PRESS BIAS AND POLITICS

How the Media Frame Controversial Issues

Jim A. Kuypers

Press Bias
and Politics

Recent Titles in the
Praeger Series in Political Communication
Robert E. Denton, Jr., General Editor

Political Communication Ethics: An Oxymoron?
Robert E. Denton, Jr., editor

Navigating Boundaries: The Rhetoric of Women Governors
Brenda DeVore Marshall and Molly A. Mayhead, editors

Talk of Power, Power of Talk: The 1994 Health Care Reform Debate
and Beyond
Michael W. Shelton

When Congress Debates: A Bakhtinian Paradigm
Theodore F. Sheckels

The Rhetoric of First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton: Crisis Management
Discourse
Colleen Elizabeth Kelley

The Clinton Scandals and the Politics of Image Restoration
Joseph R. Blaney and William L. Benoit

Campaign Craft: The Strategies, Tactics, and Art of Political Campaign
Management
Daniel M. Shea and Michael John Burton

The Idea of Political Marketing
Nicholas J. O'Shaughnessy, editor, and Stephan C. M. Henneberg, associate editor

The Primary Decision: A Functional Analysis of Debates in Presidential
Primaries
William L. Benoit, P.M. Pier, LeAnn M. Brazeal, John P. McHale,
Andrew Klyukovski, and David Airne

Notable Speeches in Contemporary Presidential Campaigns
Robert V. Friedenberg

Global Political Campaigning: A Worldwide Analysis of Campaign
Professionals and Their Practices
Fritz Plasser

The 2000 Presidential Campaign: A Communication Perspective
Robert E. Denton, Jr., editor

Press Bias
and Politics

How the Media Frame
Controversial Issues

Jim A. Kuypers

PRAEGER

To my family,
whose love and support
are constant

This page intentionally left blank

Contents

This page intentionally left blank

Series Foreword

Those of us from the discipline of communication studies have long believed that communication is prior to all other fields of inquiry. In several other forums I have argued that the essence of politics is "talk" or human interaction.[1] Such interaction may be formal or informal, verbal or non-verbal, public or private, but it is always persuasive, forcing us consciously or subconsciously to interpret, to evaluate, and to act. Communication is the vehicle for human action.

From this perspective, it is not surprising that Aristotle recognized the natural kinship of politics and communication in his writings *Politics* and *Rhetoric*. In the former, he established that humans are "political beings [who] alone of the animals [are] furnished with the faculty of language."[2] In the latter, he began his systematic analysis of discourse by proclaiming that "rhetorical study, in its strict sense, is concerned with the modes of persuasion."[3] Thus, it was recognized over twenty-three hundred years ago that politics and communication go hand in hand because they are essential parts of human nature.

In 1981. Dan Nimmo and Keith Sanders proclaimed that political communication was an emerging field.[4] Although its origin, as noted, dates back centuries, a "self-consciously cross-disciplinary" focus began in the late 1950s. Thousands of books and articles later, colleges and universities offer a variety of graduate and undergraduate coursework in the area in such diverse departments as communication, mass communication, journalism, political science, and sociology.[5] In Nimmo and Sanders's early assessment, the "key areas of inquiry" included rhetorical analysis, propaganda analysis, attitude change studies, voting studies, government and the news media, functional and systems analyses, tech-

nological changes, media technologies, campaign techniques, and re-
search techniques.[6] In a survey of the state of the field in 1983, the same
authors and Lynda Kaid found additional, more specific areas of con-
cerns such as the presidency, political polls, public opinion, debates, and
advertising.[7] Since the first study, they have also noted a shift away from
the rather strict behavioral approach.

A decade later, Dan Nimmo and David Swanson argued that "political
communication has developed some identity as a more or less distinct
domain of scholarly work."[8] The scope and concerns of the area have
further expanded to include critical theories and cultural studies. Al-
though there is no precise definition, method, or disciplinary home of
the area of inquiry, its primary domain comprises the role, processes,
and effects of communication within the context of politics broadly de-
fined.

