized political policy objectives. What we have are politics and political parties which contend for office, but do so within the domain of democratic capitalism. The political question of purpose is presumed to be settled. Thus, there are in fact a rather small domain of "legitimate dissent" and a large domain of "unauthorized dissent." The logic follows from Hofstadter, Hartz, and Roelofs, discussed in chapter one, above.) Within the context of early American politics, if government was duly constituted by the vote of the people, then dissent began to look like treason. And because each newspaper was identified with a particular partisan viewpoint as well as with an organized political party seeking office and policies, the press became a target for political sanctions.

After Englishman John Wilkes had criticized the King in print and had been thrown in prison for seditious libel, the American Revolutionaries hailed him as "that illustrious martyr to liberty." (Gill,1974,1) But when Jefferson's editors criticized the Federalist President John Adams, they too were thrown in jail under the new federal Alien and Sedition Laws. The backlash from Adams' actions helped Jefferson get elected as President. Defenders of the democratic faith are fond of quoting his turn of a phrase: "Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter." (ibid,3) But under fire from Federalist newspapers, he
recanted his earlier support. "Even the least informed of the people have learned that nothing in a newspaper is to be believed... and I therefore have long thought that a few prosecutions of the most prominent offenders would have a wholesome effect." (ibid) Even Lincoln succumbed to that ubiquitous ghost of political paranoia by jailing several editors without due process. They had blamed him for not bringing a swift conclusion to the Civil War, a criticism which Lincoln judged treasonous. Though Lincoln had responded to the time-honored political tradition of confusing his political enemies with the enemies of the people, his tenure marked the end of an era in American political journalism.

If the colonials had learned a moral truth, Jefferson and Jackson and Lincoln had rediscovered the pragmatic truth: power can be derived from the control of political information. Conversely, if the press is anything more than a mimeo machine for presidential news releases, it is inevitably a limitation on presidential power. Jefferson and Jackson and Lincoln were adept at managing the news, not because the press was partisan, as later presidents in differing contexts have proven, but because the press was in important part of the power equation. In fact, the party press ended with Lincoln's inauguration--for reasons I shall cover in the next section. What is important to discover here are the relative merits of the political communication system during this era.

Along the road to the 1860 election of Abraham Lincoln, this second generation of American journalism saw one important change and one important continuity. What was changing was that political
information was becoming a specialized business within an expanding and increasingly specialized society. In 1790, there were 3.9 million Americans in the original 13 states. By 1850, 23 millions had spread across 31 states. Newspapers and newspapermen began to assume the responsibility for political communication. The professional middleman became institutionalized. Consequently, the egalitarian characteristics of the colonial era began to fade away.

Yet, in one important respect there was continuity. The content of pre-revolutionary press was concerned about the question of independence. Post-revolutionary press was a mechanism for party competition. In both cases the perspective was consciously political. Facts were related to explicit values in the public debates about the worth and likelihood of desired states of affairs. There is some justification for arguing that their discourse was grounded in the rules of rationality.

News: machines, money and media for the masses

Lincoln's election in 1860 marked perhaps the only major change in American journalism, away from advocacy journalism of pre- and post-revolutionary America. His election dated a half-century of development which would redefine the accepted definition of political communication in the public interest to that of "objective," "balanced" "news." The next half-century, 1910 to 1960, would see only economic and technological refinements of that new definition. Because it seems useful to evaluate the consequences of each of these developments in terms of their cumulative influence on the definition and practice of journalism, I shall first sketch a brief history from 1860 to 1960,
looking at newspapers, wire-services, radio and television in turn. The political consequences of each of these developments will be postponed till chapter three.

The party press had depended upon the Washington, D.C., newspapers as the source of the party press. The president had traditionally spoken through his party's newspaper in the capitol. But Washington was a small city and those partisan newspapers had depended upon government printing contracts. In 1860, Congress established the Government Printing Office, as an office of the Congress, and thus removed the President's economic and political news-control.

At the same time, America's cities were being formed. There were twelve cities larger than Washington and the newspapers of the burgeoning urban centers were growing independent of the party line with their increasing circulation and influence in the public's conversations.

A machine had been invented, which provided the larger circulation and political independence. It was the steam-driven, rotary press. The machine created the technological conditions necessary for the economics of mass-produced journalism: low unit price, high volume, higher aggregate gross sales, and higher aggregate profits, as well as the potential for higher profit margins per capital dollar.

The commercial motive has an unequivocal measure of fulfillment and ecstasy: dependable and increasing profits. The motive is taken as an economic imperative. (cf. Schumacher, 1973) But the newspapers, as partisan journals, appealed only to specific
political groups. They could not reach everybody's pocketbook. Republicans were unlikely to buy a Democratic newspaper, and vice versa.

Underlying this economic and technological history was a more subtle cultural history. America, in working out the party system, had lost the distinction between "democratic" and "partisan." Politics was defined by the parties, which is to say, the public interest was defined by the outcome of the partisan struggles, not by any reference to defined and accepted higher principles. The American conception of political discussion was not separated from the conception of partisan—the advocacy of one group interest (or of one party or of one candidate). That is to say, Americans conceived of themselves as either partisan or non-partisan. In truth, it was and is a false dichotomy, as I have argued earlier. It confuses the role that values play in political debate (and in policy analysis and in knowledge-seeking). It assumes that values are present only if we say they are, only if we espouse a particular policy proposal. Said another way, Americans lost the useful distinction between the public interest and lesser interests, the former being defined as the outcome of competition among the latter. However, as I argued in the first chapter, democratic politics is as concerned with one as with the other, which is to say that one can be "political" without necessarily being "partisan." "Political" to a democrat implies self-consciousness, responsibility for the community, skepticism about both ends and means. "Partisan" implies the un-selfconscious assertion of political
demands in one group's interests as though they are shared by all. Simply, it is the predominance of the market conception of politics, which excludes the potential for democratic politics.

The American cultural context allowed the newspapers to adopt the stance of "objective" reporting, i.e., both non-partisan and non-political. What this meant was that for the newspapers, the marketplace conception of politics prevailed—uncritically—and did so, understandably, because the newspaper was itself essentially a business, competing in the marketplace for increased profits. They made the explicit assumption that facts could speak for themselves and in so doing they drove the valuations underground, in Myrdal's phrasing. The newspapers then appeared as non-partisan messengers, reporting political information in such a manner as not to offend Americans of any political persuasion. They not only suppressed the political values inherent in the substance of what political rhetoric they were reporting, the same convention of non-partisan journalism also operated to suppress the political implications of the newspaper's behavior.

The convention of "objective" reporting about "straight" news became more explicit as the nineteenth century passed on. (Sigal, 1973, 66; Rivers, 1970, 17) And in addition to that development, and the establishment of the GPO and the invention of the high-speed press, there were several other developments which contributed to this redefinition of American journalism and its economic success.

Parenthetically, there is an interesting historical coincidence that is probably no accident. This era of journalistic
adaptation to the "imperatives" of corporate commercialism--with its consensual political consequences--can be dated between the inventions of the telegraph (1837), the rotary press (1846), and Lincoln's election in 1860. Similarly, Louis Hartz dates the creation of the American political consensus--democratic capitalism--in the 1840's, and its flowering in "the post-Civil War days of Horatio Alger and Andrew Carnegie." (1955,94,passim) While this suggests that American journalism has had a significant role in the development of the American political culture, further exploration of the apparent connection will have to wait for another essay.

Samuel F. B. Morse invented the magnetic telegraph in 1837. Within eleven years the Associated Press was formed as a news syndication service between newspapers. The economic "problem" and "solution" facing the wire services was the same as that facing the newspapers with their high volume presses. "To produce copy that would satisfy their diverse clients, wire service men avoided writing anything controversial on their own authority . . . editorializing, in journalistic parlance." (Sigal,1973,67) (Emphasis mine)

It was the wire services who, during the Civil War, provided the newspapers with the technique that is the paragon of objective journalistic virtue: the inverted pyramid. "It is a mold that separates facts in diminishing order of importance," says John Hohenberg, though the criteria for establishing that ranking is not given in his training manual. (1973,131) "The most important (fact) is on top, so that it can take the headline and attract maximum attention.
The lesser ones are at the end where they can be chopped off at will to fit the demands of space, time, and editorial operation." (ibid)

The inverted pyramid thus has two obvious utilities for the commercial newspaper. It provides a mechanism for gaining the attention of readers with widely varying education and interests. It also allows the editor to chop off those "less important" facts on the end in order to make the story fit the fixed space allocated to news (the news hole).

However, just because the inverted pyramid provides a style that attracts readers does not connote that it also informs them. In fact, the inverted pyramid is a device which assumes the criteria for selection of which facts are important. That is to say that this device is suitable for reinforcing the conventional wisdom and for suppressing conscious and skeptical consideration of the relative merits of alternative political viewpoints. Furthermore, the inverted pyramid is thus not the equivalent of a parsimonious theory which speaks directly to causal theory in an attempt to explain some social events. The logical consequence of this analysis, then, is that the inverted pyramid as a form of political discourse does not invite political participation by the reader, at least not on the side of progressive or radical change. It may tend to invite support for conserving the status quo, however. I will have more to say about the consequences of this journalistic device in the next chapter under the section on brevity.

The inverted pyramid is particularly well suited for "hard news" items, i.e., stories which deal with eyewitness events and
attributable, uncontroverted, statements. Thus, with the high-speed presses and the economic motivation to avoid partisan reactions, the publishing barons redefined the purpose and content of newspapers. Popular news became established.

With the advent of the "penny press" came news as we know it today: crime, accidents, fires. . . . James Gordon Bennett boosted circulation and profits in his New York Herald by exploiting crime news, scandals among the socially prominent, and the blood and thunder of the Mexican War. He boasted that he cared "nothing for the election of any candidate from President down to constable." Horace Greeley's New York Tribune took a more sober view of strife and politics, but capitalized on such popular causes as utopianism and vegetarianism to win new readers. (Gill, 1974, 3)

Popular news did not prevent the press from addressing political issues, with political consequences. For example, Illinois Governor Altgeld, elected on the Democratic ticket, pardoned three men he felt were unjustly convicted of the Haymarket deaths, and later protested Grover Cleveland's gratuitous imposition of Federal troops during the Pullman strike, which served more to incite what little violence there was than to resolve the tense labor issue. Clarence Darrow in his eulogy to Altgeld said, "A truer, greater, gentler, kindlier soul has never lived and died; and the fierce bitterness and hatred that sought to destroy this great, grand soul had but one cause--the fact that he really loved his fellow man." (Darrow, 1932, 456) But Altgeld was "widely denounced as an abettor of anarchy," and Harper's Weekly called him "the most dangerous enemy to American institutions." (Morison, 1972, 82; Stone, 1941, 28) Consequently, Altgeld "was hounded from public life." (Morison, 1972, 113) If politics was viewed as a marketplace, it was not open to embarassing (and therefore illegitimate) questions.
about labor wages and working conditions, questions which arose from outside the consensual domain of American liberalism. However, popular news did tend to broaden the domain of public information, trivializing the definition of public information, and--consciously or not--diverting the public's attention from political issues. Consider Joseph Pulitzer, who has been called the grandfather of all sensationalists: "He splattered his pages with stories of blood and crime, for which he invented the X-marks-the-spot diagram." (Mason, 1971,14)

Pulitzer once displayed a gallery of pretty girls in his New York World. The picture, actually a woodcut from a photograph, was captioned: "Ladies Who Grace and Adorn the Social Circle." A trade paper, The Journalist, criticized the innovative Pulitzer:

The World made an error of no small magnitude when it published its series of Brooklyn Belles. . . . It is a piece of glaring bad taste for a newspaper to invade the sanctity of the home circle and hold up to public gaze and mayhap ridicule the portraits of young ladies who in no wise court publicity, and in whom the public has no interest except as they are pretty women. . . .

It is just this sort of journalism that fosters the idea in the minds of the general public that a newspaperman has no conscience, and that when he enters the house it is a good time to lock of the spoons. (ibid)

Pulitzer continued the practice, noting that:

In the midst of all the newspaper interviewing, editorial twaddling and legal flapdoodling touching the artistic presentation . . . we have received no complaints from the charming and worthy ladies whose portraits graced our pages. (ibid)

News thus became something to be merchandised; it became a product manufactured as a marketable commodity, for the consumption of the public at a modest price. The political consequences were there, but
they were not discussed because they were not "newsworthy." With the resulting boost in circulation, newspapers could then in turn offer increasing audiences to their advertisers.

Newspapers had always carried paid advertising. In the mid-nineteenth century, "The front page of most dailies was given over to advertisements." (Boorstin, 1973, 138) And, at some point, advertising became not only the major source of income, it dominated the income ledger. (In 1970, for example, *The Washington Post* reported 64 million revenue from advertising and 13 million revenue from circulation. The cost of newsprint that year was 20 million. Sigal, 1973, 9) In 1867, the national total for advertising was 50 million dollars. That was the first year that George Rowell issued his circulation figures for all the newspapers in the U.S., upon which national advertisers could base their ad campaigns and judge the cost per thousand readers. It seems reasonable to expect this increased reliance upon advertising revenue to lend considerable incentive to the adoption of "objective" standards for reporting controversial political and economic issues.

Partisan news, per se, might offend an advertiser. Certainly, a Democrat would be unwilling to buy space in a Republican newspaper. But if the audience is there, if the newspaper were an effective way of reaching that audience, then the economic pressure will persist in the direction of influencing him to place the ad. Moral ideals oft give way to such practical considerations. But what seems to be the more fundamental underlying truth is that the partisan slant of the newspaper would eventually point to the economic implications of some issue. And a Democratic newspaper, for instance, attempting to build public
support for Teddy Roosevelt's trust-busting policies, is a newspaper that is a political and economic threat to those clients which buy large amounts of advertising space—the large national-brand corporations. So, "objective" news had the effect of removing explicit economic social cost-accounting analysis from the pages of the newspaper, leaving the citizen with paid advertising as his main source of information about the marketplace.

Editorials and investigators: remnants and glimmerings

There were two developments which ran counter to the developing character of "objective" news: editorials and investigative journalism.

When I first went to work on a newspaper, which was after World War I, the generally accepted theory was that it was the duty of the news columns to report the "facts" uncolored by "opinion" and it was the privilege of the editorial page to express opinions about what was reported in the news columns.

(Walter Lippman, in Hohenberg, 1973, 29)

Publishers and editors, even though they were adopting the conventions of objective reporting for their news columns, reserved the traditional political prerogatives of opinion and persuasion for themselves on the editorial page. The reservation was not without political effect. Lincoln, for example, took pains to keep favorable editorials in both Horace Greeley's New York Tribune and James Gordon Bennett's New York Herald, even goings so far as to promise Greeley the position of Postmaster. (Rivers, 1970, 15) Lincoln's successor, Andrew Johnson, failed in a railroad tour to gain public support against his impeachment at least in part because of concerted hostile editorials. (Gill, 1974, 4)
The second development which continued the traditions of advocacy journalism was that of investigative journalism. This was a continuation of the earlier tradition in the sense that it was reporting based upon a conscious consideration of values--of what is right and what is wrong in the social scene. Yet it was something new and different from adversary journalism, and from editorializing, in that it was analysis and evaluation of conditions and causes and consequences. In short, it was intended as conscious political writing but not necessarily the partisan advocacy of marketplace politics. In that sense, the investigative journalists were a more modern version of the public writers before 1787. Brendan Gill listed the first cadre:

Teddy Roosevelt dubbed them the "muckrakers" and their adversary was social injustice. . . . Ida Tarbell's series on John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil Company led to federal monopoly legislation. Upton Sinclair's exposures of the Chicago Stockyards brought federal inspection standards for meat, and Ray Stannard Baker's investigations led to improved working conditions in mines and factories. Lincoln Steffans focused on municipal corruption in Minneapolis, Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, then concentrated his findings into the greatest work of the era: Shame of the Cities. (1974,4)

How do we explain the development of investigative journalism which contradicted the tenets of "objective" news reporting? There are two causes that seem reasonable. First, it appeared at the turn of the century, at a time when it was becoming apparent that the original liberal prescription for a free market and laissez-faire government needed revising. The social and economic and political conditions of late 19th century industrial capitalism are not in the public memory anymore. There is one example which vividly illustrates them.
During the depression of 1894, the Pullman Palace Car Company was accepting contracts for sales below cost in order to keep the plant in operation. In order to maintain his profit margin (2.8 million in declared dividends that year and 26 million in undeclared dividends), George Pullman changed the wage scale from daily wages to piece rates, and then cut the piece rate to speed up production. Skilled craftsmen's earnings went from $3.20 per day to $1.20 per day. Pullman then deducted the same high rent for the company housing that the workmen were required to live in if they wanted their jobs.

After their meager savings were gone able-bodied but starved men had to stop work every hour and sit down to gain strength to carry on. Conscientious workmen fainted at their machines and were carried out by their fellows. In homes the mothers searched their empty larders frantic to keep their children from developing rickets...a pattern for starvation so ingenious that only the mechanical brain of George Pullman could have invented it.

(Stone, 1941, 21-22)

The Pullman workers struck, and asked Eugene V. Debs and his new American Railway Union to support them. The union agreed, and paralyzed rail traffic through Chicago, then the railway freight capitol of the country with twenty-two main lines converging on the city. The railroad companies' organization, essentially a cartel, convinced President Grover Cleveland to send in federal troops, against the advice of the Mayor of Chicago and the Governor of Illinois and, therefore, in violation of Article IV of the Constitution. The federal government also deputized 600 hoodlums who were paid and armed by the railroad companies. Consequently, the strike was broken, the union disbanded, Debs was convicted of contempt in a trial without a jury and served six months. (ibid; see also Darrow, 1932)
"Be quiet" was the liberal dictum of Bentham to government. And so it was. The organization of the marketplace into industrial capitalism was accomplished while the government stood by, consenting and cooperating. Yet the existence of the investigative journalist was indicative of the renewal of the liberal promise and, particularly, a redefinition of the function of journalism. The muckrakers saw themselves as truthstalkers and crusaders for social justice. The best of them took the latent issues which existed in the community and helped raise them to the agenda for public debate. "The mere fact that muckraking was what the people wanted to hear is in many ways the most important revelation of the whole campaign. There is no other way of explaining the quick approval which the muckrakers won." (Lippman, in McWilliams, 1970, 8)

The second reason for the emergence of the muckrakers is less obvious but more revealing. Joseph Pulitzer took over the New York World and added his slogan: "The business of The World is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable." (Gill, 1974, 4) And it was The New York Times that investigated Boss Tweed and his 100 million dollar rip-off. Nevertheless, investigative journalism goes against the economic grain of a newspaper. It is expensive, it may not result in exciting exposé' headlines, it is not produced according to any deadline, and it is politically and economically unsettling. Nevertheless, the same technology which created the conditions by which the newspapers could provide a product for the masses—ostensibly undifferentiated by partisan color, political power, or ideological orientation—also created the conditions by which differentiated groups
could communicate among themselves. In other words, if the newspapers no longer produced usable political intelligence, there had to be some way for the intelligentsia and the political elite to inform themselves. It does not seem an accident of history that Harper's Weekly was established in 1850, nor that it carried the subtitle: "Journal of Civilization."

Initially, the magazines seemed to have been designed for the elites—Harper's, Atlantic, Scribner's and Century. But the turn of the century came with an educated middle class that was not tied to preserving the old order, and new magazines sprang up which served their political communication needs: North American Review, Political Nursery and McClure's Magazine. The Nation, New Republic and the American Mercury came later. (McWilliams, 1970, 8) The economics, in the case of magazines, serves to support and maintain a content that is not "objective" "news." The crucial difference is the dimension of time.

Magazines—by definition—are not daily publications. Useful political information is seldom relevant on a daily basis; trends, disposition, substantive knowledge about the changing character of complex systems are not generated on a daily basis. In fact, it is more probable that understanding and control is best achieved with some separation from high volume information environments. In a word, the habit of reflection is crucial to understanding.

So the ideal content of a magazine is timely, which should be differentiated from the immediacy of hard news. Consequently, the magazine can appeal to an audience that is more than a day's circulation distance away, i.e., a national audience. (This point
suggests why there is not a truly national newspaper. The Wall Street Journal may be considered to be a national newspaper, but it is in a situation where daily market information is useful.) Further, once a magazine is established as a periodical, the economic logic then serves to continue to justify the magazine as a means of communicating useful political knowledge to differentiated national groups, i.e., political constituencies.

An interesting example: In the late 1800's, a reporter named Jacob Riis had been writing about the outrageous conditions in the New York slums for two newspapers: the Tribune and later the Evening Sun. The tenements were jammed with more than a million immigrants and 25,000 people died in one year. "As a crusading reporter, Riis wrote expose articles in his paper and complained personally to city health officials--with scant results." (Williams, 1971,46ff) Riis then published a series of pictures in Scribner's magazine and later in book form that did spark an effective reform program.

The argument is made that it was the photographs which brought a shocking authentic reality to Riis' crusade. What is overlooked in this situation is that the photographs were printed in a magazine, which could devote space to a series and which could support the time-consuming task of view-camera and flash-powder photography. Moreover, the magazines and the book had the politicized audience. One reader, Theodore Roosevelt, left a note for Riis: "I have read your book and I have come to help." (ibid) And he did, after becoming Police Commissioner.
Magazines and investigative journalists were a continuation of the intellectual traditions established in the decades prior to the Revolution—public political exposition. But the magazines were essentially edited and written by professional journalists. Access by the citizenry was not a matter of high principle. The newspaper editorials were the remnants of the partisan press, but even the journalists themselves had no access to that podium; editorials were the exclusive privilege of the owners and executives.

