More Questions:

- How much autonomy does media itself have in defining political agenda?
- If media has political power, how is it used?
- What political bias?
- Does the US media meet criteria for democracy?

II. Three Theories of Media Bias

A. “Lapdog” of Corporate Power (M. Parenti)

A Class bias in how media covers politics

1. Press not “free”
   It is a business

   est 3% of US GDP

   a. content controlled by need to profit

   multi-billion dollar industry
   advertising = revenue
   news not a public service
   a way to sell ads
ratings = value of ad revenue

b. Media/News industry = oligopoly

Small # of firms “compete”
Same firms/Individuals control multiple media sources

eg: Rupert Murdoch owns (owned),
• newspapers in UK, Europe, Asia, NY, Chicago,
• cable in Asia, Europe, US,
• Fox TV network in US, etc

T. Turner,
W. Annenberg

c. **Consolidation** = narrow range of perspectives

Telecommunications Deregulation Act

by 1996, 11 corporations controlled production and circulation of over 50% of:

- Newspaper
- Magazines
- TV
- Books
- Movies

**Today**, maybe 5 firms control 50% of all media content
fewer owners
increasingly global
horizontal and vertical consolidation
1) Time Warner/AOL:  ($43 billion, 2005)
   • Warner Books,
   • Little Brown,
   • Time Inc
   • CNN, HBO,
   • Warner Bros.
   • People, Money, dozens of magazines
   • AOL, TBS, TNT.
   • Cartoon Network
   • Atlanta Braves.

2) Disney:  ($32 billion)
   • ABC broadcast TV network
   • Miramax
   • Touchstone
   • Buena Vista
   • ESPN, cable networks
   • Hyperion Books
   • 9 TV stations
   • 100 radio stations

3) Bertelsmann:
   • Television & Radio in Europe
   • Random House
   • Bantam Books. Many other book publishers
   • Newspapers
   • Magazines
   • BMG music (sold to Sony)
4) Viacom: ($24 billion)
   - CBS
   - 35 TV stations,
   - UPN, MTV, Nickelodeon, TV Land, VH1
   - Comedy Central
   - 120+ radio stations
   - Paramount Pictures
   - Touchstone Press
   - Scribner, Simon & Schuster (books)

5) News Corp. Rupert Murdoch. ($24 billion)
   - Fox broadcast network
   - Sky satellite TV (global)
   - many TV stations
   - radio
   - newspapers
   - 20th Century Fox
   - Harper Collins books
   - Lakers, Rangers, Kings

6) Vivendi/Universal ($25 billion)
   - Geffin Records
   - Universal
   - part of NBC

??) GE: ($157 billion)
   - most of NBC
   - 28 TV stations
Print:

handful of chains control 85% of US paper circulation (Gannet, Times Mirror, etc.)

less than 2% of US cities have competing news papers

3 corps control most magazine circulation:

- Time-Warner
- News Corp (Murdoch)
- Gannet

TV:

Early 90s, 20 owners control 50% of audience share
Today, far fewer owners control more share

90% of local TV stations controlled by NBC/CBS/ABC (FOX)

Even “public” TV depends on corporate $$
(Ford Foundation, etc.)

Radio:

Clear Channel
1200 radion stations
36 TV stations
SFX events promotion

d. **Result = Mc News**

- pre-packaged
- market researched
- predictable
- same content at any source

e. **Nature of bias in reporting (re: Parenti et al)**

- don’t critique ownership/corporate actions
- automatically anti-socialist
- uncritically critical of actions opposed to US policy
- indirect editorial control over content via hiring/promotion

  don’t need overt censoring of reporters

evidence: “what we don’t see...”

- no coverage of politics outside “mainstream”
  - nothing beyond 2 major parties
- no critical focus on US foreign policy
- no sympathetic treatment of labor issues

what we do see...
  - horserace, substance-less political news
  - entertainment
• sensationalism
• crime

**IRONY**: as people expand their consumption of “news”, they surrender control of sensory info intake

**B. Press as Watchdog of Democracy**

• Press has continuing adversarial role
• Press as the 4th branch of govt.

1. Automatically critical of incumbent govt.

   classic model = Woodward & Bernstein (Watergate)

   • find candidate shortcomings,
   • report on any scandals
   • uncover lies
   • protect against “disinformation”

   Q: does same criticism applies to business practices? or to US for. policy?

2. Journalism a profession (*and* a business)

   ▪ professional norms motivate reporters
   ▪ professional rewards linked to “scoop” on scandal
   ▪ professional ethics force neutrality in coverage
3. Media acts as another check on govt

for politicians, press both an opportunity and problem

- politicians need press to communicate w/ public
- press will be critical of pols communication
- press may not reflect pols desired image

Game = two-stage flow of information:

govt--->press---> public

Media strategy for politicians = manage hostile media

communications office, public relations folks
spin doctors
staged events
coordinated press releases, etc.

Presidents need media to govern:

- to build support for programs
- to weaken support for opponents
- to put pressure on Congress
- to rally opinion

Does TV make modern presidents more powerful? Less?

4. From this perspective, no political bias
media acts neutrally
adjusts to criticism when directed against it

- if “too liberal”, moves one way over time
- if “too conservative,” moves the other way
- if “too uncritical,” responds w/ more criticism

evidence: 1988 Prez election coverage too “pro-Bush”
1992, greater scrutiny of Bush Sr.

Dan Rather & Bush jr.

C. Third Perspective: Press as Too Liberal

(Lichters & Rothman)

Critique of media raised by conservatives...see mrc.org

1. National press corps journalists are liberal Democrats

- in ‘84, 76% voted Walter Mondale for President
  o (while just 44% of public voted Mondale)

- 80% of press corps said they were “pro-choice”
- 85% said OK for gays to teach in public schools
  o compared to about 40% in US public at time

2. Journalists East-Coast “Elite”
• secular, non-religious
• from eastern states
• from a small set of schools

3. Press overly cynical about politics

• focus on
  o process
  o strategy
  o motives

• little focus on substance of policy

4. Press overly cynical re: “Middle America”

bias =

• pro-Democrat
• ignore life “outside the beltway”
• ignore experts
• press reports their own opinions

examples: Treatment of Dan Quayle
          Nuclear power

D. Press as Stupid and Lazy (James Fallows)
1. Incentives =

Press cover “pure politics” --- not substance
ask questions only fellow journalists care about

- pointless prediction
- horserace
- strategy
- focus on personalities

"inside the beltway" echo chamber

- each side’s "spin" = news
- horse-race polls as news

motives of people more important that action

2. Press spoon fed information by officials/candidates

press/video releases as news

no research, no investigation

leaks = news

report leaks even if lies w/o source

see Jon Stewart
3. Reward system for reporters =

- talk show
- lecture tours
- book contracts

4. Result:

- political shows feature celebrity talking heads
- shouting matches
- simple, stupid left vs. right formula

Crossfire, Hardball, O’Reiley Factor, etc

E. Conclusions

- Which model best describes reality of US Media?
- What evidence supports?

- Conservative ownership
  - in realm of economics
  - some owners socially liberal

- For-profit business
  - ratings drive content
  - Major firms lobby to limit competition
  - little competition
• Liberal reporters (and even editors)

• Entertainment media more liberal than news?