In 1985, the editors of *Political Communication Yearbook: 1984* noted that
"more things are happening in the study, teaching, and practice of po-
litical communication than can be captured within the space limitations
of the relatively few publications available."[9] In addition, they argued
that the backgrounds of "those involved in the field [are] so varied and
pluralist in outlook and approach, . . . it [is] a mistake to adhere slavishly
to any set format in shaping the content."[10] More recently, Nimmo and
Swanson have called for "ways of overcoming the unhappy conse-
quences of fragmentation within a framework that respects, encourages,
and benefits from diverse scholarly commitments, agendas, and ap-
proaches."[11]

In agreement with these assessments of the area and with gentle en-
couragement, in 1988 Praeger established the series entitled "Praeger Se-
ries in Political Communication." The series is open to all qualitative and
quantitative methodologies as well as contemporary and historical stud-
ies. The key to characterizing the studies in the series is the focus on
communication variables or activities within a political context or di-
mension. As of this writing, over seventy volumes have been published
and numerous impressive works are forthcoming. Scholars from the dis-
ciplines of communication, history, journalism, political science, and so-
ciology have participated in the series.

I am, without shame or modesty, a fan of the series. The joy of serving
as its editor is in participating in the dialogue of the field of political
communication and in reading the contributors' works. I invite you to
join me.

<div align="right">Robert E. Denton, Jr.</div>

NOTES

1. See Robert E. Denton, Jr., *The Symbolic Dimensions of the American Presidency*
(Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1982); Robert E. Denton, Jr., and Gary

Woodward, *Political Communication in America* (New York: Praeger, 1985; 2d ed., 1990); Robert E. Denton Jr., and Dan Hahn, *Presidential Communication* (New York: Praeger, 1986); and Robert E. Denton, Jr., *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan* (New York: Praeger, 1988).

2. Aristotle, *The Politics of Aristotle*, trans. Ernest Barker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 5.

3. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts (New York: The Modern Library, 1954), p. 22.

4. Dan Nimmo and Keith Sanders, "Introduction: The Emergence of Political Communication as a Field," in *Handbook of Political Communication*, eds. Dan Nimmo and Keith Sanders (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1981), pp. 11–36.

5. Ibid., p. 15.

6. Ibid., p. 17–27.

7. Keith Sanders, Lynda Kaid, and Dan Nimmo, eds. *Political Communication Yearbook: 1984* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University, 1985), pp. 283–308.

8. Dan Nimmo and David Swanson, "The Field of Political Communication: Beyond the Voter Persuasion Paradigm," in *New Directions in Political Communication*, eds. David Swanson and Dan Nimmo (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1990), p. 8.

9. Sanders, Kaid, and Nimmo, *Political Communication Yearbook: 1984*, p. xiv.

10. Ibid.

11. Nimmo and Swanson, "The Field of Political Communication," p. 11.

This page intentionally left blank

Acknowledgments

This page intentionally left blank

Chapter One

Understanding Media Manipulation of Controversial Issues

When men understand what each other mean,
they see, for the most part, that controversy is either superfluous or
hopeless.[1]
                                                —John Henry Newman

Race relations, homosexual activism, partial-birth abortion, the death penalty, women in combat, affirmative action, federal funding for stem-cell research—the list goes on. Controversial issues are, by their essential nature, unsolvable to everyone's satisfaction. Such issues are open to discussion—debatable, questionable—and generally in dispute by contending groups. Our tolerance for one position over another is usually a matter of degree. We hear about controversial issues every day; we discuss them with family, friends, coworkers, and others. Although we often look to friends for information on these issues, we look to experts as well. We seek the opinions of politicians, prominent social figures, religious leaders, and academic and technical experts. Yet it is not often that we consider the messenger who brings us our information about controversial issues. Controversial issues are news, and for news we look to the press.