Political columnists, too, can be seen as an important continuation of the tradition of public political exposition. Initially, they were a very much diluted version of the investigative journalists, but by the 1930's, following Lippman's example, they became much more assertive. (Rivers, 1965, 66) Still, they remain within the unconscious, limiting domain of pluralism. Henry Fairlie, for example, argues that "the real duty of the political journalist (read: columnist) is to supply moral information from a coherent intellectual position." (1976b) Then, Fairlie describes the leading columnists in their coverage of the 1976 Presidential campaign as "nerveless victims of a system that is inescapably corrupting." "They are in bondage to an economic view of human aspiration," "trapped in a diminishing concept of human aspiration." Fairlie, to his everlasting credit, is nearly unique among journalists in his public position that politics is a noble means for achieving some definition of the public interest, and that its major concern is the realm of economics. But Fairlie only exhorts his fellow journalists to make their moral commitments explicit (which in itself would be a qualitative improvement). Fairlie does not
Consider (at least in this particular article) the institutional causes and obstacles to improvements which is the focus of this essay. Simply, he does not consider that for most journalists, their "liberty is held on sufferance," to borrow a phrase from his countryman John Stuart Mill. There may, indeed, be a powerful, conscious or unconscious, self-censorship operating among journalists employed by what he calls "the economic realm"--corporate journalism. However, I am getting ahead of myself.

In the main, the half-century after Lincoln's election saw the commercialization of news: "objective" reporting, the wire services and their inverted pyramids of hard news, popular news, and increasing advertising revenues. Each of these had a profound impact and changed the character of the American political communication system. They redefined the liberal definition of American journalism and the public's discourse about politics (the consequences of which I will discuss in chapter three). The subsequent development of radio and television, for the most part, has isolated and intensified the influence of those commercial conventions upon America's public discourses.

Radio: the mass connection

The radio era showed us, first, what the logical consequences were of a commercial journalism placed within a market where consumers numbered in the millions and tens of millions. Media became a word synonymous with a mass connection. And, of course, we can look back to see radio as the proving ground for television.
Radio established broadcasting, like the press, as a function of private enterprise. McKinley's assassination put Teddy Roosevelt in the White House in 1901, the same year that Marconi flashed the letter "S" by wireless telegraph across the Atlantic. His invention sparked a public debate regarding the purpose and control of this new medium.

Samuel Morse, back in 1845, had called for government ownership of his invention, the magnetic telegraph. In 1910, the Wireless Ship Act established the first government control over the medium. Two years later, a Senate study called for government ownership. But the Radio Act of 1912 which controlled radio in general gave the government no authority to deny applications. "The result quickly became a chaos of overlapping station signals." (Skornia, 1965, 64) Wilson's Democratic administration argued for government ownership and operation, but the following Republican administration of Harding opposed any government ownership, operation or regulation. Yet the new broadcasting industry itself requested regulation in the form of traffic control. Congress passed the Dill-White Radio Act of 1927, but failed to create an administrative agency that could implement the Act's provisions. FDR, in 1934, requested Congress establish the FCC. It was established by the Communications Act of 1934 and assigned frequencies to applicants. But the Act left broadcasting as a private enterprise without restrictions or definitions of who said what on the airwaves. (Skornia, 1965, 69-73; Tuchman, 1974, 9) (The FCC did eventually define standards for both time and content, to be discussed in the next section on television.)
So radio brought government regulation to American journalism. The federal legislation established broadcasting as an industry with government assigned and protected monopolies over specific frequencies. It is worth noting that in this case, which seems typical, government regulation and protection of a private industry was at the request of that industry. There was some public debate over the question of public or private ownership of the broadcasting industry. But the industry itself was seeking government regulation in order to institute some kind of traffic control. The motive was exactly that of avoiding the unpredictable consequences of unrestricted competition along the broadcast spectrum. It is another way of saying that government protection of the businesses which were then well-established was a means of protecting the dominant market position that networks and broadcasters possessed at that time.

Broadcasting was initially done by the radio manufacturers as a means of increasing sales of the receiving sets. And RCA, through its subsidiary NBC, continues that arrangement. But an immensely larger profit potential comes from the sale of advertisements. The first radio ad was ten minutes long; it was broadcast by WEAF, a Long Island station owned by AT&T. (Tuchman, 1974, 7) What quickly developed was a second categorical change from the print media. The broadcasting industry became established as a business that derived all of its income from advertising. Following the practice established by the printed media in the 1800's, the ad rates were based upon audience levels (instead of, perhaps, pro-rata shares of production costs).
It was this audience/advertiser link which led to the establishment of the networks. Local stations were motivated to affiliate with the wholesalers (the networks) in order to get the higher drawing programs which, in turn, generated the higher audience levels and higher advertising revenues. Individual stations were thus leasing programming and advertising time to the networks.

NBC, owned and operated by RCA, was the first to create a network by selling shows to affiliated stations. But it was William Paley, in 1928, who devised "an ingenious contract offering stations that affiliated with CBS free programming in return for options on sponsored network time." (Halberstam, 1976a, 47; see also Metz, 1975, 44; Skornia, 1965, 52, 41) CBS gross earnings went from 1.4 million in 1928 to 4.7 million in 1929. The number of stations affiliated with Paley's network went from 16 to 114 in its first decade.

But the most radical difference between print and broadcasting was that each radio program, and even each quarter-hour, could be and was measured for its audience levels. In newspapers, subscribers and advertisers alike pay for the whole package: news, comics and advertising. But in the broadcasting industry, the cost and thus the profitability of the news could be isolated and measured with the ratings. Thus radio did not change the underlying and dominant and simplistic assumption of news: that news was defined by what people were willing to pay attention to. (Note the identity with the simplistic pleasure/pain calculus of the utilitarian liberals. See chapter one, above.) What the radio industry did was to structure the
economics of broadcasting in such a way that advertisers not only leased advertising time, they "sponsored" a particular program, and thus their advertising rates were tied to the audience for that program. This economic connection led inevitably to the dominance of radio as an entertainment medium, because the economics worked against other types of programming. Since each program could be measured for its audience level, and since the stations and the networks were business enterprises (rather than cooperatives, or political, educational, or religious entities, for instance), the types of programs that gained the largest audiences were entertainment programs.

The premise was, of course, that the American public could be treated as though it were an undifferentiated and un-organized mass audience. The prophecy, given the consensual identity of the media, was to be self-fulfilling. One could also argue that the public--by its own actions--willingly participated. However, given the economic decision-making process of the media, which persistently leads away from programming for audiences measured by any criterion other than sheer numbers, the responsibility remains with the structured purpose of the media.

During the 1934 legislative debate, two legislative limitations on programming were considered. The Wagner-Hatfield Amendment would have reserved 25 percent of the broadcast band for non-commercial use. Senator Dill proposed to require each station to broadcast a specified percentage of educational and religious programming. Mr. Paley, in testimony before the FCC, argued that
either limitation was unnecessary since CBS was then broadcasting commercial programs for only 30 percent of the time. Consequently, the law was written without either limitation, and the economic imperatives led to maximizing the audience for each time segment, and thus commercial programming came to dominate the broadcast schedules. (Skornia, 1965:61, 71, passim)

There is one important political consequence of commercial radio which should be mentioned here (and which will be related to other consequences in chapter three). Because radio very quickly became an entertainment medium as well as being a medium that required very little effort from its listeners, it is probable that the proportion of Americans who received professional news was increased. Robinson calls this new group the inadvertant audience. (He makes the point about television. I suspect it is also true for the earlier medium of radio. 1975:105ff) Because radio news came sandwiched between the entertainment programs, habit and inertia would carry the entertainment audience into and across the news programs. Listening to the news is a nearly passive endeavor itself. Furthermore, the structure and content of "news" was designed to appeal to the lowest common educational level of the potential audience. Robinson's point is not only that the size of the audience does increase, but more importantly, the character of the new audience is different. It is now an aggregate of individuals which is indifferent and passive about political intelligence. This mass and medium connection will be discussed again in the next section about television.
Radio advanced the ability of the public to identify and measure for themselves some of the personality characteristics of the source of the news because they could hear the person speaking. The immediate result was that the professional journalist became, more than before in print, an identifiable and meaningful individual in the public's awareness. (More of which later.)

This point is related to discussions about the "unique" qualities of each medium. Radio added sound and television, later, added the visuals. And so the argument could be made, and is, that each medium has its own language, its own content "imperatives." Again, it is a point that is current with respect to television, but it applied to radio back then. It seems to me that radio was an extension of the print medium, however.

What I would like to emphasize is that each medium offers its own advantages, but that we must be skeptical of arguments about uniqueness. With regard to "personality," for instance, the printed word can communicate characteristics of the author that are distinguishable from other authors. The point is obvious, and true even for the newspapers. Ambrose Bierce, who wrote for Hearst in the 1890's, and Mencken in the American Mercury, had singularly identifiable styles of writing. It was the convention of "objectivity" and the inverted pyramid which made it seem as though there was not an individual who was doing the writing. Mencken said:

I have had overtures from time to time from virtually all the syndicates in the country, including the Hearst syndicates, but I have always managed to resist them. If I had two papers to write for I'd be thinking of the limitations of both, and if there were three I'd
have all three to think of and so on ad infinitum. Writing for the 
Sun alone, I know precisely how far I can go and what the customers 
will understand and like. Writing for syndicates always dilutes a 
man's stuff.

(1976,79)

What radio did, to the never-ending frustration of the anonymous print 
reporter, was to make it impossible for the radio reporter to be without an individuality. They tried, and a standard style and even a 
standard accent was imposed. Southern and western and Boston accents 
were trained away. But the audience was hearing the human voice 
directly from the speaker. Then the radio entrepreneurs discovered 
the audience liked it that way and John Cameron Swayze and his "Camel 
News Caravan" came through that early wasteland. My point, in this 
regard, is that personality can be suppressed or exploited; either way, 
it is not necessarily an intrinsic imperative of any one medium.

Radio, in one special case, brought back the partisan 
journalism of the early 19th century. Because personality could be 
conveyed so easily through the air waves and because the broadcasters 
had obvious reason to be solicitous toward the chief executive who 
appointed the FCC commissioners, Franklin Delano Roosevelt took 
advantage of the situation to command access directly to the American 
public. He instituted his fireside chats within days of taking office, 
speaking to the American citizenry through the radios in their own 
homes. It was a consequence unintended by Congress, who nearly a 
century before had established the GPO as a means of reducing the 
executive's control over the partisan press. And because the networks 
had centralized their medium, the situation was ready-made for 
continuing access by President Roosevelt and his successors.
In summary, radio brought the full commercialization of a medium, and it brought government control over access to the marketplace of broadcasting frequencies. It isolated the economics of news from the other types of programs. And it may have reached out to the most indifferent of the citizenry. The radio networks, mimicking the structure of the wire services, furthered the centralization of the nation's public debates. Radio also added an emphasis upon the identifiable personality of the news broadcaster, though always an apolitical personality. But radio did not change, in any fundamental way, what the newspapers had defined as American journalism: professionals who "objectively" reported what was "newsworthy" in their judgement, structured in such a manner as to appeal to the largest possible undifferentiated audience.

Television: the pictures move and we keep still

Television added the moving picture to our radio sets. And, it is commonly believed, this new technology revolutionized the way we communicate in our society. (Sevareid, 1976) The unique qualities of this video marvel need only be turned on. The convenience, the joys of its many preferred diversions, have made its attractiveness overwhelming. It is the first truly "mass" medium in that it dominates and defines a significant part of our culture. The argument, made by those in television, is that its power is derived from the acceptance and concurrence of its audience.
If we accept that as the argument, then maybe there are new rules to be considered, a new set of standards needed to measure the new technology. New theories and a new society. The machines change man.

Such self-justification is, to borrow someone's phrase, like driving with your eyes focused full on the rear-view mirror. As an argument, self-justification seems essentially amoral. It voids the question of purpose. It blinds us to alternatives and it nullifies the ideal. It never asks: Where are we going? Looking back is not entirely a useless exercise, however. It reminds us of the lengthy road we have come and it provides some justification for a semi-rational courage to proceed. But looking back is most useful for answering the question: Why? Why have we been able to do as much as we have? Why are we not where we want to be? The really important question, always, is: What do we want to do?

What has become apparent to me, looking back at television, are not its unique qualities, but its similarities with its forebears--radio and print. The differences between television and its predecessors are essentially differences only in degree, but they have come in such profusion that they appear as differences in kind. Television is a projection and distillation of the values and assumptions that underlay a century and a half of American journalism. So there are two categories of concerns with regard to this brief history of television: those that are distinctive and those that are common.
Television is mainly different from radio because of the pictures that move. Consequently, the effect on the audience may also be distinctive from that of radio. (Of course, television usually says fewer words, and the rhetoric is invariably hackneyed.)

The first spot news picture appeared in The Illustrated London News in 1842. Prophetically, it was an artist's version of an assassination attempt on Queen Victoria.

The Illustrated London News picture was not hailed by everyone as a triumph. Soon William Wordsworth, Poet Laureate of England, took to grumbling about pictures in the press. Wordsworth thought illustrations of that sort were in exceedingly poor taste and that people who were fed a diet of pictures might forget the important things, reading and writing.

Now prose and verse sunk into disrepute
Must lackey a dumb Art that best can suit
The taste of this one-intellectual Land.
A backward movement surely have we here,
From manhood, --- back to childhood ... .
Avaunt this vile abuse of pictured page!
Must eyes be all in all, the tongue and ear
Nothing? Heaven keep us from a lower stage!

(Mason, 1971, 13)

I believe that Wordsworth was right. Pictures are on a lower stage. They communicate meanings with less intellectual effort on our part. Pictures could even be called a common language. They do not mean the same thing across cultures, but they communicate some meaning; they mean something to everyone. Visual symbols and human movements communicate what are labeled non-verbal, symbolic, esthetic and empathetic behaviors. Bronowski even argues for the classification of a sixth sense—kinesthesis, "the sense of muscular effort that accompanies a voluntary motion of the body." (1965, 88) But television is more than a series of still pictures, it is moving pictures. And
like the earliest man, mesmerized by the campfire, we modern men are enthralled by the flickering video tube because motion, by and of itself, compels our attention toward it. Motion is the very definition of life, distinguishing organisms from their environment. Cinema, and by extension, television, came from the study of motion. Cinema is the language of motion. "The 'setting in motion' of images allows them a verisimilitude they would not have. . . . Figures in motion produce with astonishing efficacy that compelling affect, that sense of 'causality'." (Dorfl es, 1965,46,41; see also Kepes, 1965; Collier, 1967; Worth and Adair, 1972; Carpenter, 1972; Kariel, 1970)

The point of that somewhat metaphysical discourse is that television does have an intrinsic attractiveness and believability; and thus television news is perceived as an effective mirror of the world. Consequently, television producers can exploit the use of visuals and personalities (as in radio) to enhance the authenticity of the information and to maintain the attention of the audience.

Our policy has been to put Huntley and Brinkley at the center of every important event from political conventions to space shots so that they would be identified in the public's mind with news events.

Reuven Frank, President NBC News (Epstein, 1973, 99)

On the other hand, there is a second category of concerns with regard to television which deserve more of our attention than the unique qualities. Television took the revised assumptions of American journalism as they had been structured in the economic "imperatives" of radio, and intensified them to the degree that television even looks different from radio. But everything that characterized radio can be said of television: the commercialization of news, the isolation of
news economics, connecting with the most unpolticized of the citizenry, and centralization of control by the networks and their news personalities who operate by the canons of "objectivity." And, of course, television operates on the basis of licenses granted by the FCC. And it was the FCC which administratively and legally canonized the revised standard version of American journalism with regard to both quantity and content of news.

In 1941, the FCC forbade the radio stations to editorialize: "A truly free radio cannot be used to advocate the causes of the licensee. . . . In brief, the broadcaster cannot be an advocate." (Fang, 1972, 323) In 1949, just at the beginning of the television era, the FCC reversed its position with the "Fairness Doctrine:"

Broadcast licensees have an affirmative duty generally to encourage and implement the broadcast of all sides of controversial issues over their facilities. . . . a conscious and positive role in bringing about a balanced presentation of the opposing viewpoints. . . .

. . . the basic policy of the Congress that radio be maintained as a medium of free speech for the general public as a whole rather than as an outlet for the purely personal or private interests of the licensee. This requires that licensees devote a reasonable percentage of their broadcasting time to the discussion of public issues of interest in the community served by their stations and that such programs be designed so that the public has a reasonable opportunity to hear different opposing positions on the public issues of interest and importance in the community.

(ibid, 324)

This Fairness Doctrine was transformed by the FCC into a practical interpretation that only confirmed the revised standard conventions of American journalism: the "objectivity" assumption, the commercial "imperatives" and the "news" orientation toward content. The FCC took the "affirmative responsibility" for the "problems of
insuring fairness" and administratively created two rules which set legal minimums or prohibitions on tv news: the magic numbers and the rule of balance.

First, "a reasonable percentage" has been calculated by the FCC into two "magic numbers": "in 1969, it was 5 percent news and 1 percent public affairs programs." (Epstein, 1973, 59-62) Thus, the stations in their three year license renewal applications must promise a minimum of 6 percent of their broadcasting time to public information. Otherwise, the FCC will administratively delay issuing the license.

Furthermore, the FCC apparently gives more weight to new applicants who challenge existing licenses if they propose a higher proportion of news. Few stations provide such grounds for challenges. (see Epstein, 1973, 61, n)

Nevertheless, the FCC interpretation of how much time is "a reasonable percentage" is such as to confirm television as primarily a commercial medium in which entertainment programs must dominate, rather than as a medium of public political communication. We've come a long way, baby, since William Paley pointed out, in 1934, that only 30 percent of the CBS programming was commercial time. (Skornia, 1965, 61) The FCC administrative rule, by setting a minimum, has had the effect of establishing the standard. Typically, the FCC rule prohibits behavior, but it does not operate to foster or reward maximum behavior in the desired direction. Because the accounting methods of the television industry are accepted as legitimate--since they are private, profit-making corporations--the news programs are expected to show a profit by themselves. And news is profitable, up to a point.
Extended analysis of one subject--documentaries--are less profitable. However, in almost every situation, entertainment programs can be created which are more profitable than either news or documentaries. Consequently, the broadcasting stations and the networks satisfy the magic numbers at the least possible dollar cost to themselves. Some illustrations:

1. The expansion of the network evening news from 15 minutes to one-half hour in 1963 made the news a profitable program, because of the increased advertising revenue to the networks. In 1969, CBS Evening News returned a 13 million profit on 36 million revenue. (Epstein,1973,87) (It is a curious and perhaps revealing fact that some newsment hold the belief that news is an unprofitable production effort for television corporations, and therefore news is done for "the public trust and need," as Eric Sevareid calls it. He said that CBS News "does not make money for the company; it is a loss leader, year after year." (1976) Similarly, the news director of a local station told me, "I can guarantee you that the news department of this station does not run at a profit," A week earlier, the man who had owned and managed that same station for several years told me he was clearing about $100,000 per year on the news program. He went on to assure me that all affiliated stations at least break even on news operations because it is the lead-in to prime time.)

2. CBS moved their evening news from 7:30 to 7:15 and then to 7:00 PM in October of 1955 because the potential audience was increasing in size and the news programs were losing that audience to competing entertainment programming from ABC. (Epstein,1973,85)
3. Similarly, the CBS Morning News was moved from 10:00 AM to the lesser audience at 7:30 AM because I Love Lucy in the later spot would increase revenues by $1,000,000. (Friendly, in Epstein, 1973,89)

4. ABC, in the Fall of 1975, began to increase their proportion of the weekly cumulative audience ratings. Consequently, the ABC documentary schedule was cut from 12 to 7 for the year. The entertainment schedule not only brings a higher audience for each show, it helps maintain audiences for the program that follows. (Swertlow,1975)

5. Nevertheless, news is cheaper than entertainment programs, for the networks. According to Reuven Frank, President of NBC News: "The prime-time documentary was invented so that we could stay on the air at the least possible cost when we had only a very small share of the audience." (Epstein,1973,127) The idea originated during the early 1960's when NBC was unable to compete with Gunsmoke on CBS Saturday night programming.

6. Under conditions where the networks and the stations do receive federal pressure for public affairs programming, the same economic mini/max logic is used. In the 1950's, the FCC explicitly requested the networks to schedule a weekly public affairs program in prime time, at a different hour. Faced with the same request in the 1960's, but without the condition, NBC and CBS scheduled their prime-time documentaries at the same hour. (ibid,62,130) Again, in 1975, FCC rules led to 60 Minutes appearing at 7:00 PM on Sundays. (Brown,1975)
7. Similarly, radio and TV stations broadcast public affairs programming during periods when they would have little chance to gain a large audience from any kind of program—Sunday afternoons for television and late Sunday evenings for radio.

8. In order to report high magic numbers, some TV stations (here in Honolulu) re-broadcast the entire network news programs at 12:30 AM when there is virtually no audience at all, and even though they have already used excerpts from the network news on their own local news programs.

Consequently, network and local news and documentaries move away from audiences because they always attract a lesser audience than entertainment programs unless the FCC imposes a minimum compliance level. This also explains why many local stations do not produce documentaries (if Honolulu is any example). Because audience levels for documentaries are generally lower than for entertainment programs at any given time within the schedule, television stations can argue that documentaries are "unprofitable" as well as argue that there is no sponsor (advertiser) demand for such public affairs programming. And because the accounting is done for each program, a documentary may indeed be "unprofitable" even though the station could be making any size fortune from its news and/or its prime-time entertainment schedule.

The TV industry argues that the FCC has created an artificially high demand for news:

Through such direct and indirect pressures, the FCC creates a demand for news that licensees might not otherwise find it in their interest to provide. "A substantial amount of volume of (news and public affairs programs) have such government origins," Pierson points
out in the Federal Communications Bar Journal. "With respect to such programs, the licensee's judgment was exercised, but not to determine what his audience wanted or needed but to determine what the Commission wanted or demanded."

( Epstein, 1973, 61 )

Clearly, the broadcasters would have broadcast even fewer hours of public affairs programming without the constraint of the FCC magic numbers. And they would have done so because they could have found an entertainment program that either drew a higher audience and/or carried a higher profit margin. That is the market's definition of the public interest.

The second part of the Fairness Doctrine, and that which is usually denoted by the name, is the rule of balance:

At its most general level, the Fairness Doctrine simply requires broadcasters to present, in the course of their news and public affairs programing, "contrasting viewpoints on controversial issues of public importance." . . . the Fairness Doctrine does not require that opposing argument be given an equal number of minutes of time, or even that it be presented on the same program, or within any specific time period. It is left up to the licensee to decide what constitutes a "controversial issue of public importance," a "fair" reply, and a "reasonable time" in which to reply.... the FCC . . . only considers the question . . . if a fairness complaint is lodged against (the licensee).

( ibid, 64-65 )

There are two points about the Fairness Doctrine that are immediately relevant to this analysis. First, the Fairness Doctrine, in spirit, is an expensive proposition for the stations and the networks. Public affairs programming generates less than the maximum income possible because fewer people watch it. From the standpoint of the networks, it also loses income because local stations typically refuse to "clear" controversial network programs which can be expected
to generate some kind of opposition in their local communities. And even in the situation where a brouhaha has developed over a program, such as the complaint against NBC about their documentary, "Pensions: The Broken Promise," the networks typically do not air the controversy itself. (see Friendly, 1974) The easy conclusion is that the tv industry wants the freedom from the FCC rules without giving us any grounds to expect their free behavior to foment increased discussion of controversial public issues. As Irving Fang noted: "Most broadcasters oppose what amounts to a lessening of their control and any movement toward 'common carrier' status for broadcasting stations." (1972,325)

The second relevant point to be made about the Fairness Doctrine is that the industry and the FCC have adopted a simple working standard for news producers:

The correspondent, after reporting the news happening, juxtaposes a contrasting viewpoint and concludes ... by suggesting that the truth lies somewhere in between. If the correspondent is unable immediately to ferret out or induce a "contrasting viewpoint," producers will usually shelve the film story until an opposing view can be found to provide a balance. ... This model of "pro and con" reporting is perfectly consistent with the usual notion of objectivity--if objectivity is defined, as it is by most of the correspondents interviewed, as "telling both sides of a story."

(Epstein, 1973, 67)

The network (and industry-wide) argument is that "the fairness doctrine marks intrusion into the very process of television journalism and violates the First Amendment." (Friendly, 1974) My point, at this juncture, is that the criticism is moot. The networks themselves have made the point within the context of public discussions about the Fairness Doctrine: "CBS believes that basic journalistic techniques
require that relevant contrasting viewpoints be brought to bear on the subject under study so that it may be put in perspective for the audience." (Leon Brooks, V.P. and general counsel of CBS, in Epstein, 1973,66)

The point is that, basically, whether the FCC enforces it or not, "balance" is a standard of American journalism which has been implicit since the mid-nineteenth century and, thus, would be the operating guideline for television journalism as it is for print journalism. "Balance" is the logical progression of "objective" journalism. When an "objective" journalist reports a particular statement that is either controversial or untrue, his only means of avoiding criticism and responsibility is to "balance" his report. And, indeed, this is the rule that was adopted by newspaper reporters, as an explicit standard, after Senator Joe McCarthy so successfully used the "objective" journalists as a means of terrorizing the liberals and threatening democracy with his brand of populism. (The chronology is according to Sigal, 1973,67; though his source is dated in 1949.)

More fundamentally, "balance" is basic to American journalism because it is our cultural definition of liberal politics (though it is bastardized democratic doctrine, as I argued in chapter one). Bipartisan balance, which is to say partisan politics, is the popular touchstone of political fairness. That is the way it is in Congress which created the FCC. And that may explain why the Congress did not or could not define the public interest when it wrote the Communications Act in 1934. In the absence of an explicitly defined standard, the FCC is more likely to be responsive to the Chief Executive (who
appoints the commissioners), the legislature (who approves their appointments and provides their operating funds), and to the broadcasting industry (whose survival, stability and health they are responsible for). The Fairness Doctrine is little more than, or little less than, a codified version of the consensual market conception of liberal politics.

There has developed a differing conception of broadcasting in the public interest from FCC and Supreme Court decisions. Surprisingly, it corresponds in large measure to the democratic conception. It has three criteria: "the development of an informed public opinion through the public dissemination of news and ideas concerning the vital public issues of the day"; that these ideas and information should come from "diverse and antagonistic sources"; and that "broadcasting must function preeminantly as a local institution." (Epstein, 1973, 48) However, these criteria are, on the face of it, irrelevant to a description of broadcast news, particularly by commercial television and entertainment radio stations (about which more later in chapter three). Secondly, the criteria only come into play when a complaint is registered through the FCC or judicial system. There is a fourth criteria, unwritten but unquestioned, that television should be a commercial enterprise, which predominates in actual practice over the first three to such a degree as to make them trivial (more later).
Summary

In spite of such legal symbolism, television (and radio) news operations are extensions and refinements of the assumptions of American journalism as it developed since 1960, with the notable exception of federal regulation. But that regulation, while imposing a rule like the Fairness Doctrine and establishing the presence of a threat potential, has not fundamentally altered the revised standard version of liberalism under which the industry and its subsidiary television journalists operate. American journalism, broadcast and print, does not operate to maximize those three criteria of the FCC and the Court. It does not judge itself by that standard of the public interest, nor by the tougher standards of democratic theory. What this brief history reveals is that journalism does judge itself by three operating conventions of (1) "news," (2) "objectivity," and (3) "balance." These three conventions had their origins in the commercialization of journalism and they are applied in such a manner so as to facilitate the commercial "imperatives" of American journalism. The purpose of the next chapter will be to examine these three operating conventions for their political implications.
CHAPTER THREE

POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF COMMERCIAL JOURNALISM

"And that's the way it is."
Walter Cronkite, every night.

"The truth is we don't know what the hell the truth is."
Tom Dorsey, TV Newsman
(Fang, 1972, 32)

"One-eyed monsters have no depth perspective."
attributed to David, after slaying Goliath.

Introduction

In the first chapter I outlined some of the necessary conditions for political communication in a democratic society: the obligation to participate and the access obligations of the participants, the rhetoric of knowledge and of policy analysis, and the concern with the hegemony of social institutions.

In the second chapter, I traced some of the history of American journalism as it worked out the philosophy in practice. In those several decades immediately prior to and after the revolution, the actual American experience of public political communication was remarkably close to the democratic ideal. However, because of the unwritten but self-evident assumption that journalism was to be a function of private enterprise, the economic assumptions of business—the imperatives of profit—began to work on and change the character of American journalism. In the half century after Lincoln's election,
those economic imperatives had led to the development of three tenets central to American journalism as we know it today: news, objectivity, and balance. (Balance and objectivity are really characteristics of news, but they are separated in the journalists's conception of his work and they are useful concepts in examining the consequences of contemporary journalism.) The purpose of this chapter will be to look at the political implications of these three modern rules and to evaluate their effects from the perspective of democratic theory.

**News**

In 1974, I was searching for materials to be used on a program for Hawaii Public Television. In particular, I wanted to use parts of a CBS documentary by Mike Wallace. However, Robert Burstein, Associate Business Director of the News Division for CBS, refused me permission to re-broadcast parts of that program because (1) the network did not want their correspondents to appear on another network, and (2) I might misrepresent their correspondent by quoting him out of context!

In that same year, CBS acquired a copyright for its "Evening News." Vanderbilt University had been recording the news broadcasts of all three networks, and then making available to the public and researchers copies of the programs or subject-related compiled videotapes for non-commercial purposes only. CBS sued Vanderbilt for copyright infringement; subsequently the suit was dropped, perhaps because of the passage of a revised copyright law. Anne Rawley-Saldich argued that CBS, and the other networks, were attempting to avoid
accountability by imposing censorship after publication. (1976)
Further, she says, the consequences would be to seriously limit our
ability to accumulate knowledge about the subjects of tv news coverage
and the effects of tv news upon public opinion. I agree with her;
library archives are crucial for both accountability and the potential
for public knowledge. The point that she overlooks, however, is that
the network position is a logical extension of the assumptions of
American journalism: that news is a commercial product and as such is
not in the public domain. The assumption is clearly untenable when
stated plainly, but how else can we explain their position of
proprietary claims?

The economic imperatives have commercialized the news, and
led to a production ethic which has corrupted the democratic
communication functions of access and rationality, particularly as they
apply to the primal subject of the hegemony of institutions. The
commercial motive is production, production of a product which will get
the attention of, and sell one or another medium to, the largest
number of buyers possible. The product, then, must be shaped to
appeal to the lowest common denominator audience (LCD). The character
of commercial news can be described with three criteria: brevity,
attraction and immediacy.

Brevity

Arguing to station owners for an hour of daily network news,
Walter Cronkite said:
We fall far short of presenting all, or even a goodly part, of the news each day that a citizen would need to intelligently exercise his franchise in this democracy. As he depends more and more on us, presumably the depth of knowledge of the average man diminishes. This clearly can lead to disaster in a democracy.

(1976)

The production ethic—the necessity to gain the reader's attention with short articles written in the style of journalism with abbreviated leads and catchy headlines and inverted pyramids so that an editor can delete any portion of the story without the reader (or the writer) thinking anything important has been left out—contributes directly to the illusion that the reader must get every day's paper or watch the evening news.

Is the American public served by such "productions"? The production ethic is justified precisely in terms of their original liberal ethic: our newspapers and TV news programs are informing public opinion. For example, in an editorial, the Honolulu Star-Bulletin justified the journalistic practice of writing a "lead" or capsule paragraph (the most important "fact") because it served their definition of the public interest:

Newspapers and radio and television newscasters are going to keep reaching for "leads" because that is the way news delivery is structured. For many reasons, including the need of the public for capsulized accounts, this is unlikely to change.

(1977; see Appendix A, below)

The subject of the editorial was the media treatment of a long interview by Playboy of UN Ambassador Andrew Young. "When reporters got the United Nations ambassador's Playboy interview, a great many saw a lead in Young's assertion that President Nixon and President Ford were racists—which seemed like pretty strong stuff."

The Star-Bulletin editorial did not claim that the misleading and sensational news treatment of the 16,000 word interview was an intelligent summary of Young's opinions. Yet, the editorial itself was able to summarize that particular point with three paragraphs. I submit that those three paragraphs, if they had been the sum and substance of the original front page story, would have better informed the public. But editorials are written under a different set of rules. The journalistic device of a "lead" and inverted pyramids are excerpted isolated facts which are designed to catch our attention and sell the newspaper. They are constructed in such a way as to give the impression of understanding while, in fact, they misinform.

Substantive knowledge requires time and effort to be written and to be read, and there seems fewer than the majority in the polity who want to or can afford to devote such effort. (Which is self-defeating while being, in part, rational since the political system operates to restrict dissent.) Complex reality--causes, consequences and alternatives--can be abbreviated. Indeed, that is what a theory does. But the length and the substance of a story in print or broadcast journalism is determined by economic considerations rather than by epistemological criteria. Political information comes to assume the character of "news," i.e., it is sensationalized in the manner of Hearst's and Pulitzer's yellow journalism nearly a century back. News is made attractive to the potential buyer. If the public is not informed by news capsules, that is not the responsibility of the tv news director or of the newspaper editor. There is the assumption that each news organization and each type of media is not responsible
to a holistic conception of responsibility for their political behavior. Simply, it is a market conception of political communication.

Attraction

Closely related to brevity, as a defining characteristic of news, is that of attraction. It might be better called programming which is done in such a way as to create an attractive product. The underlying conception is that of motion which compels our attention toward it. I wrote earlier of television as a medium of visual motion which, consequently, has an intrinsic attraction about it. But the point here is that all news media are constructed with similar characteristics so as to achieve the same results of attraction.

Both tv and print, for instance, typically use the short story form which might be called literary motion, instead of placing events within their political or economic frameworks. (see Sigal, 1973, 85; Epstein, 1973, 239ff) Highway deaths are reported in terms of the human interest angle rather than analyzed as the expected consequences of automobile and highway design and advertising themes. They are personalized to get our attention and to supply our craving for an emotional charge. Each incident looks unique rather than continuing examples of a pattern, so our response is not a rational analysis which would lead us to political or economic decision-making. (They also lend themselves to an appearance of immediacy on the part of news media.)

Similarly, there is a programming motion to print and broadcast media. TV and radio, for instance, carry a series of short
news clips. Newspapers and newsmagazines emphasize short items and interrupt longer stories with brief asides (boxed inserts). The purpose is that of keeping your attention, not with the substance of usable knowledge within an explicit value framework, but with layouts and styles of presentation. They depend upon, and reinforce, the short attention span of their audience. Which is another way of saying they are appealing to and helping create the lowest educational denominator audience rather than speaking to those who can or want to be politically adept. They create the illusion of being informed, rather than set an information standard for those who aspire to being informed.

Sevareid and others in the tv industry speak of the audience as being "restless prisoners" to the editorial line-up of stories on the news programs. (1976; also Rank,1972,487) Presumably, the tv news directors would consider themselves arrogant fascists if they devoted too much time to any one story, imposing their view of what is important upon a passive and helpless audience. Thus a series of short stories maintains our pluralistic society--something for each of us, but nothing for us all.

I find that argument self-serving of television's economic interests as well as defeating any potential for raising political rhetoric to the conscious level of public debate. If, on the other hand, the audience was assumed to be composed of politically competent and responsible citizens, then longer pieces with depth (analysis of causes, consequences, and policy alternatives) could be presented.
And political actors could be given direct access. The audience could tune in or turn off as they desired. Of course, under most circumstances, the aggregate audience level would be lower for this alternative method of programming. Thus, the economic consequences (lower advertising revenue) would be one result. Of course, the political consequences in democratic terms seem to be only positive. But since economic "imperatives" take precedence over democratic "imperatives," there will always be the structural pressure toward "news" instead of political knowledge.

TV news also makes an indirect contribution to the profitability of the entertainment schedule which, in turn, increases the commercial imperatives for news. TV viewing habits are apparently ruled by the law of inertia. Large groups of TV viewers tend to stay on whatever channel they are tuned into, regardless of the programs being shown. (Epstein, 1973, 91-100, 240) Thus if a news program or a documentary loses a significant share of the audience, that audience is unlikely to tune back for the next program. In this way, the programming motion maintains the audience flow and news, which is scheduled for the beginning and end of prime time, becomes the parentheses for the entertainment wasteland.

More obvious than programming is another technique for making news attractive: the TV news correspondent. Epstein characterizes them as being hired for their potential as corporate technicians. (1973, 205-220) Political or intellectual skills are grounds for rejection. They are hired mainly on the basis of their theatrical talents, their ability to project a strong, believable and
and attractive personality while on camera. In this manner, tv news becomes a vehicle for gaining increased ratings by creating and selling personalities. As Joan Lunden, WABC news reporter, tells it:

WABC, Eyewitness News specifically, tends to make all their reporters more than just reporters. They tend to make them personalities. They have promotions on them, radio, newspapers, magazines—they build them up as being a specific type of personality. And essentially what we find is that people watch Eyewitness News just as much to find out what Roseanne did today and what J.J. did today and what so-and-so is wearing and what their feelings are that day, as they are turning in to get the news. It is almost like a continuing soap opera, a serial.... People feel they do not want to miss it because if they miss it they feel like they have missed one of the episodes. And I think that has a lot to do with why we are more successful.

(Scheer,1977)

TV news personalities are not associated in any way with the characteristics of the democratic citizen or the professional educator. "While all attended liberal arts college, correspondents generally considered their formal education inadequate, or even 'useless' as one put it." (Epstein,1973,206) If tv broadcasters were hired and promoted on the basis of their ability to manage the public debate, then tv news could justify the personality criteria in terms of the democratic doctrine. It could also be argued that popular newscasters make political information more interesting, and thus increase the audience for, and the understanding of, political information. The truth of these assertions would depend upon the ability of the newscasters to communicate political information, as well as evidence that political information was emphasized on tv news and that it was communicated within the rhetoric of rationality. Simply, it would mean that newsmen could be responsible for giving access to a wide-range of political value positions and responsible for the truth value of news.
However, there is not much evidence to suggest that the TV reporter's success is measured other than simply and economically: by the box-office count. The salaries of local anchormen rise and fall with their audience shares. What we should carefully note is that there is no public accountability for the substance of what they say, even by their own organizations. And they are in a role that has large status and financial rewards. Consequently, the performance criteria itself—the ability to "produce" TV news—has implications that are distinctly anti-political. Michael Robinson put his finger on it: "The new journalists reflect the high-styled, high-toned, often egotistical pattern of behavior of the stage." "Performing has its own inevitable by-products; in this case the by-products are more cynicism, sarcasm, arrogance, sometimes hostility." (1975,124) (For an example, see Roger Mudd's comments, Appendix B.) Robinson's emphasis is that TV news—because of this style of presentation and other factors—is effective in gaining attention and imputing credibility to TV reporters. His main thesis is that TV news is enormously successful in producing "a more disaffected, alienated and frustrated electorate." (ibid,125) From the perspective of this essay, we can extend Robinson's criticism by taking note that this effective, assertive and hostile behavior not only tends to de-legitimize politics as partisan conflict resolution (pluralism), it also tends to make democratic politics (majorities and public interests) inconceivable. It violates, rather obviously, the canons of democratic theory of taking responsibility for the political consequences of individual and organization behavior. It also tends to increase the costs of citizen
political behavior to the point of futility. What rational person will voluntarily expose himself to a political communication system that will tend to delegitimize his motives, his behavior, and his policy proposals?

Attractiveness, as a criteria for what good news is, also explains much about why news is a product of consensus among journalists, why journalism tends to rely upon the same sources (about which more later), and thus why the news represents a consensus about reality. When a subject becomes "hot" for one newspaper or tv news department, it becomes "hot" for all journalists. There is a "greenhouse effect," as someone called it, by which a story that is super-attractive becomes magnified out of all reasonable proportions because of the cumulative and multiplicative effects of each news production center moving that story to the top of the agenda and devoting more resources and space/time to that story. For example, the spectacle of Patty Hearst and the Symbionese Liberation Army was not used as a "news hook" upon which to hang a public debate about the conditions and quality of political dissent in America. Instead, the issue was personalized to the point of saturation and boredom--a process for driving the most public-spirited citizen to extremisms or apathy.

To describe the public political communication in any society as that of a consensus is in one sense saying no more than that a culture protects its illusions and structure. But to describe the public political communication in a society as consensible is immediate cause for concern--if it aspires to democracy. For without dissent, we are neither moral nor rational. Dissent is not only the mechanism by
which we publicly assume responsibility for our political behavior, it is the means by which we adapt to changing circumstances. (see for example, Seymour Hersh's history of the media treatment of the My Lai story, in Emery and Smythe, 1972, 148.)

There is a more subtle implication to consensus which questions the legitimacy of the assumption that competition between individual news machines is in the public interest. Because there is an underlying identity in economic structures and audience identification, competition leads to consensus, not to diversity. In economic terms, it may be said that competition for the maximum income and safe capital leads to competition for the audience as defined by some criteria which are more homogenous than others. But, competition on the basis of other criteria, such as for a unique product (read: partisan press, or intellectual journals), defines the audience in terms of heterogenous criteria, and thus the potential income has a much lower ceiling.

Immediacy

Immediacy is the most obvious characteristic of contemporary commercial news; it dominates any other perception of what news is all about. It is a criteria that can be easily justified, with or without democratic doctrine; although immediacy may be more a concern for administrative leaders than for citizens in a policy-making role. Political intelligence, to be useful at all, must be up to date. But that necessity for immediacy as a characteristic of political information raises the problem of closure. Closure is the point at which we
are willing to operate as though uncertain truths and changing realities are understood. (see Kaplan, 1964, 70, 95) The decision to act upon the information that is available, as though the knowledge it contains is certain, is a difficult one. It can be made with more confidence as the knowledge about causes and consequences becomes more explicit.

But American journalism does not impose closure as a function of understanding. American news media work against daily deadlines which grew out of the imperatives of the marriage between technology and capitalism. The business of news is the business of competition in production.

News people argue that competition keeps them honest. Underlying that attitude are two assumptions. First, they might say, competition is a natural and unique function that powers the marketplace of free enterprise economics. The argument is disingenuous. Competition is a driving force in a great deal of human behavior and certainly within the American culture, regardless of the economic context. Competitive journalism could be equally expected from non-profit institutions. A more congenial assumption is that competition is a corruption of the craving for excellence. (from Tussman, 1970, 23) Secondly, there is the assumption that competition between news organizations is in the public interest because it forces information into publication. The New York Times withheld a story for six months about American nuclear tests in the upper atmosphere even though scientists were arguing that the secrecy was only a means of avoiding embarrassment to the government. The Times published the story when it
became apparent that other publications were about to learn of it. (Sigal, 1973, 80-81) So there is some truth to the assumption that competition between news organizations is in the public interest, without regard to economic conditions.

However, competition among the American news media is not measured by any criteria from the rhetoric of reason (with the important exception of accuracy). Competition in the marketplace is according to the production ethic. And the production ethic imposes arbitrary and repetitive deadlines that are incompatible with the reasonable creation of knowledge. It leads to the inevitable decision to go with what you've got, regardless of its truth value—literally ignoring the history, causes, and consequential meaning of events.