Recent surveys show that 77% of Americans read their daily local papers, and this on average of five days a week.[2] The consumption of print news takes on greater importance when we see that 54% of Americans turn to an additional print source for news. Furthermore, there is a direct correlation between reading print sources for news and educational and income level. In short, the higher an individual's education and income, the more likely that individual will look to print sources for news. News

sources are not limited to local papers, however. According to Ted Smith and colleagues, "Major national newspapers . . . are read by . . . about one-third of all adult Americans. People with high levels of education and income are . . . approximately twice as likely as those with low levels to read a major national newspaper. Less than one-fourth (24%) of those Americans whose education is limited to high school read a national paper, while more than one-half (55%) of those with a college degree do the same.[3] What makes this large readership all the more worthy of study "is that newspaper reading is strongly associated with political involvement."[4] It seems clear that to better grasp how Americans come to view controversial issues we need to understand the influence of the press upon our acquisition of information.

The purpose of this book is to understand and chart the potential effects the printed press—and by extension, broadcast media—have upon the messages of political and social leaders when they discuss controversial issues. Although much has been written about how the media focus public attention on certain issues over others, there exists scant literature that explores how media reportorial practices take into account the original utterances of those being reported upon. This book explores how press reports modify the original meaning of that which they report upon; as case studies I use two high-profile controversial issues: race and homosexuality. In examining the relationship of press reports to our understanding of these issues, this book asks and answers rather broad-based questions about press influences on our public debates: Guided by the press, how do we perceive controversial issues? In what terms are these issues discussed by the press, and do these terms limit options for discussion in the public sphere? Is the press neutral, or does it encourage us to view controversial issues in a certain way? How does the press construct a notion of tolerance for a particular position?

As the above questions suggest, the idea behind this book is to make readers more knowledgeable consumers of news media products. One should be able to say after reading this book: "I know now what will happen when the media reports on almost any given controversial topic. I know now how the information will be meditated by those in the press." Armed with this knowledge, readers will be better able to make critical assessments of the news.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The manner in which I examine the influence of the press on our understanding of controversial issues is a combination of rhetorical analysis, journalism theory, and modified social scientific inquiry (framing analysis).[5] Ultimately, this book is a rhetorical analysis of the interaction of a political or social leader's speech and the subsequent press coverage;

thus this section will briefly cover the concepts of rhetoric and rhetorical situations before moving to the areas of media agenda-setting, agenda-extension, and framing analysis.

Rhetoric and Rhetorical Situations

For the purposes of this book, I define rhetoric as the strategic use of communication, oral or written, used to achieve specifiable goals. Thus, public pronouncements on controversial issues may be counted as rhetoric. Public speaking does not exist in a vacuum. That which politicians and other public figures say in public is in response to a situation of some sort. This is to say, the person speaking has determined that something needs to be done, has crafted a response announcing a plan of action or hoped for interpretation, and then has made comments or given a speech. Because of this, when analyzing the words, or utterances, of a speaker, it is important to understand the situation surrounding the problem a speaker is addressing.

One way of understanding such a situation was provided by communication theorist Lloyd Bitzer.[6] His classic definition of a rhetorical situation is worth noting: "a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigency which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigency."[7] An "exigence is an imperfection marked by some degree of urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something to be corrected."[8] The audience consists of those individuals capable of modifying the exigence. In short, they have the power to change the situation, to solve or modify the problem. Constraints influence both audience members and speakers and are composed of "persons, events, objects, relations, rules, principles, facts, laws, images, interests, emotions, arguments, and conventions."[9] Constraints act to limit and influence what a speaker may say as well as how an audience interprets what it hears.

The above concepts (exigency, audience, and constraints) are intertwined and mutually influence each other. The three taken together require some type of discourse to fuel their interaction and possible modification. The discourse, or *utterance* in Bitzer's terminology, "participates naturally in the situation, is in many instances necessary to the completion of situational activity, and by means of its participation with situation obtains its meaning and its rhetorical character."[10]

A *situation* is not the same as *context*, however. Context, a necessary component of human communication, is more than the historical facts surrounding a rhetorical situation. Context is, in part, constituted by the various interpretive communities that apprehend what a speaker says.

In this vein, Gregory Bateson provides a useful definition of context: "a collective term for all those events which tell the organism among what *set* of alternatives he must make his next choice."[11] Viewed in this manner, contexts may have broad influences upon our understanding of any particular speech or utterance. Rhetorical situations, on the other hand, are not to be understood at a general level but rather through the speaker's interaction with audience, exigency, and constraints. Contexts help shape the general level of interpretive precision that produces a speaker's utterance (and its subsequent interpretation); it is this utterance that enters into the rhetorical situation. Rhetorical situations are a part of the larger context; they "come into existence, then either mature and decay or mature and persist. . . . Situations grow and come to maturity; they evolve to just the time when a rhetorical discourse would be most fitting."[12] Contexts allow for the general interpretation of utterances; rhetorical situations provide moments for a "fitting" utterance through which modification of an exigence may be achieved.

For example, consider the impeachment proceedings against President Clinton in 1998. The larger contexts that could have influenced utterances within the rhetorical situation included the upcoming congressional elections, the ongoing Starr investigations, and the historical or cultural understandings of Americans concerning the distinction between private and public acts. As distinct from contexts, the rhetorical situation is modified by utterances that are shaped by the above contexts. The utterance, however, can have a bearing upon which contexts subsequently wax or wane in influence.

In order for the words of a speaker to modify an exigency successfully, they must "fit" not only the particular situation into which they enter but also the contexts which influence the situation. In fact, the creation of a stable context through which to view the situation is often the first step for the successful modification of an exigency that occurs in a situation impacted by multiple contexts. Yet the audience capable of enacting change—frequently voters—more often than not hears a speaker's words through the mediating influence of the press. Because of this, the role and influence of the press in transmitting information to the public must be examined.

The Agenda-Setting and Agenda-Extension Functions of the Press

Understanding the agenda-setting function of the press helps explain how press reports interact with political discourse and public perceptions of that discourse.[13] A famous statement still circulating in schools of communication and journalism was made by Bernard C. Cohen, who observed that the press "may not be very successful in telling its readers

what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about."[14] If the second part of Cohen's statement is accepted as accurate, and I think it should, then it behooves us to consider speeches on controversial issues in relation to the press, not because the press represents public opinion (although many members of the public might think so), but because the press is a good indication of the issues and ideas that informed voters and opinion leaders will be talking about. These individuals are aware of the issues, ideas, and responses that circulate in the press not because they represent popular opinion, but because they are a good indicator of that which still needs to be addressed in public policy or that they should be talking about. Studies into the agenda-setting function of the press confirm that the media "have a great deal of influence" upon political decision making and that they are especially influential in telling the general population what to think about.[15]

For example, Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw argued that voters learn about an issue "in direct proportion" to the attention given that issue by the press, and that voters tend to share what the media defines as important.[16] Further, these researchers asserted that the mass media provide voters with the "major primary sources of national political information."[17] These findings were later corroborated by Sheldon Gilberg and colleagues. Their study found that the press has the potential to set our government's agenda, even at the highest levels.[18] That the press has the power to set an agenda should come as no surprise. McCombs and Shaw explain: "the press is an independent force whose dialogue with other elements of society produces the agenda of issues considered by political elites and voters. Witness the major role of the elite press as a source of information among major decision makers. Through its winnowing of the day's happenings to find the major events, concerns, and issues, the press inadvertently plays an agenda-setting influence role."[19] Often, the longer an issue remains in news focus, the more the public perceives it as a crisis. Michael B. Salwen highlighted the importance of this consideration when he suggested that policy makers "will address issues only when these issues are perceived as crises by the public."[20] These and similar studies paint a convincing picture: the mass media shape not only what the public "perceives" as "political reality" but also how political elites understand what voters and opinion leaders are thinking about. It is in this manner, then, that a conversation develops among the press, its sources, and the public audience that determines "what is *accepted* as the public agenda."[21]