Their organization's insatiable demand for news dominates the incentives of all newsmen. Every day editors have a sizable news hole to fill. Every day they want something new and original for page one. The overriding organizational imperatives for reporters are to get news and to get it first. (Sigal, 1973, 52)

The daily production deadlines of newspapers and tv news programs require several stories a day from the average reporter, so there is little time and little pressure to reflect and write upon the meaning of their subjects. And, in fact, network correspondents are not expected to be able to analyze and comment upon significant political issues. "The correspondents tended to depend more on the producer for the general organizing idea on a subject they were assigned to cover than on either background reading or personal contacts." (Epstein, 1973, 210) Regardless of its truth value, some news must be produced every day to satisfy the economic demands of a daily
production schedule and to justify the consumer's buying of the newspaper or TV news program. News organizations can operate in this manner because there is only a tenuous connection between any political criteria for content and the economic criteria for profitability. So long as there is some political news in the newspaper, we may not judge the paper or the televised news program by what it excludes. The disconnection is especially clear in television. "Most executives assume that there is little if any relation between news coverage and audience ratings." (Epstein, 1973, 97) Thus, the production ethic boils down to competition for something new. The emphasis and priority is for what newspeople call "hard news."

This is not to say that there are not longer "think pieces" in both print and television which at least focus our attention on serious problems. (They usually stop short of presenting policy alternatives. That would be "partisan.") And there are columnists who often provide some real political intelligence. Nor am I not saying that the subject of trends rather than recent events is totally excluded from our media. Their presence at all is indicative that journalism contains multiple and contradictory values. What I am saying is that every organization is a mobilization of bias for a particular kind of action, to borrow Schattschneider's concept. (1960, 30) And that the news media are organized to produce "news." Other categories of information are assigned a subordinate priority. TV documentaries, for example, are typically scheduled as fillers for low audience time slots, and their subjects are designed so as not to offend any significant share of the audience, affiliate owners or
advertisers. (Epstein, 1973, 56, 126-130, passim) Newspaper analyses are more likely to appear on the days when the increased retail advertising enlarges the total news hole. But even then, they are often used as fillers in the classified sections, etc. The overwhelming weight of organizational pressure is for news, because that is what maximizes the profits. Thus, commercial news is characterized by brevity, attractiveness and immediacy. These act as criteria for what is published or broadcast as news. This emphasis on hard news (with the compounding effects of objectivity and balance to be discussed later) has significant consequences for our public political communication from the perspective of the democratic philosophy.

Implications

The commercialization of news has fractured the potential for both community and national debate. Our public issues are long standing; at some level of abstraction we might even say that they are perpetual dilemmas of the human condition. But the need of the media is for something topical, and an issue is raised only if someone says something new about it. "Events are pretexts for running information," says Sigal. One example he uses was The New York Times' delayed publication of a five-part series on the CIA until a "news peg" occurred, which happened to be the planting of agents within a university research project. (1973,71) The emphasis is on what someone "newsworthy" said today. So the focus on an issue, if it gets into print at all, is discontinuous. Reality, which in fact is recognizable in terms of cause and effect, historical trends and probable futures,
becomes episodic, ephemeral and self-destructive. (This characterization was suggested by Daniel Boorstin's perceptions of the American folk culture that is created by media advertising. 1971,26-42)

Conversely, because the media are extraordinarily dependent upon the topical news of the day--which can be packaged in brief, attractive form--and because they operate in a competitive marketplace where the competition's "product" is nearly immediately known, the news comes to be a consensual product. Television, for instance, is highly dependent upon the wire services for their basic agenda of the day's news. In one month, NBC derived 70 percent of their domestic film stories from the two major wire services. The more general categories of network news stories are derived from The New York Times, The Washington Post, Time, and Newsweek. (Epstein,1973,134,140) Epstein argues that the networks depend upon wire services as a function of their own intrinsic economic imperatives, i.e., they maintain a minimum number of camera crews necessary to produce the number of stories for each day's news program. Their operating assumption is that the size of the audience is independent of the content of the news programs. Which is another way of saying that the audience is maximized if they do not attempt in-depth coverage. My point is that all commercial mediums have the same economic imperatives with similar consequences.

So too for the newspapers does the competitive environment force the news toward consensus:
Even at the best newspapers, the editor always gauges his own reporters' stories against the expectations that the wire services have aroused....

The Times team filed a lead saying that Humphrey had apologized for having called McGovern a "fool" earlier in the campaign. Soon after they filed the story, an editor phoned from New York. The AP had gone with a Wallace lead, he said. Why hadn't they?
(Crouse,1972,20,22)

Crouse was writing about the pack journalism that receives its own earned measure of criticism after every American political campaign. The larger point is that the same economic pressures operate year around upon the American media. Leon Sigal, for instance, comes to a similar conclusion after an intensive analysis of The New York Times and The Washington Post:

So long as newsmen follow the same routines, espousing the same professional values and using each other as their standards of comparison, newsmaking will tend to be insular and self-reinforcing. (1973,181)

Consensus journalism places a premium upon newsworthies: newsworthy people and newsworthy events. (Newsworthy events will be discussed under the heading of objective news.) Consensus journalism can create public figures; but in either event, what ever the source of an individual's newsworthiness, the media become dependent upon public personalities. They are the stuff that news is made from. And the other side of dependency is exploitation. "The very routines and conventions that newsmen use to cope with uncertainty, though, are exploited by their sources either to insert information into the news or to propagandize." (ibid)

The point here is that consensus journalism contains within it criteria for access to the public podium. The consensual criterion of newsworthiness provides nearly automatic access to three categories
of individuals: establishment, dissident, and celebrity. The messages that come from these individuals, in the brief, attention-getting, topical form that the media finds so necessary, can be briefly described as an episodic fashionably consensual symbolic populism. (Or, perhaps, as a bottomless can of non-caloric pringles.)

Predominant access is granted to those in positions of formal power: corporate executives, labor leaders, and particularly government officials, both elected and appointed. Their legitimacy and authenticity is presumptive. A manual for newspaper reporters published by one newspaper gives the following instructions:

The following is a list of 50 key jobs in Hawaii. You should be familiar with the functions of each position and the names of the persons who occupy them. . . . The idea is that you should be aware of potential newsmakers before you are asked to deal with them. (Honolulu Advertiser, 1976)

The list was composed exclusively of city, state and federal officials and totally ignored the half-dozen corporations, two labor-unions and two churches which exert considerable influence on public issues in the state (among others). The major conclusion to Sigal's study of the Times and the Post was that

so long as the organization and politics of newsmaking remain as they are, the press will primarily offer news from official sources passed through official channels. (1973, 190)

Access is controlled and legitimized by what Boorstin called "pseudo-events." (1961, 9-12; see also Epstein, 1973, 134) They are those press conferences and interviews which serve the mutual advantages of the press and the government, or more broadly, the establishment. They are predictable events, even controllable, and consequently both
guarantee a story and do so at a cheap cost. (Epstein found that 90 percent of stories used on NBC Evening News for one year were produced after at least one day's advance warning from the "news-makers." 1973, 31)

Pseudo-events are not propaganda, says Boorstin. "While a pseudo-event is an ambiguous truth, propaganda is an appealing falsehood." "Propaganda oversimplifies experience, pseudo-events over-complicate it." (1961,34,35) He seems to be saying that propaganda is what we commonly think of as biased news, while the representation of pseudo-events is not. It might be more useful to conceive of propaganda as consciously biased information, while pseudo-events arise from an unconscious or structural bias. The commercial structure of newspapers brought about some journalistic conventions which unconsciously bias political information. It is biased toward those in government and in journalism in order to maintain their domination over the source and flow of news. The bias limits access and prevents reality checks.

Another way of looking at pseudo-events is to consider them as the means by which the government and the public engage in their characteristic predispositions toward symbolic politics, as Edelman has argued. (1975;1964, especially chapter one) Symbolic politics are assertions which reinforce the public's conventional wisdom and simplistic myths about government: the state is competent, benevolent, and responsive to democratic representation. Symbolic politics thus maintains our focus on political threats and political reassurances without costing us the price of participation (such as the fear of
exclusion, time and energy for debate and negotiation, and the fear of failure—all of which are tempted in the public arena). Symbolic politics, Edelman argues, is for public consumption, maintaining our allegiance and quiescence while the elite prospers with more tangible benefits from the government. The rhetoric of symbolic politics also focuses our attention on the personality of the public figure who is seeking support for his intentions, rather than upon the history of his performance and the political implications of his policies for our own tangible well-being. In particular, symbolic politics serves to reinforce our illusion that each problem facing society and government is unrelated in any way and especially unrelated by the economic system.

Edelman argues that both the public and the politicians are maintaining a political rhetoric which is fundamentally irrational because it contains reality assertions and presumptive value positions—"dramatic in outline and empty of realistic detail."

To experience the political world as a sequence of distinct events, randomly threatening or reassuring, renders people susceptible to deliberate and unintended cues, for the environment becomes unpredictable and people remain continuously anxious. (1975,21)

Edelman's major point is that the rhetoric satisfies the characteristic predispositions of the public toward quiescence and of political figures toward power. (I will consider the implications of that word, "characteristic," in the next paragraph.) For Edelman, journalism makes the connection:
Because signs of these dangers are most voraciously and universally sought after, newspaper men have both economic and psychological reasons to play them conspicuously: the latest move of the potential foreign foe, or, in another time, the latest depression news. (1964,15)

In this manner, the media willingly provide access to both officials and dissidents.

Parenthetically, Edelman provides another opportunity to emphasize the utility of a positive, value-oriented, focus on institutional causes and alternatives. Edelman's perceptive analyses are concerned with the rhetoric of symbolic politics and its undemocratic consequences. He contrasts that behavior with "groups directly involved in maneuvering for tangible values." (ibid) Consequently, he is able to nearly ignore the role of the media since it, too, plays for the benefit of tangible profits. Apparently, the media are willing co-conspirators in the grand illusion. But it seems to me there is an underlying fatalistic tone to Edelman's thought, for he does not discuss means for changing the system, nor does he discuss a positive conception of the public interest (each of which implies the other). I agree with him that, indeed, there are commercial causes that make American media such a willing participant in the public's impotence. However, their role is as a crucial mediating institution whose economic imperatives exacerbate our political culture's predisposition toward symbolic politics, and that perception places our hand on one of the levers of change. The history of American journalism is that it has played a significant role in the building of such a pathological system. And it has done so within the justificatory rhetoric of American liberalism. Consequently, there is a discontinuity between
the media's goal and their successes. My operative assumption is that
knowing the causes of their behavior gives us keys for changing the
outcomes of their behavior. The assumption is that a media with other
imperatives--organizations whose survival and successes are measured
by other criteria--would produce a different mediating influence upon
public rhetoric and thus upon public politics. The media can be seen
as an independent--or at least a separately identifiable--institution
influencing the rhetorical environment for citizens and officials. The
symbols of government and community are crucial to a coherent society,
as Edelman would agree. But my argument, moving beyond him, is about
how to enhance their validity as references to the empirical world.
Edelman implies, in his comment about newspapermen, that news is a
product of rational individuals. But, if we make explicit that news is
a product of rational economic institutions, then we are led to
consider viable institutional alternatives.

Political dissent is the source of institutional criticism,
and dissidents do gain access because they make good headlines and that
is good business. But, because officials dominate the news, the thrust
and sweep of public dissent is severely limited by those issues about
which the factions within the establishment agree to disagree. (see
Sigal, 1973, 189-190) A punster might label this as an orthodox
circumcision. For those dissenters outside the establishment, access
is gained by "blood and pageantry," in Neil Hickey's phrase. The
commercial imperatives reduce their political messages to symbolic
demonstrations which inevitably appear as "distruptive to the newspaper
audience." (Sigal, 1973, 190) The effect is to reduce their respecti-

bility and potential for success. Epstein well summarized the argument:

Television news invites the audience to judge the conduct of the
protestors rather than the content of the problem. This creates false
issues. Popular support is generated against causes which appear on
television to rely on violent protests, while underlying economic and
social problems are systematically masked or ignored.

(1973, 270)

In short, the commercial imperatives of news work against dissent in
the democratic sense of that word. The news machines work against
intelligent social adaptiveness which is dependent upon access by
diverse politically conscious viewpoints for its reality checks.

(Access to the podium by dissenters is also significantly controlled by
the journalistic principle of balance, which will be treated later.)

Significant access is also granted to political (and non-
political) actors on the basis of their social recognition--their
status as celebrities. The necessity for brief topical news creates a
predisposed access for personalities. Personalities are symbols that
are easily recognizable by large segments of the public--those that are
"tuned in," or "hooked" on the media. Personalities make news appear
credible. (And tv reporters are the paragons of credibility. See
Robinson, 1975, 123-125) The continually emerging emphasis on personality
can be explained by several factors. First, there is the commercial
motive--it attracts the largest audience. People--at whatever educa-
tional level--feel expert at judging personalities (though not
necessarily social issues, abstract economic and political explanations,
etc.) Perhaps it is the same thing to say that personalities bring a
sense of intimacy with the world out there, and thus lend credibility
to the news media. Secondly, there is the underlying American culture which has always underestimated the role of institutions in social life, preferring to see society as composed of singular individual entrepreneurs. Conveniently, the recognition factor of personality can be and usually is created by the media.

The televised campaign commercial is a superb example of the media's power to create winning personalities and to create a category of political rhetoric that dominates other conceptions. (The history of televised political advertising can be outlined by Richard Nixon's electoral campaigns, beginning with the "Checkers Speech" in 1952. Also see Woods, 1975) In general, the media's ability and predisposition to exploit personality, and to create personality where there is none, is in effect obscuring the potential for true charisma and political leadership to gain the public's attention. (Barber, 1975)

Similarly, the media turns some political actors--those who say and do things that are topical, attention-getting, and can be capsulized--into celebrities. The exchange is mutually beneficial. As Benjamin Barber said, "Celebrity is a key to influence if not to power." (1975,54) But the status of celebrity has inherent limitations. Having achieved access to the podium, their messages are truncated and trivialized. And access based upon the criterion of celebrity is not the criterion of power or of wisdom, both of which are studiously ignored by the media. The criterion of celebrity confuses authoritative leaders with rock stars and Hollywood starlets. In Barber's forceful rhetoric:
Like the praying mantis, (celebrity) consumes the consummator. It stands mischievously by the gates to the citadel of power and destroys those select few it permits to enter. Like children mugging before the new family movie camera, aspirants to public influence engage in competitive antics before the public eye. The winners, at least in the short run, are those who have clowned away their souls and thus can no longer use the power they have won. 

(ibid)

The torrent of trivia from artificial personalities characterizes our public communication networks. Daily and hourly deadlines for brief, attractive news forces a flow of superficial and trivialized information which diverts journalists, citizens and officials away from a coherent focus and discussion about important public issues. The working criterion of immediacy defines the news as what is fashionable. "Novelty and topicality go hand in hand; fashion and trivia serve one another. Like firecrackers, they are noisy, short-lived, and powerless to harm, affect, or change the world." (ibid) (The "all-news" radio station in Honolulu, for example, is currently broadcasting five-minute news summaries from each of the three networks each hour, plus two five-minute local news summaries each hour. Then, presumably because the audience only tunes in for an average of fifteen minutes, they sandwich in their own composite national and local news "headlines" once each hour.)

As the media manufactures personalities, so they become dependent upon celebrities for newsworthy statements. Empirical evidence and value perspectives which bear upon major social issues actually come at unpredictable intervals, and really cannot be "capsulized." But statements about those issues, from noteworthy
personalities, can be obtained by any enterprising reporter with whatever frequency demanded by the empty news holes.

Thus, the inclusion of a political issue on the public's agenda may rest on the willingness of newsworthies to make them topical. If they do not, then the issue remains a non-issue regardless of its objective impact on any significant portion of the public. And even if public issues are raised, the criteria of brevity, immediacy, and attractiveness insures their temporary standing on the agenda and their superficial treatment. Novelty and topicality are antonyms of relevancy:

To show the relevance of something is to lift it above the current of daily topics, to connect it with distant events and larger issues.

(Boorstin, 1971, 24)

Novelty is, by inherent definition, temporary. Novelty becomes fashionable when it is defined and ratified by the populace massed. And thus, the political synonym for fashionable is populism. The American media (and perhaps others too), because they have commercialized news, promote the political culture of populism. (Robinson, for example, found that support for George Wallace was associate with reliance upon television journalism. 1975, 131)

First, the media promote populism because they focus the attention of the masses as unorganized aggregates upon individual political actors, rather than upon issues and the concepts which make sense out of issues. The media substitutes visibility for other criteria of leadership. And because they inundate us with topical reiterations of the conventional wisdom we are left with the illusion
of being informed, while in reality we suffer the consequences of Edelman's definition of symbolic politics. Empirical social cost-accounting is obviated in the flood of unexamined truth statements. And the potential function of political debate to renew community-wide values as well as to publicly decide upon the partial fulfillment or deprivation of lesser representative values is bastardized into political rhetoric in which the dominant values are presumed consensual and dissenting value perspectives are suppressed as illegitimate. That is populism of the first water.

Secondly, corporate economics, which lead to increased centralization of the communication system, do in fact create a populist political culture. The proportion of independent papers to those owned by newspaper chains is decreasing. Gannett, for example, went from 49 papers in 1975 to 73 papers in 28 states in 1977. In 1976, the Newhouse chain purchased the Booth chain, bringing together 30 newspapers, 5 magazines, 10 tv and radio stations, and the Sunday supplement Parade. A centralized communication structure is necessary for all authoritarian regimes, but the continued centralization of the American media enhances the political consequences of a commercial media, making the alternative of populism more likely.

Recall that Kevin Phillips, for example, made the common argument that the media trusts should be busted by means of the anti-trust legislation. (1977) His assumption is that competing media produce something that is more in the public interest. However, he does not raise the prior question of whether it is appropriate to have
the media in the corporate capitalist marketplace. My argument is that these marketplace imperatives shape political information to such a significant and anti-democratic effect that we need to consider alternative economic structures outside that of corporate capitalism. Big is worse than small, as William Rivers suggests, but even small has its limitations as they too are defined by the economics of a corporate economy. (1970,238-239) The National Observer, with its concern for public intelligence, folds while People with its superficial capsulized superstar character sketches succeeds because the marketplace criteria for content is a populist one.

The populist criteria for content is: what will the people pay to read? More fundamentally, it strives to produce only that which the largest proportion of people will pay to read. Thus, the commercial media substitute market criteria for political criteria—populism for democracy. (The same mechanism is working in the fiction market. See Braudy,1978)

Populism is rule by a representative, but it is rule unrestrained by law and therefore rule by an unrestrained majority. (see Kornhauser,1959,131) That is to say, rule that is oblivious to any set of morals or values other than representation, which is itself more easily manipulated without the restraints of ethical procedures (and ethical purposes).

The argument can be seen to turn around the education characteristics of the people. If the people are educated into the traditions of knowledge and truth, if they become comfortable with public debate of the relative worth of values, become tolerant of
dissent for its utilitarian worth in making values conscious and
integrating them with facts, then of course they will "pay for" public
intelligence, as many already do. We must not be confused, though, for
these are democratic assumptions about the individual's potential as a
citizen. The assumption has never been that all the citizens acted
with such civility, but that it was a worthy and achievable goal. Even
the best of the founding fathers saw it as an ideal to be realized.

The central Jefferson hope had been a nation of small freeholders,
each acquiring thereby so much moral probity, economic security and
political independence as to render unnecessary any invasion of the
rights or liberties of others. (Schlesinger, 1945, 309)

Democrats may argue that the masses are not "civilized" in
the political sense of the word, but the democratic ideal is that the
average adult should be capable of civil political behavior; and it is
a belief in the ability of society to bring that ideal into the realm
of reality. That was the commitment of John Dewey:

Belief in equality is an element of the democratic credo. It is
not however, belief in equality of natural endowments. Those who
proclaimed the idea of equality did not suppose they were enunciating
a psychological doctrine, but a legal and political one. (1939, 402)

But the rationale that the criteria of what news should be is that
which the people will pay to read is an economic rationale. It is not
a rationale which drives the democratic engine by providing standards
for leadership and for citizenship. It drives the populist engine. It
is a rationale which must depend upon the assumption that the people are
possessed of an intuitive folk wisdom. It is an egalitarianism without
moral standards. "He is a barbarian who thinks that the customs of his
generation are the laws of the universe." (Rivers, 1970, viii)
Objectivity: an amiable myth?

In addition to the journalistic criteria for what is news, there are two criteria for how that news is reported: objectivity and balance. The latter is a logical and historical extension of the former, yet their conceptions are distinct and their consequences are separable.

The commercialization of news led journalists to adopt the role of professional truth-tellers. Objectivity met the commercial purpose: news could then appeal to wider audiences and the gross income could grow higher. Simultaneously, the assumption of objectivity removed the newspapers from appearing as participants in the political arena. They were no longer the targets for the partisan political attacks they had suffered, such as with the Alien and Sedition Laws.