Many studies testing agenda-setting theory have as their focus the president of the United States. For example, Gilberg and his colleagues asserted that the president is in a "strategic position to influence the agenda" of the press because he is the major source of news at the na-

tional level.[22] Although they found that the press had a significant influ-
ence upon President Jimmy Carter's second State of the Union address,
they were unable to determine whether Carter's address influenced sub-
sequent press issues. A later study by McCombs and colleagues found
evidence of "presidential influence on subsequent press coverage."[23]
However, although the president is occasionally able to influence cov-
erage of issues, other politicians and social leaders are not in the same
position of authority. The implications of this for the study of press in-
fluence upon political utterances should be clear, particularly in light of
the degree to which the public relies upon the press for information,
especially concerning issues of national importance. These national issues
are generally not part of an individual's common experience; therefore,
the "news media exercise a near monopoly as sources of information
and orientation."[24] Although many politicians surely know more, the
media tell them what we, *the public*, know.

Whereas agenda-setting serves to focus public attention upon an issue,
agenda-extension occurs when the media move beyond a neutral re-
porting of events, and it is to this concern that we now turn. During the
decade of the 1980s, communication and mass media researchers ex-
ploring the agenda-setting functions of the press began to discover an
evaluative component to media news. These researchers postulated that
the media do more than tell the public what to think about; they also
tell the public *how* to think about any given topic. These studies revealed
two other aspects of agenda-setting which relate to the public evaluation
of political leaders; these aspects are called priming and framing. One
way of understanding priming and framing is that the media provide
the contextual cues "by which to evaluate the subject matter" under con-
sideration.[25]

Shanto Iyengar and Adam Simon have studied the effects of network
news coverage during the Gulf War, and provide examples of the dif-
ferences among agenda-setting, priming, and framing. They defined
priming as the "ability of news programs to affect the criteria by which
political leaders are judged."[26] Specifically, priming involves the corre-
lation among patterns of news coverage and the manner in which the
public evaluates the performance of politicians. These effects upon eval-
uation are strongest in the area of performance and weakest in the area
of affecting judgment on personality. Priming is intimately linked with
agenda-setting because the "more prominent an issue in the national
information stream, the greater its weight in political judgments."[27] In
analyzing the news coverage of the Gulf War, Iyengar and Simon found
that the "amount of coverage accorded to the Gulf's situation and the
proportion of respondents nominating it as the nation's most important
problem were highly correlated" (agenda-setting).[28] In terms of the role
that priming played, they found foreign policy "performance assess-

ments tended to override economic assessments in their impact on . . . ratings of George Bush during the Gulf crisis."[29]

These findings highlight the relationship between those issues political leaders announce as important and the perceived importance of those issues to the American people. Priming works because "by calling attention to some aspects of national life while ignoring others, network news programs determine the standards by which presidents [and political leaders] are judged."[30] Iyengar and Kinder, drawing from basic psychological theory, explain that this occurs because public attention is highly selective and that the public relies primarily upon information that is easily accessible. Judgments about political matters are in part due to what standards come to individuals' minds but also are due to those "considerations that are, for whatever reason and however briefly, accessible."[31] Mainstream news outlets are quick and accessible sources for news.

News coverage that implies politicians' responsibility for a situation at the national level encourages viewers to attach more importance to their performance on that particular situation when evaluating their overall performance. In addition, this "effect appears to be stronger for problems that are relative newcomers to the American political agenda, problems for which the public's understanding is still in formation."[32] Thus, when announcing new public policy initiatives, when public knowledge is in flux and new knowledge is constantly being injected into the public's evaluative consciousness, the effects of priming could be considerable. However, when issues are on-going—abortion, affirmative action, etc.—the effects of priming may not be as strong.[33]

Framing moves beyond priming because it involves the relationship between qualitative aspects of news coverage—contextual cues—and how the public interprets the news. William Gamson asserted that a "frame is a central organizing idea for making sense of relevant events and suggesting what is at issue."[34] Facts remain neutral until framed; thus, how the press frames an issue or event will affect public understanding of that issue or event. On this point Gamson argued that facts "take on their meaning by being embedded in a frame or story line that organizes them and gives them coherence, selecting certain ones to emphasize while ignoring others."[35] Framing, then, is the process whereby communicators act to construct a particular point of view that encourages the facts of a given situation to be viewed (or ignored) in a particular manner, with some facts made more noticeable than others. When speaking of political and social issues, frames actually define our understanding of any given situation.