It may seem that the conception of the journalists as being objective is just too naive and outdated. John Hohenberg, in 1973, argues this case in his textbook. "The concept of objectivity . . . is . . . an amiable myth and has been generally recognized as such." (28) His "amiable" qualification should cue us that the myth still does some work. The illusion persists. Leon Sigal in his 1973 study of The Washington Post and The New York Times states, "The dominant role conception held in the news community is that of newsman as neutral observer, detached from events and reluctant to pronounce explicit personal judgements on them in print." (75) And Epstein, in his 1973 analysis of the network news operations, finds the mirror metaphor to be a common and mythical conception in the rhetoric of tv news executives and journalists. (13ff,205) Timothy Crouse also provides us with a
cumulative and detailed account of the objectivity convention in operation during Presidential campaigns. (1972) These assessments confirm a primal truth in science that dates back to at least Sigmund Freud's pioneering analysis in the 19th century. As Epstein notes, the myths are a means of avoiding responsibility: "These metaphors may only serve to discourage both insiders and outsiders--to the extent that they are assumed to be true--from attempting to intervene or purposefully influence the news outputs." (1973,41)

Moreover, the myth is reflected in the American culture, as perhaps it must be if it is to be effective. The American public does believe that journalism is biased, more or less, which is a way of saying that it could be objective. I have argued (in the first chapter) that the illusion of objectivity is a reflection of a strong anti-intellectual virus which persists in the American culture. American journalism thus reinforces this cultural strain, rather than attempting to counter it. And the illusion of objectivity serves the organizational and economic imperatives of commercialized journalism. But the myth has a number of political implications that work against our democratic values.

The first implication of the objectivity myth is that professionals can be trained to be unbiased. The inference is, of course, that the rest of us are biased. Indeed, the inference is that all political rhetoric is biased, i.e., colored by our own personal self-interests. Political rhetoric is biased in the sense that it proposes the acceptance of one set of values over all others. But the journalistic connotation is that bias is something to be avoided. As
Myrdal argued (see chapter one), the popular understanding of bias is a commitment to rationalism rather than to rationality:

The man in the street, when he wants to appear enlightened, will attempt to avoid expressing primary and personal valuations. . . . He wants, in other words, to suppress his valuations as valuations and to present them as systems of rational beliefs concerning reality. (1944, 1046)

Thus not only is this conception a misunderstanding of the role of values in knowledge-seeking and knowledge-using, rationalism also explains the social power and domination of the conventional wisdom. Sigal found that "many newsmen are ardently anti-theoretical. Better read than expert is the watchword around the journalism community." (1973, 73) Perhaps this attitude is a response to, and justification thereof, the immediate necessity of working within the economic imperatives of news-making. But anti-theoretical is a synonym for anti-intellectual. And though the intellectual and the journalist have similar self-professed goals of informing the community, there is a degree of suspicion and hostility between the two that may be explained by this rationalism/rationality distinction. (cf. Lasswell, 1963, 189-193)

To the journalist, the discussion of which values shall prevail and their relative utilities in social cost-accounting terms is an exercise which seems to have little value in the pragmatic world of who has the power and what is he doing with it. Explanations about cause and effect--particularly social and structural cause and effect--seem speculative and opinionated. They cannot be verified--irrefutably--by the facts and thus they are irrelevant. Consequently, the intellectual is seldom sought after as a news source. Similarly, the news criteria for what is published and how it is reported seem to the
intellectual as a pandering to the folk-wisdom for commercial purposes. Since the intellectual's remarks are typically inverted into capsulized pyramids of facts, he gains little by attempting to gain access to the media.

A second implication of the pretension that journalists can report to the public without having any influence upon those messages is just that. The implication is that a political role can be assumed without responsibility for all of its consequences, that participation in politics can be partitioned. It is this assumption, I think which helps to explain the ironic posturing of tv news reporters. Irony is an attitude of detached awareness about the incongruity between political rhetoric and political reality. For the journalist to maintain that attitude, while acting to communicate what Edelman called the rhetoric of symbolic politics, is to behave irresponsibly. For the journalist, irony is justified by the myth of objectivity. (Robinson has accurately labeled their behavior as egotistical, sarcastic, arrogant and piqued. He attributed this behavior to youth, big-city life, aggressive role-modeling, income, status, and theatrical skills. But he misses two crucial and powerful explanations: first, that the acting skills are sought after by the networks to insure large audiences, and second, that the behavior is political irresponsible and justified by the objectivity myth. 1975,120-125)

Similarly, since the objectivity myth removed explicit political criteria for what defines the news, the substance of news reinforces the lesson of political irresponsibility being taught by the style of irony. First, there is the morality lesson. If political
information can be equated with or subordinated to topical trivia, then the political responsibilities which are incumbent upon all citizens in a democratic polity can be assumed or not be assumed. Political responsibility becomes voluntary and temporary. Secondly, there is the pragmatic political lesson. Political conflict is contagious and the outcome can be determined by the extent to which each side is able to muster a majority from among the ranks of the spectators. "A free society maximizes the contagion of conflict; it invites intervention and gives a high priority to the participation of the public in conflict." (Schattschneider, 1960, 5) But the myth of objectivity not only made politics a sometime thing, it removed its partisan color. Thus the news dilutes the moral and pragmatic reasons for the public to attend to and to participate in the public's own affairs. The effect is explicitly anti-democratic.

Parenthetically, there is one positive aspect to the tradition of objectivity: that of getting the facts straight. Professional journalists are proud of their integrity in this regard, and rightfully so. My quarrel is with the "facts" they choose. What are the "facts" that are fit to print? There is the delusion that facts carry no value premise, no political color, that the criteria are obvious and not in dispute. The "amiable" myth is that facts come to us as virgins, an old and powerful argument in the human tradition of matchmaking.

The journalist's assumption of objectivity removes the first person singular from his rhetoric, and thus disenfranchises a potential for advocacy, and for analytical statements, from those who witness politics at first hand. Simply, it deprives journalists of their
ability to tell the truth because truth begins with individual perception of causal reality as measured by a set of values which are held by an individual. Similarly, Leon Sigal talks about the reporting of news leaks from un-named sources which "interfere with understanding the news":

Knowing how the news gets made--the organization and politics of newsmaking--is a prerequisite for understanding what the news means. . . . News tends to emerge as a by-product of policy change or dispute. Interpreting it requires determining what the change or dispute is all about. It requires making inferences about the source of the information and his position in public life, the face of the issue under consideration as he would see it, the target of his words, and his possible reason for uttering them.

(1973,187,188)

But the journalist, because he cannot write in the first person, is thus deprived of his ability to tell the larger truth. Contrary to American judicial procedures, the omission of relevant information is a form of lying. One newspaperman told me, after two decades in his profession: "Everyday I write stories that are not truthful to me. By being truthful to no one, I am untruthful to everyone." News comes out meaning something to insiders, but it bewilders the rest of us. Because he is forced to turn out topical capsulized inverted pyramids which contain only facts in descending order of importance, i.e., statements about events and issues by newsworthy others, the journalist is effectively neutered. His perception of cause and effect, responsibility and suffering are "more than illegal--they are not possible" under the rules of journalistic rhetoric. (The phrase is from Boguslaw's book concerning the irrational and anti-social effects of systems engineers and computer control systems. The comparison I find instructive. 1965)
Because the journalist is forbidden (by his editors) to use the language of cause—to assign responsibility—then those who reap the benefits from the political system can enjoy their success without guilt; and those who suffer misfortune do so autonomously. Simply, our choice of rhetoric determines how we understand and evaluate the world in which we live. "The language that we learn . . . is one of ethical antisepsis and of political decontamination," Jonathan Kozol wrote. (Kozol was writing about the syntax that is taught by the profession of English teachers. It is a revealing exercise to read it as though it were written about the syntax of American journalism. 1975) He warns us that if we are taught insufficient concepts then we are unable to properly label reality. And thus if the media—which is the public's education system—does not employ concepts that deal with structural imperatives, then we are not taught to critique the institutional hegemony in our lives. The myth of objectivity leaves the ignorant powerless. For those who are informed, it deprives them of the means to discuss politics within the rhetoric of rational discourse. Thus, intelligent citizens must attempt rational behavior in spite of the media.

Yet, precisely because the language of the media is intelligible, it carries a set of implicit values. The adoption of the journalistic standard of objectivity is a way of saying that the journalist is able to report about some reality without allowing his own values to impinge upon that report, i.e., he can be unbiased. Fortunately, for those of us who prize evidence supporting the democratic assertion that man is an inner-directed and purposeful
being, biases are not excluded through disregard. Indeed, as Myrdal argued, biases are only controlled by explicitly regarding them. (1944) But, they are always there, ubiquitous and potent. By assuming their impotence, we place ourselves at their mercy. Thus, the professional journalist who espouses the standard of objectivity, and behaves as though he were objective, is really allowing a set of values to operate unhindered. My argument is that the values which do operate are those which came out of capitalism's influence over journalism in the mid-nineteenth century. They are also the dominant values of our culture which perceives political values as those of the marketplace. The consequences tend to promote the partisan politics of populism. In a word, they are anti-democratic.

These habits of mind, like the routines of action, seem to reduce the scope of newsmen's uncertainty by providing a set of standards for selecting news and a catalyst for crystallizing consensus. (Sigal, 1973, 66)

One of the major political consequences of the objectivity myth is differential access. Since he cannot report in the first person singular, he must rely upon others for descriptions and analyses. As Sigal puts it, "most news is not what has happened, but what someone says has happened, thus making the choice of sources crucial." (ibid) And thus the objectivity convention reinforced the consequences of the production ethic which was analyzed earlier in this chapter. "Objectivity" tends to give automatic access to those in positions of authority: "authoritativeness as a news source became synonymous with authority in important institutions." (ibid) More importantly, not only does journalism give "access" to society's leaders, it promotes access
by the government. The media need a daily dose of information which applies to the general public. Likewise, the government for reasons of authority and legitimacy and influence must maintain its connection with the public. So, "information from officials and the conventional wisdom prevailing in official circles dominate press coverage of events." (ibid, 70) Again, we see journalism reflecting the conventional wall-eyed wisdom of America: that politics seems like the marketplace but the economics of the marketplace seem to have little connection to politics. Our blindness to this inherent connection is not shared with our cultural cousins in Canada or in Europe. And again, it is my argument that American journalism reinforces and, perhaps, even had something to do with creating such a self-destructive myth.

Conversely, the national agenda excludes mayors, governors, congressmen, un-organized interests and even organized but not quite legitimate interests like Stokely Carmichael and SNCC if they are seen as "over-exposed," or do not "really represent their group," according to Epstein. He finds that network television news operations not only promote official views, but more specifically, it tends to focus on and thus promote access by those engaged in presidential politics by traditional standards: senators and cabinet officers and other established presidential candidates. (1973, 144ff)

So the predominant political consequence of the objectivity convention is to bias the news towards the conventional wisdom, particularly as it is defined by those in formal positions of authority or contending for the authority of the national executive. Furthermore, "objectivity" tends to insure uncritical access by those few:
The straight news convention . . . permits the publication of stories based on the views of a single news source, so long as he is in a position to issue a press release or call a press conference on a beat regularly covered by reporters. Even more, it guarantees a hearing for a source's views regardless of reporters' personal judgement of their veracity or validity.

(Sigel, 1973, 67)

Senator Joseph McCarthy understood that convention and used it. The history of his campaign of terror is a classic example of how the media is responsible, in part, for the success of political demagoguery.

Douglas Cater wrote:

Few of the reporters who regularly covered McCarthy believed him. Most came to hate him and fear him as a cynical liar who was willing to wreak untold havoc to satisfy his own power drive. But though they feared him it was not intimidation that caused the press to serve as the instrument for McCarthy's rise. Rather it was the inherent vulnerabilities—the frozen patterns of the press—which McCarthy discovered and played upon with unerring skill. "Straight" news, the absolute commandment of most mass media journalism, had become a strait jacket to crush the initiative and the independence of the reporter.

(1959, 72; see also Gill, 1974)

One of the central lessons of the McCarthy chapter is the extent to which American journalism fostered such behavior because of the conventions that determine who and what is the news. McCarthy had access because he was a U.S. Senator. Further, what he was saying was not outside the bounds of the conventional wisdom. The dominant perception of the communist threat had grown beyond the test of rationality, it had taken on a life of its own because it satisfied various social needs. (For an explanation of its recurrence in the American political culture, see Hartz on the "liberal hysteria," 1955, 293ff.) McCarthyism seems to be a good example of the symbolic political exchange which typifies much of the media fare.
Conversely, objective journalism is so heavily biased toward those in authority who speak the accepted wisdom that it is disinterested toward other sources and viewpoints. An example is the journalistic history of how difficult it was to get the media to accept the My Lai massacre as a legitimate national story. (see Hersh, 1969)

There are several categories of stories which do gain ready acceptance with journalists, which is another way of saying that the convention of objectivity predisposes the media toward some theories while suppressing the consideration of others. The emphasis upon "hard news"—"stories based on information directly perceptible to human senses, eyewitness reporting of events and recording of statements"—reinforces the individualistic focus already predominating for reasons mentioned earlier. (Sigal, 1973, 68) The media want individual stories, not social movements or institutional effects. They want events, not trends.

The first consequence of the individual focus is that journalists look for explanations of events and issues in the rational behavior of individuals. "Their crucial premise is that actions . . . take place the way they do because someone intended them to." (ibid, 74) Not looking for them, they do not see the predictable patterned sequence of events that flow from economic and bureaucratic structures.

A logical consequence of the individual focus is the bias toward evidence of illegal behavior. "Compared to social and economic analysis of the impact of urban renewal or welfare or other issues, illegality is rather well-defined and clear-cut. It is usually easier
to feel 'objective' in discussing violations of the law and impropriety." (ibid) Sigal traces the cause of this bias for revelations of illegalities back to the muckraking tradition, i.e., the journalistic role of governmental adversary. He is correct, I believe. An institutionalized journalism outside government will inevitably focus on the shortcomings of government. (Similarly, Michael J. Robinson found systematic evidence to support his conclusion that the adversary role of American journalism leads to an increased dis patriotizing effect. Robinson, however, does not focus on the institutional and commercial causes of this consequence. 1975) The argument of this essay, however, is that the commercial definition of news and its concomitant convention of objectivity tend to create an exclusive focus on individual explanations. The journalist that is predisposed to look for illegal behavior is also predisposed to not see social and institutional explanations. And thus, journalism reinforces the classic marketplace conception of politics as an arena for individual action in pursuit of self-interests. There cannot be an explanation of political behavior using concepts of the public's interests if those concepts are not in our common vocabulary. Since the politician's use of political rhetoric (which must always be in terms of the public interest) is automatically discounted—delegitimized by the journalist—the politician is never held accountable for that language. We never know to what extent his rhetoric is a reflection of his behavior. That is to say, we never know if political behavior is in the public's interest. If "politics" is now the word for vote-getting partisan conflict, what language do we
do we have if we want to talk about representative, democratic politics in the public interest? Consider, for example, two major events in America's recent history.

The Vietnam war was accepted, supported, and eventually assumed by the United States. Each of three successive administrations --Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon--prosecuted our singular involvement with that war, in large part, because they were able to sustain untested public belief in both the official principles and the official facts. (see Halberstam's monumental work. 1969) "Objective journalism" allowed the media to accept the official version and pass it on to the American public without taking responsibility for the relevancy of the principles involved or the veracity of the facts in the matter.

Epstein analyzed the network news coverage of the war and cited other studies supporting his conclusions: "Up until 1968, television coverage was controlled to a large extent by the American military, and generally it reflected a controlled American initiative which seemed to be winning the countryside and decimating the Vietcong." (1973d,54) American military hardware was featured, partly because war machines make such striking visual images (symbols) and partly because they are clean symbols. Wounded Americans and Vietnamese soldiers and civilians were deliberately edited out because this was inappropriate for dinner-time television. In short, the American public was shown a war that was moral, feasible, and relatively cheap--the administration viewpoint.

But American television news changed its perspective after the Tet offensive in 1968, Epstein argues:
(During Tet) correspondents found themselves willy-nilly in the midst of bloody fighting. There was no way that the attacks in broad daylight on such landmarks as the Presidential Palace could be concealed from television cameras.

Correspondents rushed unedited stories of desperate street fighting on the first available plane to Tokyo, where they were relayed almost instantly by satellite to the networks in New York. Rather than showing the usual carefully edited view of an orderly, controlled war, they depicted a totally chaotic situation. Instead of a constant series of American initiatives, American troops were shown on the defensive.

Moreover, network producers in control rooms in New York had neither the time nor the opportunity to shield American viewers from the grisly close-ups of wounded Americans, body bags and death.

For the next two months, while generals in Saigon and officials in Washington claimed a military "victory," television continued to show scenes of fighting and devastation, and openly suggested that the Government statements were examples of a "credibility gap," as NBC correspondent Sander Vanocur and others put it. Don Oberdorfer describes in convincing detail how the Vietcong insurgents lost virtually every battle and suffered irreplaceable losses in terms of both manpower and prestige, yet paradoxically won a decisive psychological victory in America.

If the Government (and networks) had not projected for years the image of invincible American progress in Vietnam, Tet might not have been viewed, with equal hyperbole, as a disastrous defeat.

In the analysis of this phase of the televised war history, along with those of other phases, Epstein makes a persuasive case that (1) the conventions of American tv journalism typically exaggerates oversimplified conclusions out of all intelligent proportions, (2) the New York producers imposed editorial policies, even after Tet, that usually reflected Administration policy statements, and (3) television news did have a measurable impact upon American public opinion both in support of, and in opposition to, the American involvement in the war.

American journalism, in Epstein's view, dealt with the war on the basis of the criteria of commercial journalism--brief, attractive, topical and objective news clips. Producers and editors and reporters
had no time nor incentive to question the official view. They were not trained nor paid to scrutinize the fact and value assumptions and the political, economic and social consequences for both Vietnam and the United States. During Tet, it became "apparent" that the American government had been "lying." So journalists called it a "credibility gap." In other words, journalism could only interpret what they saw as an Administration which was guilty of illegalities, but not an Administration which was responsible for immoralities as well as being responsible for sustaining illusions of reality. (The effort to maintain public illusions insidiously undermines the ability of an organization, particularly a public organization, to also maintain private rational knowledge. This may explain why Robert McNamara commissioned the massive historical study of classified government documents called "The Pentagon Papers." (cf. Halberstam, 1969, 769)

Of course there were notable exceptions in the television coverage, notable in part because they contradicted the main impression left by the regular coverage. But even if a documentary, for example, were to achieve a larger perspective and reach an explicit and contrary conclusion, the evening news the next day would be reported in an "objective" fashion as though the newsmen, themselves, had never come to any conclusion at all.

Shortly after Tet, Walter Cronkite flew to Vietnam. "A few years earlier, when he made his first trip to Vietnam, Cronkite had publicly supported the objectives of the war and praised the American commitment as 'courageous.' But in 1969, Cronkite concluded a special broadcast by calling the war 'a bloody stalemate.'" He said, "It is
increasingly clear to this reporter that the only rational way out then will be to negotiate, not as victors but as an honorable people."

(Epstein, 1973c, 22) The American government continued the war for six years after Walter Cronkite said those words, and that fact stands as a monument to the relationship between "objectivity" and the truth in American journalism.

The decline and fall of Richard Nixon is the second example I want to use to illustrate the inexorable, anti-democratic consequences of "objective" commercial journalism which is predisposed toward "factual" individual explanations. In 1960, Theodore H. White wrote his perceptions about presidential candidate Richard M. Nixon, perceptions that were to receive the Pulitzer Prize. Here are some characterizations culled from one chapter about Nixon:

He had a great capacity for self-pity. . . . He was frightened . . . he scared easily . . . . One could perceive neither in this last climactic proposal nor in his prepared speeches nor in his personal discourses any shape of history, any sense of the stream of time or flow of forces by which America had come to this point in history and move on . . . . From this weakness of philosophy comes that apparent volatility that has plagued Nixon throughout his career. . . . It was this lack of an over-all structure of thought, of a personal vision of the world that a major statesman must possess, that explained so many of those instances of the campaign when he broke under pressure.

(1961, 361-377)

Fourteen years later, David Halberstam was to write his own character sketch of Richard Nixon. It paralleled and extended and thus confirmed White's description:

If there was ever a man ill-suited by his own nature for the full and relentless exposure of national politics, the fierce give-and-take, it is Richard Nixon. He is the most solitary and private of men, the most isolated: intensely shy and introverted, uneasy with any kind of real intimacy, possessing few old or close friends. He is deeply suspicious and he has a memory richly stored with the humiliations vested upon him from so many years. Above all he hates to be revealed.
Men have risen in the Nixon entourage over the years not just because of his definition of their ability, but also because of their willingness not to reveal him. . . . He is a man plagued by inner doubts which did not go away as his position in life rose, which multiplied under the increased exposure which the new positions demanded.

With 20/20 hindsight, we can look back at the candidate that T.H. White saw and predict the character of Nixon's campaigns and administrations. Nixon's campaign of 1968 was some kind of a classic, for example. Halberstam: "It was all very contrived and not terribly democratic, a plastic campaign with a plastic candidate." (ibid, 229) Joe McGinnis: "Nixon . . . depended upon a television studio the way a polio victim relied upon an iron lung." (1969, 141) In fact, Nixon's political career is a capsule summary of the development and effective use of political advertising on television, which allows advertising agencies to build an image the public wants. Did the conventions of objective journalism allow Nixon "to seem to be exposed (to the public) without in fact being exposed," in Halberstam's words? White in 1960 writes that Nixon "was frightened," "he scared easily." In 1974, it begins to seep into the conventional wisdom that "The Nixon years have been something of a Golden Age of political paranoia. . . . The Nixon Administration saw politics as an array of reified conspiracies against it. . . . and behaved accordingly. . . . When the crimes and conspiracies know as Watergate began to come to light, the Administration's two basic responses were denial ('I am not a crook') and projection ('everybody does it')." (Hertzberg and McClelland,1974,53) Did the conventions of objectivity keep the journalists from themselves considering and publishing a debate about the basic issue in every campaign--the reality of the candidate evaluated by democratic
standards? Was it unbiased journalism that had to wait till Nixon broke the law till it could expose him to the American public? It is a telling fact that the Watergate story, and Nixon's eventual abdication, began with a phone call from Alfred E. Lewis, the police reporter for The Washington Post. (Bernstein and Woodward, 1974, 15)

Journalists rely upon the Law of Anticipated Consequences, and Watergate was the great story that confirmed their rightousness. When this law does operate, it is immensely satisfying to the journalistic ego. To find and publish evidence of illegality can result in criminal prosecutions, in job terminations and transfers. And thus journalism creates its own self-fulfilling prophecy. Revelations of impropriety do justify the journalist's position as a crucial participant in the democratic process. But stories about individual culpability only distract us from the larger and more important stories about institutions which dominate and circumscribe our political and economic freedoms. The conventions of journalism preclude the potential for structural change. Their selective perception reinforces the dominant conception of politics as just another place where private interests operate--the marketplace.