According to political scientist Doris Graber, this type of "manipulative journalism raises philosophical, ethical, and news policy questions."[36] Graber calls this manipulative journalism agenda-building, the

"process whereby news stories influence how people perceive and eval-
uate issues and policies."[37] This clearly moves beyond agenda-setting,
and involves the influencing of public opinion. What Graber describes
as agenda-building I call agenda-extension.[38] Graber and I are not alone
in reporting upon press effects beyond agenda-setting. Agenda-setting
researchers in the mid-1990s began to investigate second level agenda-
setting effects.[39] Simply put, agenda-setting can be described as the role
the media play in focusing the public's attention on a particular object
or issue over another object or issue, primarily by how much attention
the media gives to that object or issue. Second level agenda-setting posits
that the media can focus attention on particular attributes within a par-
ticular object or issue. The notion of second level effects blends in well
with research examining priming since the media would be elevating
one attribute over another in the mind of the public. Since a particular
attribute on an issue would be foremost in the public eye, it seems likely
that the public would use that particular attribute to evaluate a politi-
cian's actions. Anne Johnston, in a review of media scholarship, discov-
ered that work in agenda-setting research has well documented the
agenda-extension process.[40] The public becomes primed to evaluate the
president, for example, by how well he handles the issue covered by the
press. The more the press covers an issue, the more the public will eval-
uate the president's success or failure in relation to the content of media
coverage.

    Johnston stated that news stories provide their audiences with more
than the important subjects to think about; they also provide "contextual
cues or frames in which to evaluate those subjects."[41] Issues are often
framed by how station managers, producers, editors, and reporters tell
the story of the issue. Gladys Engel Lang and Kurt Lang discovered this
type of agenda-extension operating during the Watergate hearings. They
demonstrated that agenda-extension begins when media gatekeepers de-
cide to publish a particular story.[42] Although this is the first step in all
news reporting, the move toward agenda-extension occurs when a sec-
ond step is taken, the decision concerning how much attention to give
to the story. As pointed out by Graber, it is at this "point where ordinary
agenda-setting activities can most readily turn into deliberate agenda-
building [agenda-extension]."[43] By continually focusing on an issue, the
media may thrust it into the forefront of national thought. And at the
point when an issue emerges, its media frame becomes crucially impor-
tant. Lang and Lang noted that the Watergate coverage was first put into
the framework of the election campaign, thus leading the public to think
of it as partisan politics as usual. As soon as the media switched frames,
moving from the framework of the 1972 presidential campaign to the
framework of continual Washington corruption, the nation became ob-
sessed. It is at this point that agenda-extension goes beyond second level

agenda-setting in that it posits that the media not only focus attention on particular attributes of an issue, making some portions more salient than others, it does so in such a manner that a particular political agenda is advanced. Simply put, second level agenda-setting examines *what* attributes are stressed, agenda-extension allows us to see *how* those attributes are stressed to influence audience reaction.[44]

Although it can be successfully argued that providing contextual cues for interpretation is a necessary part of media responsibility, when the media places its partisan context over that of the people or government, the potential for public manipulation increases.[45] For example, Graber conducted a content analysis of television news coverage of the 1984 presidential campaign that sheds light upon this media manipulation.[46] Her focus was on how the news was framed. She found that there was a ratio of three to one of bad over good news for the United States during this period. This news primarily focused on foreign policy and economic concerns. Graber posited that this bad-news coverage should have derailed President Reagan's reelection bid but did not. While the networks had framed the news so as to stress the bad aspects of American news, they also primed the population to evaluate President Reagan's performance on foreign policy and economic considerations. Thus, frames do allow for multiple interpretations. As Graber noted: "[V]arious media effects are modulated by the sensitivity of audiences to particular issues, and that effects vary with background, demographic characteristics, and experiences of individual audience members."[47] Reagan was able to overcome the negative effects of priming because there were good stories mixed in with the bad that had a "leavening" effect. Graber, like Iyengar and Simon, also noted that priming effects are linked with policy and not with personality.