There is a corollary bias in journalism to that of the predisposition to look for evidence of illegal behavior. Because the objective journalist relies upon individual explanations and tangible facts, it follows that journalists expect politicians to be working toward some tangible, personal benefit--reelection.
The working hypothesis almost universally shared among correspondents is that politicians are suspect; their public images probably false, their public statements disingenuous, their moral pronouncements hypocritical, their motives self-serving, and their promises ephemeral. (Epstein, 1973, 215)

This may explain why the noun "rhetoric" when used with the adjective "political" has come to apply to verbal symbols about the public interest which are automatically discounted and delegitimized. We are left without language and without a whole category of motives to explain political behavior. And if we do not look for it, we will not see it on those occasions when it is there.

For example, Mike Wallace in his CBS documentary about televised political campaign commercials asked three different producers if they thought their political advertisements were immoral. (1970) The repetition of that question by a television journalist who epitomizes the egotistical and cynical style creates an adversary style without substance. Posing the question of morality does not lead the journalist or the audience toward causes and consequences and policy alternatives when dealing with these society-wide issues. It assumes that the public would not know what to do with knowledge. And, of course, there is the implicit argument that all politicians are immoral, that they are self-serving. The citizen is left with one futile gesture: replace the bad men with good ones. But since we do not have the language nor the profession of journalism by which to measure their behavior in the public's interests, we are committed to a continuing series of disappointments. And we are susceptible to the populist.
To summarize objectivity

I have argued that the convention of objective journalism comes from the commercial motives of maximizing the audience and that it is an important part of journalism's professional ideology. Yet it is an illusion, a means of avoiding responsibility for the influence of journalistic processes upon the content of the media. It assumes that the consequences of political behavior (journalism) can be voluntary and partitioned. Thus, journalism is irresponsible. "Objective" journalism is a form of anti-intellectualism; it reflects the anti-intellectualism which is a significant part of the American culture. "Objective" journalism is rationalism, a mechanism for accepting both the morality and the truth of the dominant wisdom. It defines out the language of cause and effect, of values in politics, and of the structural imperatives of political and economic organizations. It is, therefore, a language which sees an irrational world and promotes irrational behavior. It maintains the status quo by preventing our understanding, evaluation, and change of the dominant institutions. It fosters access by official newsworthies, authorities in the national government, particularly the President, his Cabinet and the Senate. It restrains access by dissenters outside the national establishment, and therefore promotes demagoguery. Further, "objective" journalism predisposes journalists to look for individual causes, particularly illegal behavior and vote-getting behavior. It reinforces marketplace conceptions of politics--a place where self-interests prevail. Thus, it predisposes the audience to look for a savior to rid the temple of the money-lenders--a populist.
Instead of an institution which impinges upon the conventional wisdom with explicit value references and improved information, the American media operate so as to support the untested values and beliefs that our culture holds so dear. The media does not foster the public's ability to manage a public debate at the level of the public interest. We cannot judge the morality of political behavior; we are not competent to discuss what political morality is, and which ideals we might all agree upon. The question is so potent that we avoid it and thus we lie at the mercy of the dominant ethos--the marketplace. Similarly, the organizational imperatives of news are blind to the organizational imperatives of politics and economics, i.e., to the social level of analysis.

Because American journalism poses a formidable barrier to those who want to publicly discuss the relevance of ideas (called ideologies) to our political situation, because it labels that kind of discussion as theoretical and thus irrelevant, we are left dominated by those in power and their values and their realities. The absence of a sustained intelligent critical evaluation of our major institutions--military, industrial, labor, education and government--is evidence that the myth of objectivity is alive and well in the American media.

Fairness

Balance, or fairness, is the third major tenet of American journalism. Journalists see it as a refinement of the objectivity assumption, a rule by which the journalist can avoid influencing the news with his own personal biases.
To remedy problems such as those caused by McCarthy, newsmen supplemented straight news with another convention, that of "fairness." (Sigal, 1973, 67)

To the convention of straight news, newsmen have added one of "balance"—making news columns accessible to various sides in a political controversy. Stories are supposed to present the views first of one side, then of another—"writing it down the middle," reporters call it. (ibid, 68)

The Fairness Doctrine simply requires broadcasters to present, in the course of their news and public affairs programming, "contrasting viewpoints on controversial issues of public importance." (Epstein, 1973, 64)

To enforce these policies, producers of news and documentary programs have adopted what might be called the "dialectical" model for reporting controversial issues, in which the correspondent, after reporting the news happening, juxtaposes a contrasting viewpoint and concludes his synthesis by suggesting that the truth lies somewhere in between. (ibid, 66)

At first blush, "fairness" seems to be a reasonable ethic, presenting both sides of a controversial issue and let the audience make up their own minds. But the way the convention is employed, combined with the other conventions of journalism (brevity, topicality, attractiveness and objectivity), results in a bias to the news that is both conservative and irrational.

"Fairness" could have been written in the rhetoric of democratic philosophy: Journalists, as professional guardians of the podium, have a responsibility for maximizing access to the podium by the citizenry and for encouraging the dissent which is crucial to the veracity of our knowledge and to the relevance of our values. That defines an active and affirmative role, which would encourage political conflict and thus public choice. But the commercial objectives of modern journalism demand an impartial media and the avoidance of a
"political" role. So, "fairness" as a practical guideline is applied in "controversial" situations. Without explicit moral guidelines—such as those provided by democratic theory—the mechanism that defines "controversial" is that of consensus. And as the research done by Sigal and Epstein indicates, consensus journalism is largely controlled by administration and establishment office-holders. Thus, some issues are legitimate issues, and others are not legitimate regardless of the perspectives of democratic morality. If those sources that are "authoritative" do not consider an issue "controversial" then it is a non-issue. Thus, the conventions of journalism operate (1) to suppress conflict and access by dissenters, and (2) to sustain a larger political process which keeps certain political questions—no matter how descriptive they are of political inequities—out of the political domain. (see E.E. Schattschneider, 1960; Bachrach and Baratz, 1962) As one network news producer who has won national awards for his documentaries and been cross-examined by a Congressional Committee told me:

Programs are criticized not because they are objective, that is to say, objectively truthful, but rather because the bias goes against the conventional wisdom. It is a hypocrisy that ties to the definition of a "controversial issue." It is society's gate to keep exposure down until the vested interests are ready. The Fairness Doctrine is biased toward the right, not the left. It does not help to get pluralistic debates on television.

My point is not that journalists are afraid to rock the boat, which is largely true, but that the sources they rely upon have common perspectives in defining what is "controversial," i.e., what is an "appropriate" issue to be debated upon and decided.
Even if it does result in the airing of some dissent, though, balance ensures that those backing administration policy always get a hearing: they are usually in a better position than their opponents to air accusations of imbalance against newspapers. (Sigal, 1973, 69)

The argument of this paper, at least the epistemological argument, is that journalists and the public will not recognize those latent issues that are being suppressed without having to frame and defend their own values in the face of dissenting and public debate.

There is a second major criticism to be made of fairness as a concept for structuring public political conversations. Even if fairness motivated affirmative action and there was indeed a pluralistic debate carried by the media, the resulting political consequences would be conservative.

Fairness is the underlying concept of the contemporary liberal apology: pluralism. For decades, American intellectuals have been arguing for a redefinition of the American political ideal, that the political process of bargaining between diverse groups was a sufficient condition for us all to call ourselves a democracy. But as I argued in the first chapter, pluralism is fundamentally a market conception of politics, and as such its consequences legitimize what may appear as majority rule but is in reality outcomes determined by the most powerful groups in the polity, or policies prevented by their veto. Pluralism argues that choice and compromise, per se, will lead us to policies in the public's interest. Yet, alternatives and negotiation result in bargains that favor those with more leverage. In this manner, fairness--by itself--is both amoral and conservative.
In the first chapter, I had used Easton's definition of the subject matter for political science: that politics is the authoritative distribution of values in society. (1953) Therefore, the major task of politics is to define which values, or whose values, will be promoted and whose will be impaired. I also argued that democratic politics, which includes representative politics, holds some values as superior to others, values that benefit the citizenry in equal measure and which sum to a social value which is greater than the simple addition of the differentiated values of the groups in the society. In particular, I argued that when we consider the public political communication in a democratic society, the values that should dominate any analysis, evaluation, and policy alternatives are those of responsible freedom, access, and rationality. In politics, power carries a social purpose. In democratic politics, the purpose is always to be judged publicly by the common good. From this conception flows the potential for systematic policies and evaluations.

But the market conception of liberalism that is labeled pluralism treats "all values in the process as equivalent interest," obviating any higher moral standards by which both process and policies may be judged. (Lowi, 1969, 288) Liberalism is treated as a procedural norm, only, and winning is a measure of moral behavior. Journalists, by adopting fairness as a sufficient guideline, are not only fostering the public's acceptance of pluralism as a sufficiently legitimate doctrine, they are imposing the structure of pluralism upon the public debate.
The intellectual equivalent of pluralism is perhaps best typified by Oliver Wendell Holmes in his famous maxim: "The best test of truth is the power of thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market." (Epstein, 1973, 63) Inherent in Holmes' dependence upon the majority for their definition of truth is the potential for legitimate tyranny. It is at once a stupifying and, fundamentally, anti-intellectual conception. (see also Levinson, 1977, 37ff; and Tussman, 1960, 104ff) Yet that is precisely the rule that is embodied in the concept of fairness as it is employed by the American media. The potential for winning in politics determines who gets access to the media. And it is not an accident, but rather a matter of economic and historical fact, that the same rule conforms to the definition of what is news—in order to maximize the profits of the profit-motivated media.

For example, in 1972 in the context of the California Presidential primary, Senator Humphrey challenged Senator McGovern to a televised debate. The networks offered the senators joint appearances on their regularly scheduled interview programs. Subsequently, two other candidates, Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm and Mayor Sam Yorty, petitioned the FCC and then the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for air time under the equal time provisions of Section 315. In response, all three networks included Chisholm and Yorty in various programs. Reuven Frank, the President of NBC News, calls this a violation of the First Amendment, a restraint upon his freedom to exercise his news judgement. (1972) But "news judgement," according to his own definition, is what interests the most people. Thus, according
to his logic (that is, his political argument), Congresswoman Chisholm deserved no access because she was showing only two percent in the California polls at that time. So "news judgement" is really an act that requires no judgement at all, but is rather a reflexive response. Clearly Frank is arguing for freedom to exercise a discretionary choice according to the criteria of American liberalism. He is attempting to legitimize a criterion which is identical to that of commercialized news and commercialized television entertainment—maximize the audience by producing news that will appeal to the lowest common denominator and which excludes all identifiable, or differently measurable, minorities. In a word, simplistic majority rule. Let us briefly consider Frank's argument, for as President of a network news division, his political argument is both typical and influential.

Frank extends his justification with the argument that the audience was "coerced into watching people they didn't care about." (ibid, 487) His assumptions are, first, that a stated intention not to vote for Chisholm is an argument for denying the majority access to her point of view which would, presumably, challenge the consensus candidates; second, that the minority who did state their intentions to vote for her could be legitimately denied access to her opinions; and third, that the tv audience is indeed "forced" to watch whatever is programmed for them.

Frank's argument simply turns democracy on its head. Regarding that first assumption, the function of campaigning in a democracy is to widen the public debate, not constrain it. Secondly, democratic theory explicitly regards minority rights as superior to
majority rule—in the sense that their rights form an absolute constraint on the majority—and that is the purpose of the First Amendment. (In the election, Chisholm received 4 percent of the primary vote, or 139,000, based upon the Democratic vote in the general election. World Almanac, 1974, 734) Frank states: "It is my understanding that the purpose of the First Amendment was not to achieve freedom to print; that was its method. Its purpose was to keep all government out of all news (meaning government non-interference)."

(ibid, 482) This paper argues just the reverse of that particular purpose/method distinction (see chapter one). The purpose of public political communication was to give voice to the people, to enable them to search for the truth about the social institutions that hold sway over the individual, i.e., to enable individual liberty. The method was, in 1787, to keep the government out of news. Stated another way: the democratic purpose is to free the press from all dominant institutions. The First Amendment was to prevent legal infringement by the government which could be construed as legitimate. All other infringement, including that by economic institutions whose purpose is to maximize capital, is equally illegitimate—if we interpret the First Amendment as a democratic document rather than as a liberal document. Frank's interpretation of the means and ends inherent in the First Amendment leaves him without the responsibility that is found in a democratic interpretation.

The fulcrum of Frank's argument is that newspapers are not obliged to answer to any judicial, executive or legislative questions concerning the exercise of news judgement. Therefore, he argues,
neither should television journalism be responsible to government. But, Frank's argument begs the question: who does define the public's interest and measure media performance? His answer is the editors and the news consumers. Which is another way of saying that news is what sells. It seems clear that Frank advances no other criteria. But, if we were to define news as what informs public knowledge, then we would have the external criteria of access and rationality and a concern for hegemony. Then we could measure the performance of publishers and producers alike, for their responsibilities are identical.

His third assumption is much the same as the second. Defining the issue as one of "coercing" the audience is really disingenuous capitalism. The unstated fear is that the tv program "produced" by the networks will not be watched, that the audience will turn off the program. (See my earlier discussion of "attraction" as a criterion for news.) The conception is that of the public as consumers rather than as citizens.

Frank called this small piece of television's political history a "ludicrous sequence" and a "charade." If there is any transparent pretense--the definition of charade--it may be Frank's argument. He may or may not be confused about the political nature of his argument. Nevertheless, there are obvious and objective truths about the political implications of his argument. If we accept his argument, we stand to be confused about the distinction between his interests--the interests of corporate news production--and our own interests which were admirably served in this case by the federal judiciary who concurred in the petitions for access. (The FCC refused
the petitions.) The greatest moral to this story is that the government can define and support a conception of the public interest which is inherently more democratic than that of NBC.

In a footnote to the situation above and within the context of the Presidential campaign in 1976, CBS made the same argument as Frank in their courtroom defense of access rules. Judge MacKinnon in his opinion noted that if access was increased according to the candidate's "significance" (i.e., strength in public opinion polls), then the voters would naturally select among those who were given access. "Thus, the media's early 'evaluation' becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy." (McCarthy, 1977, 91)

The FCC has legitimized fairness as a sufficiently democratic criteria with its Fairness Doctrine, however. (see above, chapter two) Thus, the networks in 1976 could willingly and legitimately participate in creating the debates between the Democratic and Republican Presidential candidates. (The debates were good business; nearly 100 million watched the first one according to Newsweek, October 4, 1976. They demonstrated the commitment of the tv industry to public service, and they preserved a tradition of priority access for the Chief Executive.) But underlying the debates was a congenial association between the networks, the League of Women Voters and the three branches of the federal government on behalf of the preservation of pluralism as defined by the two parties. (The Supreme Court declined to hear Eugene McCarthy's petition for access as reported by UPI, Honolulu Star-Bulletin, April 4, 1977.) The Fairness Doctrine and the bi-partisan composition of the FCC essentially canonize bi-partisan balance as a
definition of the political universe. Not only are third party candidates such as Eugene McCarthy excluded (though McCarthy did not represent a party, which is in itself an indication of the strength of the bi-partisan cartel), also excluded is any over-riding conception of the public interest. Fairness is the process and outcome of balanced partisans.

Parenthetically, the convention of the Fairness Doctrine operates to keep the FCC, the networks and affiliates from taking responsibility and answering criticism about their massage of the message. Adhering to the Fairness Doctrine is the means by which the networks and affiliates satisfy the administrative rule of the FCC, which is itself the only major potential political and economic check on the industry (in the absence of Congressional action). For the networks, abiding by the Fairness Doctrine insures that the affiliates will clarify the national news for broadcast. (Network news programs are not profitable for local affiliates, but the FCC requires them to broadcast a proportion of national news. Epstein, 1973, 87, 95) More generally, by promulgating the Fairness Doctrine as a standard, the industry maintains its public legitimacy as an authoritative news medium. The bottom line in the financial sense is that the Fairness Doctrine, as a convention for structuring news, is a means of maintaining the audience's attention because it legitimizes and defines news as conflict and drama.

If we unpack one more layer of fairness, we find underneath pluralism there is the overriding simple concept of conflict. Conflict structures much of American news, and it encompasses the conception
of pluralism. Epstein, for example, at one point reports about the literary model of drama:

The networks . . . cast each event, which in itself might not be immediately relevant to the lives of most of those watching, into conflict stories that presumably have universal appeal. "Every news story should, without any sacrifice of probity or responsibility, display the attributes of fiction, of drama," Reuven Frank instructed his staff at NBC.

(1973,241)

Scenes of potential conflict are more interesting to the audience than scenes of placidity. . . . Situations are thus sought out in network news in which there is a high potential for violence, but a low potential for audience confusion. . . . However, even when the conflict involves confusing elements, it usually can be reconstructed in the form of a two-sided conflict. Therefore network news tends to present the news in terms of highly dramatic conflicts between clearly defined sides.

( Ibid,262)

At another point, Epstein labels their model as that of a dialectic:

To enforce these policies (of the Fairness Doctrine), producers of news and documentary programs have adopted what might be called the "dialectical" model for reporting controversial issues, in which the correspondent, after reporting the news happening, juxtaposes a contrasting viewpoint and concludes his synthesis by suggesting that the truth lies somewhere in between. If the correspondent is unable immediately to ferret out or induce a "contrasting viewpoint," producers will usually shelve the film story until an opposing view can be found to provide a balance.

(Ibid,66)

This sort of topographical and epistemological conception in which "between" makes sense is, of course, mad. Jonathan Kozol, in writing about the prevalence of the same banal compromise in public school English classes, makes abundantly clear the political consequences of this emotional and intellectual neutering. (1975) (Similar evaluations about newspapers and mass-circulation magazines can be found in Sigal, 1973,85; and Epstein,1973,241, respectively.)

Similarly, the imperative to write a news story as a conflict was the fundamental cause for the earlier mentioned media treatment of
UN Ambassador Andrew Young's *Playboy* interview. The political consequence was to wash out his politically unifying thoughts. Writing it as a divisive statement, the media treatment reversed his meaning. (see Appendix A.)

Conflict is exciting; it makes news attractive and irresistible. But to label the media's cognitive theory of political reality as that of drama and conflict is both charitable and misleading. Their version of drama and dialectic is an aborted form of each. Of course they involve power struggles. But drama and dialectic are conceptual structures for analyzing the progress and resolution of power struggles and the eventual dominance of one particular value or set of values (or some sort of compromise). To view politics as conflict and only conflict--without considering its impact on public policies--is a mindless reduction that creates a barrier to democratic behavior as rational behavior.

In the example of Andrew Young's interview, the expected political consequences for the public's perception and cognitions of American politics are simultaneously conservative, negative and irrational. The consequences are conservative because the media did not focus the public's attention on the political issue of racism that was being raised, allowing the status quo to persist. The logical public response to this presentation of politicians is that of cynicism and hostility, whether or not it is deserved. And the media fundamentally distorted the inherent meaning in the matter.

I had earlier discussed the myth of objectivity as a rationale for the journalists' profitable emphasis upon politics as
either for the purpose of personal profit or for insuring votes. However, conflict is the explanatory variable in that equation. Elections and rip-offs are both zero-sum games, and they are both logical consequences of conceiving politics as pluralistic conflict. Elections are, in fact, one of the all time great stories for the American media. (see for example Crouse, 1972) The simple focus is on winning and losing. But, "straining for a story line," in Robinson's phrase, network television defines winners and losers according to their own pre-conceived expectations and definition of the horse-race. In his discussions of tv coverage of the New Hampshire primaries in 1968 and 1972, Robinson notes: "In 1968, Eugene McCarthy lost New Hampshire to an incumbent President by 7.7 percent and was declared the 'winner' by the networks. In 1972, George McGovern lost to front-runner Edmund Muskie by 9.3 percent and was declared the 'winner' by the networks." (1978,43) "This is not to say that the networks ever gave the wrong information. They merely gave the wrong impression--thematically." (1975,113) In building a horse race, the media coverage of American elections does not focus on the role of the parties or on ideological distinctions or even on any sustained coherent discussion of the relevant issues. Concerning television's coverage of the 1976 campaign, Steven Scheuer wrote "(Working tv newsmen) thought the coverage of the campaign was disgraceful. . . . There was not . . . a single solitary prime-time program which examined, in detail, the major issues of the Presidential campaign and carefully compared where each of the candidates stood on such incredibly important issues as defense
spending. Not once did the networks in prime time point up the inconsistencies in the speeches and proposals made by both Ford and Carter." (1976)

A natural consequence of the emphasis upon elections, to the exclusion of issues and performance, is to reinforce the continuation of politics as symbolic exchanges, from Edelman's perspective. So long as American journalism fosters the perception of such dramatic confrontations and thus hold our attention as an audience by providing us with politics as soap opera, we will be unlikely to analyze the tangible exchange coming from American politics. Nor will we be likely to attempt to alter the incremental institutional effects of both American politics and media which arise from the politics of pluralism -- in which public policy is moved erratically forward as an outcome of the jousting by various powerful interests over a sequence of "temporary crises."

At some very bottom bedrock level, the American journalistic conception of fairness and conflict creates a dangerous ignorance about the causes and consequences of politics. Fairness carries no criteria for truth. Speaking of its most explicit form, the FCC interpretation of the Fairness Doctrine, Epstein states:

It can, however, seriously conflict with the value that journalists place on investigative reporting, the purpose of which is "getting to the bottom" of an issue or "finding the truth," as correspondents put it. Since a correspondent is required to present contrasting points of view, even if he finds the views of one side to be valid and those of the other side to be false and misleading (in the Fairness Doctrine . . . truth is no defense), any attempt to resolve a controversial issue and find "the truth" can become self-defeating. (1973, 67-68)
Nor is this framework of fairness conducive to questioning the arguments presented, or exposing the weakness or superiority of one or another side in a controversy. For even to appear to favor one side might be construed as an unfair presentation by network executives who closely monitor the news. Quite inadvertently, the fairness standards encourage rhetoric and even demagoguery, at least to the degree that spokesmen in a controversy are aware that their arguments are not likely to be questioned.

(ibid,264)

To argue that the public is informed about any issue of consequence by the simple juxtaposition of brief statements by any two spokesmen is to argue for a rhetoric of irrationality. Ignorance and irrationality are the logical consequences because journalism focuses upon the conflicts in politics, excluding the public's understanding of the rational system which is inherent in our political institutions as well as excluding understanding of those pluralistic values inherent in our political institutions and those democratic values excluded by them.

Ignorance and irrationality can be taught away. And yet, there is another consequence of American journalism that follows from the assumptions of news, objectivity and balance which is not susceptible to teaching in the classroom sense. There is the subtle and profound lesson inherent in American journalism that the legitimacy of government is always a matter of question. It is in this sense that journalism is always questioning political rhetoric. It reports about politics within its own attitude of cynicism, assuming that all political rhetoric is hyperbole, and hence false, not to be explicitly challenged or confirmed on the basis of evidence. Their lesson is one that is not subject to evidence, nor is it an explicit argument that is open to debate. Instead, it is made by the steady repetition of that same song of doubtful legitimacy. Only the words change with each deadline. The logic of that argument begins with the constant focus on
political conflict. (Robinson has made a persuasive empirical confirmation of this causal hypothesis between journalism and our political malaise—that increased reliance upon television news leads to a decreased understanding of politics and, consequently, to declining legitimacy on the part of the public for their government. However, Robinson is looking at just television journalism, he does not focus on the causal factor of organized commercial imperatives, and his conception of the public interest is unclear. 1975)

Conflict and disputation really are the stuff of which news is made. Media coverage of political news tends to follow a pattern, which Epstein makes very clear:

It is generally assumed that high-ranking figures of authority involved in heated conflicts or challenges to their authority are more likely to produce news than news makers who are explicating developments or policies in a complex world. The more heated the dispute or challenge, the more certain the story.

(1973,261)

The loci of these (organizational imperatives) are situations involving challenges to authority. Since the amount of time that can be allotted to a story is limited to a few minutes, both because of network scheduling and the need to separate commercial messages, it is generally not possible to present all the reasons for a challenge. Nor, given the networks' fairness standards, is there an incentive to evaluate the validity of the challenge, though the very fact that challenges are prominently featured as news gives them some presumption of legitimacy. By comparison, the legitimizing myths of authority, which depend on complex historical analogies and cannot easily be illustrated by current news happenings, suffer for want of explanation.

Moreover, the requirement to present conflicts as disputes between no more than two equally matched sides tends to reduce complex issues, which may have a multitude of dimensions, to a simple conflict between protesters (or nonauthorities) and authorities. When this is presented in the usual story form of rising action, confrontation and denouement, the visually presented issue becomes simply one of the protesters' right to protest or the authorities' right to suppress the protest.
In this version of the news, change always seems relatively easy to accomplish, since the more complex reasons for tempering change--such as economic feasibility, minority interest and possible consequences in other areas--are neglected by a purely visual presentation. 

(ibid, 266)

Robinson states it somewhat differently:

When there is planned violence, or violence that takes place through an extended period of time, the networks can be expected to move enormous amounts of equipment to the staging area. The coverage of the battle of Wounded Knee was a finest hour--in terms of television needs. But, if there is nothing of that nature transpiring, nothing to meet the theme of social discord, the networks can shift to closely-related themes. Intragovernmental conflict is another theme that the networks continue to utilize. Senators fighting with businessmen, bureaucrats, each other, is a popular theme; so are governmental unresponsiveness and governmental laxity. David Brinkley, Hughes Rudd and Charles Kuralt have virtually built their television careers on the theme that our government functions badly and that it used to work far better than it does now.

(1975, 113)

Such an ironic role depends upon the assumption that journalists have no effect upon the political messages they communicate (as I have discussed under "objectivity" above). Consequently, their adversary stance appears justified.

The role of journalist as adversary stands on two very old and useful legitimizing assumptions. First, it is assumed that government tends to enlarge its domain of legitimate power. Second, it is assumed that government tends to maintain the benefits for those who have power. Consequently, democrats argue that if the public understands and participates with government, there will be a context in which individual freedom and policies in the public interest are more likely than not. But contemporary journalists have rewritten those assumptions. They assume that government is the only social institution that threatens individual liberty and thus ignore the other social institutions which are increasing their degree of hegemony in
in our social lives. Journalism also ignores the fundamental legitimacy of government—that individual liberty is achieved by politically limiting the potential for any one individual or group to maximize its power. Secondly, they assume that corruption is the logical outcome of politics—the only outcome—and thus they ignore the value choices inherent in governmental policies. The combination of "objective" journalist with that of the "adversary" allows for that short step within social-psychology from the perception of the self as pure to the perception of the other as immoral.

Epstein provides us with an example of one such morality play. He compared tv and newspaper coverage of the Republican Governors Conference in December of 1968:

Since television was not allowed to film most of the meetings that took place at the six-day conference, the only film that NBC had to work with was obtained on the last day of the meeting, when the governors posed for the cameramen on horse-back, in Western hats, and then proceeded to a barbecue, which the press attended. . . . What was reported in the newspapers as an effort to reach political agreement on the Nixon Administration's programs appeared on television as a "holiday from politics," a "turn from reality" and an odd sort of horse opera. In this case, the film which was available determined the story, not vice versa.

(1973,38-39)

Epstein draws the wrong conclusion, I believe. The film may have suggested the story, but it did not determine it. The film could have served as a visual counterpoint to a verbal story much like the viewpoint of the newspaper coverage. It did not, I suggest, because of the television imperative for visual and verbal conflict, and because of the inherent position of the media as them and the public against government.
George Crile provides another example of a morality play, describing the manner in which the press bestowed access and authenticity to ex-CIA agents who were critical of the Agency while depriving another agent of those self same rights who was supporting the Agency. He describes how the press, in its contribution to the public debate over threats to our freedoms from internal institutions, "has chosen to write a straightforward melodrama." Casting the issue in terms of good and evil, "CIA demonologists (are) often accepted as straightforward muckrakers... No longer is the journalist just another advocate: the advocate becomes the journalist and cites anonymous sources to document grisly stories... Escalating a legitimate controversy into political theater it becomes far less likely that a sensible course of action will be pursued to correct the abuses being investigated."(1976)

Arthur Miller has provided us with what can be read as a fable about this characteristic of American journalism. The politics of moral absolutism are called theocracies. Both tentative values and social facts are irrelevant in theocratic politics. The major concerns are obeisance and obedience. A compelling example is found in Miller's The Crucible:

DANFORTH: In an ordinary crime, how does one defend the accused? One calls up witnesses to prove his innocence. But witchcraft is, ipso facto, on its face and by its nature, an invisible crime, is it not? Therefore, who may possibly be witness to it? The witch and the victim. None other. Now we cannot hope the witch will accuse herself; granted? Therefore, we must rely upon her victims—and they do testify, the children certainly do testify. As for the witches, none will deny that we are most eager for all their confessions. Therefore, what is left for a lawyer to bring out? I think I have made my point. Have I not?
HALE: But this child claims the girls are not truthful, and if they are not--

DANFORTH: That is precisely what I am about to consider, sir. (1952,96)

If the children were to argue, like journalism, that their perceptions are objective (or immaculate, depending upon your choice of rhetoric) the outcome of the public trial is foregone.

Simple morality tales--fables--are essentially the predominance of value assumptions over reality tests. (see above, chapter one.) Little wonder that systematic criticism and rational policy analysis (using explicit value positions and empirically confirmed information) looks irrelevant. The main story of a morality play is an impervious irrationality. What develops in the contemporary journalistic conception of the adversary role is that the journalists are the good guys and the government is the bad guys. More properly, the subtle and devastating consequence of the media's imperative to perceive politics as dramatized conflict, tied to its own role definition of neutral observer, is disestablishmentarianism. The consequence of this institutionalized political cynicism is more than viewing one politician as venal, it is to view all politicians as venal. Not only is one particular regime corrupted, the American institutions for politics are corrupted. The logical policy is to "liquidate the beast" in Crile's phrase, which may go a long way toward explaining the anti-government populism that is appearing in our politicians and citizenry alike.

I began this essay with Henry Fairlie's observations about Jimmy Carter's campaign rhetoric. As time progressed and the logic of
this essay developed toward my unexpected populist thesis, political history has also unfolded and provided an unwelcome confirmation of the populist impulse. To watch the Carter campaign machine and the Carter Administration at work is to watch neither leadership nor effective politics, neither American democracy nor American pluralism. What we see is a man more comfortable with the rhetoric of democracy in his focus on human rights than with the deep understanding of its coherent and "radical" implications. As Benjamin Barber said, leadership arises out of neither great men nor great challenges, but out of great purposes. Jimmy Carter may be a great man, but there is little evidence that he understands the pragmatic categorical imperatives that are contained within the democratic faith. There is ample evidence to suggest that America is backsliding in its practice of democratic politics and in its maintenance of the economic and social conditions necessary for a democratic polity. We cannot fault our President for his ability to change these things, because the office is severely constrained by many forces. But we can fault his understanding of the situation and his evaluation thereof. The uncomfortable truth is that it may not be his fault at all. It may be that the American political culture--of which American journalism is perhaps the major participant--is now more than ever structured to admit a particular kind of politician--candidates who appear as plastic populists, but are disguised electoral technicians with the capability of understanding and using the system to gain office. The system neither understands and appreciates the great purposes of democracy, nor does it test its own institutions and its leaders against those ideals.
To summarize fairness

I have argued that the journalistic convention of fairness is an effective operating rule for all journalists (with the exception of political columnists). It could be written and used as an affirmative code, encouraging and even stipulating access by those with diverse viewpoints. However, in practice it is applied only in "controversial" situations, and because journalism is "objective" and thus reactive to the establishment, fairness discourages access by dissenters. Thus, fairness is a synonym for pluralism; it is a market conception of politics which treats all values as equal, and thus it is the powerful who rule in determining access to the podium. Fairness defines the political universe as two balancing partisans, hence it hinders access by third (and fourth, etc.) parties. It is, more basically, a conception of politics as conflict which makes news a more irresistible product. Fairness as the limiting perception of political conflict, focuses on and thus preserves the position of those groups in power, excluding those without. Without an attachment to pragmatic ideals, the presentation of politics as only conflict results in public hostility toward politicians and political institutions. It distorts the meaning inherent in an issue, that is to say it is a mechanism for preventing our understanding. Without a public discussion of the values that are in the public's interest, we cannot evaluate the politics that we see, nor can we rationally plan our future course.

Fairness, when combined with the assumptions of news and objectivity, results in the journalists' self-conception as an
adversary, and particularly as a moral adversary; and thus political institutions are viewed as immoral and the logical public response is populism.

Conclusion

In conclusion, American journalism is a product of capitalist economic institutions, which developed and maintained a set of working assumptions--news, objectivity and fairness. But in each case, and cumulatively, these assumptions lead to public political discussions that view politics as a marketplace, that is fundamentally a rhetoric of irrationality, and that tends to support populism because of its cynical role. Profit oriented mass journalism also tends to support the control aspects of modern populism which remains in the hands of political and economic elites. Ironically, the policies of those elites which may seem fruitful for the very near future, have consistently contained enormous detrimental consequences which might have been foreseen but for the irrational public consciousness in which they were conceived and implemented. Our public policies--governmental and non-governmental, political and economic--neither benefit the public nor the elite, for we are all in it together. In a word, the dominant logic of capitalistic journalism leads inexorably to a devastating conclusion--anti-democratic.

Her insanity was of the kind that has within it everything, but with no order, no focus, and therefore nothing. The self is obliterated by a whirlwind of people, things, and events. Life is an expanding scream. Nothing but unconsciousness can make it stop, or being plucked out of it bodily and told to do this and to do that. This latter is not a solution; it is a reprieve.

Kenneth Bernard, "Reprieve" (Harper's, September, 1975)
CHAPTER FOUR

SUMMARY AND ALTERNATIVES

There is more to be said about American journalism than I have written here. (And, I fear, better said, or differently said.) At the same time, the acknowledgement of complexity can become an apology. We can make too much of that and self-impose ignorance. The world is knowable. In this essay I have tried to cut to the essence of the matter, to define and interrelate what seem to be the most crucial of the concepts.

Journalism, as society's public intelligence system, plays a prime role in society's delicate attempt to achieve both control and purpose, both identity and understanding, both community and self-consciousness. That is, perhaps, the fundamental question. The analog of that question can be seen in the scientific paradigm, which is why I began this essay with a discussion of epistemology. The lesson of epistemology is that values, in large measure, determine the causal relations that we see. And so the essay also began with the explicit choice of values, which is a way of gaining control over those values. In addition, I wanted to be in a position of being able to suggest policy alternatives. Both epistemology and policy analysis considerations lead to the adoption of one political philosophy as relevant--democratic theory.
Democratic norms are widely held in our culture, but poorly understood. Someone once said that democracy seldom needs justification, only those departures from it. Perhaps that is true after considerable reflection, but I do not believe that it is generally true in our society. The evidence presented in this essay illustrates that fact, as well as the common perception of this essay as "radical." Yet the simple question this essay poses is: What would our public political communication system look like if it were democratic?

The philosophy of democracy, more than any other I believe, poses the solution--however imperfectly--to the twin goals of community and self-consciousness. It has the enormous potential of making reality more problematic, more amenable to improvement. It can also reveal the potential, the possibilities that inhere in humanity. It is fairly useful to consider that our political and cultural institutions conspire to close down our options, to reduce negotiables into givens. They would transform us into consumers, accepting the choices defined by others. The balance is always conservative. Democratic theory stands outside what we have achieved, reminding us of what there is yet to be done. The most powerful argument for our faith in democracy lies in its being a process for the production of knowledge in the largest sense, or its poetic metaphor--truth.

And so I began this essay with the express purpose of measuring the legitimacy of the major American institutions of journalism. I proposed a set of evaluative criteria which seem to be logically inherent in democratic theory, which are part of the
optimistic conceptual idea of "citizen," and which enable us to define politics in the public interest, and equally, to define political communication in the public interest.

First I argued that participation in the political debate is obligatory for those engaging in political acts--as a means for accounting for the consequences of their actions. Second, one of the preeminent responsibilities of those who do participate is to encourage the conditions and accessibility necessary for all others to participate who are significantly affected by any political issue. Those who exercise their freedom responsibly encourage the access of others. Third, I argued that the subject for democratic politics is, and always has been, hegemony. Its purpose is to reduce hegemony, to insure and create freedom--in the egalitarian sense meant by T.H. Green and C.B. Macpherson--by either public or private social action, whichever is the lesser evil in that particular context. The last criteria was the imperative for intelligence within the individual and as a characteristic of our public discourse--the task of integrating fact and value in our quest for knowledge and policy analysis. This standard, if we were to begin with it, requires all of the others. Participation in community political debate is the school for self-responsibility. It reveals one's own potential for achievement and responsibility. Access to the perspectives of others is crucial to political self-consciousness of one's own values, and for separating and controlling the effects of those values on one's understanding of the world. In a word, access is the solution to irrationality. Access is equally crucial to insuring one's own freedoms through participation in policy
debate, and for attempting to learn about and improve the freedoms of others. That task could be considered the essence of democratic politics: the building and moving of majorities (and minorities) for the purpose of increasing the positive freedoms of everyone. Thus, there is ample justification for the roles of authoritative leadership and accountable representation within democratic theory. (see Kaufman, 1969,207) Democracy is not a means for achieving unlimited freedom for the individual. That is a defective and corrupting conception. Democracy--authentic democracy--is a means for enhancing everyone's freedom. It is a social means for achieving social values which are measured by each individual.

When we examine contemporary American journalism from this democratic perspective, its achievements seem few and the visible trends are depressing. The success of American journalism depends upon its misrepresentation of its role in the political process. The rhetoric of objectivity is used to avoid consideration of the political role played by journalism, and to censor the political content of statements made by others. The myth of objectivity operates to truncate, personalize, and sensationalize those substantive political issues that are raised by our political and economic institutions. Access is generally biased in favor of those individuals in formal positions of political and economic power, rather than in favor of analyses of personalities and institutions, issues and trends. Consequently, the political and economic hegemony that does define our society is not on the agenda, only messages intended to justify political and economic power, and to maintain its control. Reflecting our market conceptions
of politics and society, the relative gains and losses of the contending dominant institutions is frequently a subject for political debate. The standards of intelligence, of moral responsibility and rationality, are so misunderstood and misapplied that the messages we do hear, whether from partisan or dissenter, are garbled beyond intelligibility. This essay can be seen as a case study for Roelofs' description of the American self-sustaining, often violent, cycle of political process which never understands itself, and thus cannot solve its problems. It describes what Hartz called a colossal liberal absolutism. It is irrational. Considering that American journalism is the political education system for nearly all American adults, it is no wonder that Americans are confused, apathetic and hostile toward politics as a primary social process. As the economy continues to flounder through such crises as stagflation, and it surely will, we can expect the political impact of American journalism will be toward unstable mass populist movements. For the people are powerless without a conscious conception of the democratic ideal, in its complexities, and the empirically substantiated and public debated measurements of current political policies, evaluated from the perspective of the democratic benchmark. On balance, when we closely examine the performance of American journalism with the evidence I have presented in chapters two and three, it does not measure up. It is illegitimate. Worse than that, it is performing a profound job of dismantling much of the social characteristics necessary to democratic society and democratic government.
Some might want to argue that democracy is too far out, that we should not lead the people anywhere, just do the best job with the present system. Aside from the erroneous (and politically justificatory) presumption that journalism is not leading us somewhere now, the question is worth considering. Does journalism measure up to the operating ideology we have now? Many call ours a pluralistic system where multiple, competing representatives determine public policy through a process of bargaining and compromise with voters choosing among competing political parties for their leaders.

Drawing from chapter one, we should clearly understand that this revised, empirical theory is based upon the utilitarian conception of man who needs power to insure his consumption of utilities and his accumulation of capital. It treats democracy as a mechanism for maintaining the present "assumed" equilibrium. This market conception of politics is essentially amoral, and distinctly antithetical to democratic theory. Moreover, pluralism as a revised democratic theory does not fit as an empirical description of American politics. The best description of American politics, as Dye and Zeigler take great pains to illustrate, is a thinly disguised elitist system, with many public decisions made by private institutions. (1978) America, by any observation, has an increasingly centralized economy which is becoming dominated by the institutions and practices of monopoly capitalism, often in the form of multi-national corporations. This economic system is protected, legitimized, and presumably supported by a welfare government, both of which lead us into seemingly insoluble problems such as stagflation.
The irony of this increasing institutional centralization and
dominance is that American journalism does not properly fulfill the
information and control tasks which either a pluralist or an elitist
system requires--because the communication system itself is not
democratic. The American public seems increasingly hostile toward both
government and business. The public attitude flows, in part, from the
bias of journalism which sensationalizes and disconnects all systemic
accidents, breakdowns and failures. Of course, the public's attitude
may also reflect a primitive understanding that capitalism, when left
alone, cannot be trusted to be socially responsible, and that government
seems incompetent to make substantive corrections. John Stuart Mill
reminded us that any elitist system is similarly flawed, particularly
elitist governments. Likewise, the public may have an impervious
understanding that capitalism contains an unavoidable element of
exploitation, as does any sanctioned denial of self-determination.
Corporations tend to see these attitudes, as they are manifested in
public opinion polls, as problems for public relations; others might
see them as causes for public debate and public policy.

What is truly ironic, though, is that both corporate and
government elites depend upon journalism for much of their understanding
of the world. This knowledge environment, since it contains no
standards for truth, is corrupted by the imperatives of its own
capitalism into reflecting the reality preferred by the elites
themselves.

Fortunately, reality in all its manifold complexities is
recalcitrant. It refuses to be commanded. The same short-term
utilitarian motive that enlarges the executive salaries of government and business and labor also produces some equally tangible social disabilities such as decreased individual freedom and responsibility, stagflation, the exhaustion of our natural resources, the dominance of defense expenditures in our national budget, and the industrial and product pollution of our environment which becomes the prime cause of cancer and other illnesses. No one escapes those kind of social expenses, as John Donne so eloquently reminded us.