The very real power of frames to influence the way in which the public interprets certain issues is well documented by Paul M. Sniderman and colleagues. Using mandatory testing for HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) as their controlled frame, these researchers found that the effect "of framing is to prime values differentially, establishing the salience of the one or the other. [A] majority of the public supports the rights of persons with AIDS [acquired imuno-deficiency syndrome] when the issue is framed to accentuate civil liberties considerations—and supports ... mandatory testing when the issue is framed to accentuate public health considerations."[48] Another powerful example of frames is provided by Thomas Nelson and colleagues. Using a local news story about a Ku Klux Klan march as the controlled frame, these researchers presented audiences with either one of two stories: "One framed the rally as a free speech issue, and the other framed it as a disruption of public order. Participants who viewed the free speech story expressed more tolerance for the Klan than those participants who watched the public

order story."[49] When one considers the pervasiveness of the mass media in America, one must conclude that the potential power of framing is great indeed.

Another way of using frame analysis to understand news stories has been advanced by Zhongdang Pan and Gerald M. Kosicki. These researchers suggested that each news story will have a theme that "functions as the central organizing idea" of the story, and that these themes provide readers with cues that prompt them to understand and interpret a news story in a specific manner.[50] The cues within themes are "structurally located lexical choices of codes constructed by following certain shared rules and conventions."[51] These codes and lexical choices are the tools that news-makers use to construct news discourse and the psychological stimuli the audience processes when reading the news. For Pan and Kosicki, themes function as frames, and the cues within themes may be likened to framing devices. In this way, the framing of news stories is reduced to lexical choices made by the journalists—words in a vocabulary. The words chosen by a news reporter, then, reveal the way he categorizes that which he is reporting upon. One way of understanding frames is to consider how word choice often "signifies the presence of a particular frame."[52]

For example, look to descriptions of Yugoslavian President Slobodan Milosevic given by American reporters during the NATO bombing of Serbia. President Milosevic was described as an "evil dictator," "a cruel and determined enemy," and "a brutal dictator" to name only three. Comparisons with Hitler were frequently made as well: "Adolf Hitler had a 'final solution.' Slobodan Milosevic has 'ethnic cleansing.' Each leader's term gives a brilliant, if not positive, spin to his massacres."[53] If one were to describe Milosevic as the "Yugoslavian leader," "Yugoslavian president," or the "Yugoslavian commander in chief," the connotations about Milosevic's legitamacy would be quite different.[54] The lexical choices made act to frame the news story so that it facilitates a dominant reading of that story. Pan and Kosicki pointed out that framing analysis allows researchers to provide information about how an issue is discussed in the news and "how the ways of talking about the issue [are] related to the evolution of the issue in political debates."[55]

In order to make generalizations about a frame's influence on political debates, one must be able to identify frames at a general level of analysis. The work by Robert M. Entman, who comparatively analyzed the narratives within news stories about the downing of KAL 007 in 1983 and Iran Air 655 in 1988, is especially instructive.[56] Entman chose these particular incidents because they could have been reported on in a similar fashion; thus, any differences in the information that comprised the frames would be easier to detect. For Entman, "frames reside in the specific properties of the news narrative that encourage those perceiving

and thinking about events to develop particular understandings of them."[57] The specific properties that reside in the narrative accounts of events are composed of key words, metaphors, concepts, symbols, and visual images. Understood in this manner, frames are manufactured by particular words and phrases that consistently appear within a narrative and "convey thematically consonant meanings across . . . time."[58] Framing thus elevates the salience of some ideas over others, while making some ideas virtually invisible to an audience.