How else do we explain that American foreign policy and the CIA (that paragon of institutionalized intelligence) persistently create the opposite effects intended in Vietnam, Cuba and the Bay of Pigs, Chile, and more recently Angola? An equally troubling, but less well-know example, can be made for Korea. (see Paige, 1977) The fundamental unavoidable explanation lies in the intellectual vacuum that characterizes this country's public political thought and which allows American political and economic barons to persist in the arrogant delusion that they know better than the rest of us. Their private delusion is insured to the extent that journalism corrupts public political debate by suppressing dissenters, or by trivializing their arguments. If there is no public discussion of means and ends, beliefs and values, there can be no private knowledge.

We could consider that the basic problem with American journalism is the problem of institutionalizing anything, particularly what Mark Roelofs calls "the most fragile and precious feature of the nations's democracy, its political dialogue."(1976, 191) Epstein certainly argues that institutions have unavoidable and uncontrollable
consequences. "The point is not to change news, but to understand its limitations." (1973, 273) (see Epilogue, below) The rational response to Epstein's political argument is, of course, political quiescence—the dream of barons and bureaucrats alike. Politics, and especially democratic politics, is based upon the presumption of, and historical struggle for, institutional virtue.

Organization, leadership, and representation (qualities that journalism likes to see in itself) are not necessarily antithetical to democratic theory. They depend upon theory being properly applied, as both natural and social science have hesitatingly proven in the past few centuries. With regard to American journalism, the more revealing question is: What public purpose has been institutionalized? To what purpose is it accountable? It may state its intentions with some incoherent democratic rhetoric, but its measurement of success is always the bottom line of the accountant's ledger.

The real problem, the one so powerful that no one raises it seriously in the media, is in the attempt to fulfill a democratic standard—the public interest—by a capitalist institution. Thus, concerns about size and monopoly, valid as they may be, will not solve the basic problem. Capitalist journalism imposes market conceptions of society and politics upon our public discussions.

Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes was born in that decade which marked for Hartz and for American journalism that consensual American dream of the democratic capitalist. Holmes has burdened our administrative and judicial language with his deleterious metaphor: "The best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the
competition of the market." (Epstein, 1973, 63) The identification of deliberation with bargaining is outrageous, and the concept of forum should be substituted. But Holmes' metaphor is used by the FCC to justify its Fairness Doctrine: "Individual broadcasters are assumed to be the marketplace itself," and "each station must itself supply the competing viewpoints." (Epstein, 1973, 64, 63) It is not a bad idea of the public interest if the FCC were to act it out. Similar arguments have been advanced for including newspapers within the same judicial standard. (see Friendly, 1974; Barron, 1969)

Behind the FCC definition of access is a more basic problem, that of direct access. Political statements should be unedited. Journalists who have heard that proposal raise several objections. First, they tell us, readers and listeners would be faced with a lot of dull material. Politicians cannot write. That objection is, in part, an economic objection. Editing allows news to be made attractive. Furthermore, no one ever argued that politics, democratic or not, was easy. If politicians are unable to express themselves, we had better know that instead of being carried along as we are with professional journalists who re-write for the public what a professional press secretary has written for the journalists. Direct and stipulated access might encourage politicians to say something useful, as well as to encourage others to act as citizens by creating a skeptical (but not cynical) counter dialogue. For political conflict is contagious, it tends to get the audience involved as Schattschneider reminded us. (1960) Those who recognize this truth make politics the strategy of controlling and limiting access. But democracy was intended to be a
process which would encourage access. Journalism, by suppressing the political debate, only insures the unaccountability of those who are left alone to make political decisions for us all.

Journalists also argue that direct access is unaccountable access, that political statements need to be set in the context of history and other perspectives. Journalists do not add those perspectives nearly as often as they would like to think. Nevertheless, the democratic imperative for access does not preclude journalists themselves from having access. In fact, journalists have substantial justification for access to the forum because they have greater resources for creating public knowledge, and they have greater access to officials through press conferences. They are representing the public, and that explains the role of The Washington Post in Watergate. What the democratic imperative denies, however, is that journalists by profession should be the sole arbiters of access and substance. Accountability for them, too, comes from access by divergent political perspectives, which may help explain the role the press played in Nixon's gaining the White House in the first place.

The myth of objectivity does much to justify journalistic editing and access policies. Democratic theory denies that individuals and institutions can attempt and create political consequences without being responsible for those consequences. That responsibility can be acknowledged by journalists speaking in their own voice. Similarly, the responsibility of journalists is limited by letting others take
responsibility for their own political statements. This is not such a radical proposal as it seems, some journalists have made the argument for themselves. (see Crouse, 1972, 324-328)

Journalists, when talking about stipulated access (which is how the Fairness Doctrine might be interpreted), raise the spectre of a cacaphony of voices, all shouting for the public ear. I think this is a strawdog that serves to protect the editorial domain. Without stipulated access, minorities and dissenters are speechless and powerless, as Reuven Frank's self-serving political argument demonstrates. (1972) Senator Eugene McCarthy has had considerable experience with that kind of censorship. He proposed an intelligent set of criteria for deciding among competing demands for access:

First, if someone is talking or writing nonsense, and it is irrelevant nonsense, there is no obligation to spread the word. Second, if someone is talking nonsense and having an effect, the press has, I believe, as a monopoly or near monopoly, an obligation to report the nonsense. It can and should challenge it with counter-information and analysis. (his example: George Wallace) . . . Third, if someone is speaking sense and having an effect, there is obviously an obligation to report it. And fourth, if someone is saying things that do make sense, and that have relevance to current problems, even though there is no immediate evidence that what is being said is having any significant effect, these things should be reported. It is in this fourth case that the failure of the press is most evident.

(1977)

If we look at McCarthy's proposal closely, we can see a democratic decision-making rule for the agenda of public debate, a decision-making rule that makes clear the responsibility of publishers, editors, producers and journalists as our agents for managing the agenda of public debate. It would open access to those who are not represented at the public podium. Not representation as it is understood in the American sense of bi-partisanship, but in its egalitarian sense, or at
in a proportional representation sense. But of course, the use of these criteria presupposes the condition that McCarthy found absent: the public assumption of the political role that editors play. (McCarthy explained this absence because editors were "indifferent or careless.")

Proposals could be suggested for increasing direct governmental regulation of all media in order to realize the intent of the First Amendment--such as raising the "magic numbers" of broadcast licensees for news and public affairs, forcing divestiture of news operations from entertainment and other conglomerate operations, and requiring public accounting of all businesses which claim journalism. However, direct regulation may not be very effective in creating the conditions which would rationally lead to more desired results. Other government policies could directly enhance the ability of non-profit journalism to survive and become effective, as well as remove government tax-subsidies and protection for profit-journalism. The supposition here is that liberty can be a result of state action, and that profit-journalism is fundamentally antagonistic to a democratic conception of public political discussions.

The necessity for structural reform comes from an understanding of a more elemental contradiction. Can we reasonably expect an institution built upon authoritarian principles such as capitalism to produce a product which is democratic in substance and consequence? That is the crucial question of our time, which dates in modern history from John Stuart Mill, and which we can see reflected in such diverse contemporary crises as the misapplication of Dewey's philosophy of
education (Hofstadter, 1962, 390), imminent resource depletion and ecological disasters (Bateson, 1970), and the current Israeli policy of disenfranchising the Palestinian refugees, inside and outside their borders. (Allman, 1978) The democratic process is more important than its goal, for we can never be certain of any final solution. A concern for the nature of the way we go about solving our problems and improving our society will tend to insure against any final solutions, as well as tend to insure the immediate achievement of much we do value in a democratic society—life, liberty, security, equality, and community. Reforms relating to size, profitability, and even governmental policy are all concessions to market conceptions. The most substantive reform must be toward what is often called industrial democracy, i.e., transforming the labor union of political journalism into a democratic profession that controls its own process and product (with all the attendant benefits and ills that come with professional institutions).

This logic may seem to contain a paradox: How can undemocratic institutions with anti-democratic consequences become democratic? The paradox is resolved by the application of human intelligence to social problems. Democracy is not antithetical to organization, leadership, and representation so long as those agencies are rationally used in a reasonably democratic manner for reasonably democratic purposes. (see Kaufman, 1969, 206-211) Competence and responsibility can be characteristics of American journalism, if journalists are given the freedom and direction to grow into them. That is one half of the conclusion to this essay on American journalism. When we get down to
the bottom of the barrel, we are left with our willingness to make democracy a matter faith and a matter of practice. It will not happen unless we trust the people, trust ourselves, let us educate ourselves and be responsible for ourselves.

Behind faith and practice, there remains the question of purpose. American journalism remains a latent political issue of the first magnitude precisely because this country is nearly devoid of a conscious political philosophy. Hartz nicely characterizes us as Hercules with the brain of a Hamlet. Our ability as a nation, or better as a part of the community of Western civilization, to solve visible problems like incipient nuclear warfare, monopoly capitalism, welfare government and predictable ecological disasters, much less the silent and more basic problems of raising the capacity and opportunity for individuals to achieve their unique human powers, depends upon our conscious sense of purpose and process. Political consciousness will come only from a public debate about purpose and process which originates from diverse and identifiable political perspectives. Let there be no mistake about it, the democratic concept of political communication in the public interest is one essential condition for a surviving humane society. Democratic theory is coherent, useful, and attainable.
CHAPTER FIVE

EPILOGUE

In the preface to this essay, I introduced the argument that knowledge—if it is to be useful to us in understanding, evaluating, and intelligently altering our present condition—must begin with a set of relevant values (following Myrdal and Thompson). Otherwise, the dominant values of the culture will direct our understanding and policies, and we will be subject to them. The essay itself is intended as a demonstration of that epistemology and its utility for both scientists and citizens in a democracy.

Within the essay, particularly chapters one and three, I expanded that argument, saying that "objective" newsmen were, in fact, enhancing the values of capitalist corporations which depend upon the dominance of marketplace conceptions of politics. That is the journalistic bias and their rationalization which ostensibly support democracy but in fact undermines democracy.

To support my argument, I relied heavily upon the evidence, the causal theories about journalism, found in a few lengthy studies of American journalism. So it is fair to ask how my argument differs from theirs, how I can conclude with a recommendation that is radical and not widely shared in the professional, much less the journalistic, literature.
Typically, these authors present evidence that journalism, in one medium or another, consistently influence the public political communication system in such a way that can easily be characterized as anti-democratic. Yet, they stop short of moving toward political recommendations that would appear effective from the perspectives of this essay. (see Barber, 1975; Crile, 1976; Epstein, 1973; Fairlie, 1976b; Hohenberg, 1973; McCarthy, 1977; Phillips, 1977; Rivers, 1970; Robinson, 1975; Sigal, 1973) It would be glib to characterize some of them as elitist—which is in fact the logical political consequence of their own conclusions. Yet that is an argument they should make for themselves. Let us assume that perhaps they do not have a clear conception of the public interest as it is defined by democratic theory. Further, let us consider that their empirical theories are defective, that they either lack appreciation of social structure as an important explanatory variable, or that they subscribe to the Iron Law of Oligarchy, i.e., democracy is unattainable. (cf. Kaufman, 1969) Many of these authors, in one way or another, serve as an example for Myrdal's argument about the ability of unexamined values to bias research and policy recommendations.

Those that avoid considering institutional causes assume that journalism is a product of rational self-directed individuals operating in a social environment that does not steadily bias their work in a predictable, commercially-satisfying, direction. Thus, they can conclude by exhorting journalists to work harder. When organizational imperatives are accounted for, they are placed within an empirical/
evaluative context that makes organizational imperatives for individual behavior appear immutable, and thus the organizations and the individual journalists within those organizations are beyond accountability. They are irresponsible.

An example of the individualistic conception of journalism is Henry Fairlie's comments in *The New Republic*. (1976b) Writing about the columnists' performance during the Ford-Carter campaign of 1976, he made an especially penetrating evaluation which echoes the democratic theory and history of Macpherson, Hofstadter and Hartz. "There is no way in which the newspapers and television can ultimately escape from the fact that they are in bondage to an economic view of human aspiration. . . . (Journalists') primary fault is not to recognize or acknowledge that their--my--whole profession is trapped in a diminishing concept of human aspiration." Fairlie exhorts his fellow journalists to make their moral commitments explicit, but he does not consider the institutional causes and obstacles which would explain his analysis.

Edward J. Epstein wrote his book for his Ph.D. in Political Science at Harvard. The book is a particularly charming example of the way that unexamined values leave us powerless, for he presupposes the Iron Law of Oligarchy.

His thesis is: "To what extent are the directions that large organizations take, whether they are political parties, city governments, business corporations or whatever, determined by pressures to satisfy internal needs rather than by external circumstances or even long-range goals? . . . The particular output, the formulation of
'news,' might then be explicable in terms of what the news organization had to do to stay in business. (emphasis mine) (1973,xiv) His research affirms his hypothesis. "(The book) does argue that certain consistent directions in selecting, covering and reformulating events over long-term periods are clearly related to organizational needs." (ibid,xviii)

But there is no political--much less democratic--value standard that is expressed by Epstein. Democracy is either of no concern to Epstein, or we have gone just about as far as we can go. Consequently, after listing the way that network news defines American society ("by the problems of a few urban areas rather than the entire nation, by action rather than ideas, by dramatic protests rather than substantive contradictions, by rhetorical dialogues rather than the resolution of issues, by elite newsmakers rather than economic and social structures, by atypical rather than typical views"), Epstein concludes with "The point is not to change news, but to understand its limitations." (ibid,272,273)

Epstein does at one point cover the FCC's definition of the public interest as it is expressed in the Fairness Doctrine. His discussion of this subject is revealing. (ibid,63ff) First he posits the "liberal theory": a "free market of ideas" (about which see above, chapter three). He then argues that the Fairness Doctrine is a "radical" departure from that traditional view of the First Amendment because it restricts the freedom of "each individual member of the press. . . (to) express and advocate the views or versions of events he prefers to." It is radical because the FCC definition forces each television licensee to supply the marketplace, "a public forum in which
different parties, representing different views, can be heard by the public," But, Epstein's argument seems identical to that of Reuven Frank. (see above, chapter three) The argument is simply freedom of the press without any defined responsibility.

As I noted earlier, the FCC definition is really not a bad approximation of the democratic standard, if it had a measurable impact on television journalism. It defines the public interest as informing the public about the vital issues of the day, with ideas coming from diverse and antagonistic sources and particularly local sources. (ibid, 48) But Epstein never points out, in his conclusions, that network news does not begin to approach that standard; in fact, it works against it.

Epstein's rationalization is clear when we study his definition of organizational needs, which is his major independent variable. His failure to find fault with, and suggest reforms of, network news lies in his avoidance of defining the major goal of the particular organization which he studies: the corporate goal of maximizing control over both capital and profits. That is a "long range goal" that seems more powerful in his own evidence than any of the short range or "internal needs" he mentioned in his original hypotheses (and which in fact determine the substance of many of his "internal needs").

Thus, for example, he argues (or accepts the network argument), that the FCC with the Fairness Doctrine has created "an artificial demand for news programing.... even though such programs may be unprofitable for the broadcaster." (ibid,59) "Through such
direct and indirect pressures, the FCC creates a demand for news that licensees might not otherwise find it in their interest to provide. (emphasis mine) (ibid, 61) (Later, he points out that CBS News turned a profit of 13 million on an income of 36 million.) Similarly, he states that the expansion of the evening news program from 15 minutes to 30 minutes "fulfilled an economic rather than the stated journalistic need," because the extra fifteen minutes went into "magazine pieces" with "old or dated news." (ibid, 89)

Underlying his acceptance of the network's political and economic arguments here is the assumption that the networks are, indeed, only responsible for a headline service (which maximizes the mass audience). (The headline service justification is a common one with television. See Av Westin, speaking for the American Broadcasting Company, and quoted uncritically by John Hohenberg, 1973, 23) And thus the public interest is defined by the audience ratings for each news program. Each news and "public interest" program is expected to cover its own cost. If it does more than that, then the profit can be siphoned off for other corporate interests.

Magazine pieces, for instance, are or can be in the public interest. Not being "hard news," they are the only vehicle for explaining the history, context and consequences of a particular issue. But to define them as not fulfilling a journalistic need is to accept the corporate definition of what public political communication is all about--a marketplace conception.

Epstein accepts the "imperatives" of corporate capitalistic journalism as both necessary and proper. He replaces one powerful
myth—the mirror metaphor—with another one that is more powerful and more subtle—that corporate capitalism can legitimately define the public interest. By steadfastly ignoring what kind of public political communication may be a categorical imperative to a democratic society and to an individual endeavoring to act out that ideal, and by defining the public interest only in terms of journalistic freedom from governmental control, Epstein deprives us from considering public policies that increase the accountability of journalists to any external standards.
Racist Remark Looks Milder in Context

Reading the whole of Playboy magazine's 16,000-word interview with him strengthens our regard for Andrew Young, and our sympathy, too.

It also increases our pain with the problems of our own craft, journalism, in which every story must be searched for a "lead" or opening that will stress the story's highlight and be the basis of headlines and radio-TV bulletinized treatment.

When reporters got to the United Nations ambassador's Playboy interview, a great many saw a lead in Young's assertion that President Nixon and President Ford were racists—which seemed like pretty strong stuff.

Say it Young did. But in the total context it is a much milder accusation than the short statement of it suggests.

Referring to the two presidents, Young said: "They did not face racism in their lives and tended to rule it out. Nixon and Ford did not face it because they were, in fact, racists ... They were racists not in the aggressive sense but in that they had no understanding of the problems of colored peoples anywhere. There's a sense in which every American, black or white, is affected by racism. You cannot grow up in the United States of America in the 20th Century and not be tainted by it. We've got to start talking about racism without putting moral categories on it so we can understand it."

Young went on to talk about his own racist response when in 1959 he met Chinese for the first time in his life in San Francisco and found himself afraid someone was going to put opium in his tea or snatch him through a curtain and put him on a boat to China.

Young's theme that it is important to hurdle such barriers in order to have effective international dealings is hardly debatable. The characterization of Nixon and Ford is not nearly so venomous as it first appears when a former civil rights fighter links the shortcomings he sees in them with the shortcomings of most Americans, including himself.

Newspapers and radio and television newscasters are going to keep reaching for "leads" because that is the way news delivery is structured. For many reasons, including the need of the public for capsule accounts, this is unlikely to change.

A man as candid as Andy Young may wise up and avoid the kind of sentences that can be excerpted so easily and so disadvantageously to him.

The media have a duty to keep their capsules as fair as they can, and most practitioners do. The problem is that it is often the unfair ones that catch the public fancy and go zinging around the world before the full story catches up with them. It's a people problem as much as a media problem.

(Editorial, Honolulu Star-Bulletin) (June 11, 1977)
Roger Mudd:

This campaign was probably condemned to an issueless status from the beginning. Once Jimmy Carter determined that the traditional issues were not the issues, but that trust, integrity and candor were, the tone of the campaign was set. "If I ever betray a trust, if I ever make a misleading statement, don't vote for me."

Most Americans probably expected a loftier campaign, at least an attempt by the candidates to rough-out a national agenda of issues. They got neither and many of them feel vaguely cheated. Voter apathy is said to be widespread, although the turn-out Tuesday is not expected to be much less than the 55 percent of four years ago. But this campaign has been vapid and egocentric. And President Ford helped Jimmy Carter make it that way.

Mr. Ford moved his office into the Rose Garden where he staged the Presidency. The Republican output revolved around himself, his image and his personality. And it looked like the Ford strategy would work.

Carter, with his lead in the polls collapsing, spent the first weeks of the campaign flip-flopping around the country. In Seattle, he was for pardon but not amnesty. In Iowa, he would never permit a grain embargo, that is until he got to Plains. In Connecticut, he thought Mister Ford should fire Clarence Kelly but wasn't sure he would. "But the answer, from what I know is yes, I would."

I take it that your saying if you are elected President and that he is still the Director of the FBI, then of course you will replace him." "Well, we'll cross that bridge when I get to it." September was bad news for Carter, culminating in the inexplicable Playboy interview, and the loss to Mister Ford on their first debate.

During it all, Mister Ford campaigned twice beyond the Rose Garden. Once at his Alma Mater and once with the conservatives in Louisiana. The polls showed Carter continuing to sink. (Ford:) "I don't concede a single state. I don't concede a single vote." But toward the first of October, the campaign changed direction. "I think Gerald Ford is on shaky ground again, when he starts talking about experience. If we had wanted experience we would have kept Richard Nixon." Carter, obviously unnerved, went on the attack. And in a series of unrelated events, the President was thrown on the defensive, admitting that U.S. Steel had paid for some of his golf trips. Trying to ride out the Earl Butz storm with just a severe reprimand. Insisting on the second debate that the Soviets did not dominate Eastern Europe. "Each of those countries, is independent, autonomous, it has its own territorial
integrity." Mister Ford's performance that week revived the gossip the
White House dreaded to hear. The President of the United States was
not competent and was probably dumb.

By mid-October, Carter's backward slide had stopped and his lead
had stabilized. The third debate was roughly a draw. Each was too
cautious to hit very hard. As the two candidates started their final
push, the campaign emphasis shifted to a twenty million dollar media
blitz, where gaffes, flip-flops, and denials do not exist. By any
political measuring rod, Gerald Ford should be out of it by now. After
all, it is not often that an un-elected President has to admit that the
IRS is auditing his tax returns, that his Agriculture Secretary offends
at least twelve percent of the population, that his Chairman of the
Joint Chiefs of Staff offends at least three allies during one
interview, that he himself is responsible for reviving a lot of bad
Polish jokes. Gerald Ford should be out of it. He is not. And that
the election is still this close is either a great tribute to Gerald
Ford or a serious repudiation of Jimmy Carter.

Roger Mudd, CBS News at the White House.

(October 29, 1976)
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