For Entman, the framing process begins with the interaction of sources and journalists. Once established, the frame guides audience and journalist thinking. Entman called this initial interaction "event-specific schema." Once in place, event-specific schema encourage journalists to "perceive, process, and report all further information about the event in ways supporting the basic interpretation encoded in the schema."[59] In his study of the coverage of the two destroyed planes, Entman used news items appearing in *Time, Newsweek, CBS Evening News*, the *Washington Post*, and the *New York Times*. He found that the Soviet downing of KAL 007 was framed as a moral outrage, whereas the American downing of Iran Air 655 was framed as a technical problem. Entman's findings also demonstrated that frames have the capacity to obscure contrary information that may be presented in a particular news story. As Entman asserted, "for those stories in which a single frame thoroughly pervades the text, stray contrary opinions . . . are likely to possess such low salience as to be of little practical use to most audience members."[60] Because of this, Soviet explanations that included technical information were pushed aside for information that supported the interpretation of the event as a moral outrage. In the case of the United States downing of Iran Air 655, Iranian evidence of U.S. negligence was pushed aside for information that supported the interpretation of the event as a technical difficulty. Accordingly, while it was perfectly acceptable for political elites to describe the downing of KAL 007 as a brutal attack, it was far less likely for them to describe it in terms of a tragedy; the frame had been set: the Soviets were evil and at fault. To think of the plane's destruction in terms of tragedy runs against the frame and would mitigate the culpability of the Soviets.[61]

It is important to note that Entman focused on those frames he considered politically important—those elements within frames most likely to "promote a common, majority response to the news events as measured in public opinion polls."[62] Viewed in this manner, framing is a reciprocal process between political elites and journalists. In established frames, political elites often find it difficult, if not foolhardy, to resist the frame's pervasive influence; however, in the development of *new* event-specific schemata elites have great influence in establishing the initial frames.

THE ASSUMPTIONS OF THIS BOOK

In *Presidential Crisis Rhetoric and the Press in a Post–Cold War World* (1997) I employed a new approach to analyze both the press and the Clinton administration's handling of three international crisis situations. Using case studies of Bosnia, Haiti, and the alleged North Korean nuclear build-up in 1993, I examined contemporary presidential crisis communication and the agenda-extension function of the press. I found that the press often advanced an oppositional frame to that used by the Clinton administration, and that in part this frame was based upon an idealized, or utopian, form of Anglo-American Liberalism (i.e., pushing to the extreme radical notions of egalitarianism and freedom). The press frames were found to limit the options of President Clinton, even when the press supported a particular presidential strategy.

I am inclined to believe that instead of an objective Fourth Estate, the media have evolved into a partisan collective which both consciously and unconsciously attempts to persuade the public to accept its interpretation of the world as true. Such press practices are not without their difficulties. According to journalism ethicist Louis Day, media practitioners should "strive to keep their personal preferences and opinions out of news stories. . . . [They should be] concerned with facts and impartiality in the presentation of those facts."[63] Unfortunately for Americans, such press practice is not the norm. As Irving Kristol stated, "There is a comfortable symbiosis between our national newsmagazines, our half-dozen or so newspapers that claim national attention, and our national television networks. They are all liberal, more or less, and feel that they share the journalistic mission of 'enlightening' . . . the American public."[64] Impartiality is often ignored for various reasons (economic, political, institutional). However, by not striving to be objective, by establishing an agenda, the press steps out of its socially mandated role of a responsible Fourth Estate and instead assumes its own political persona in opposition to the elected government and the will of the people. Strong evidence exists that this relationship is unidirectional; that is to say, press content affects public concern, but public concern does not affect that which the news focuses upon.[65] If my assumptions hold true, then, the press no longer acts in a socially responsible manner, but instead sets itself up as an independent advocate for particular political ends.

According to Mitchell Stephens, objectivity involves both impartiality and the reflection of the "world as it is, without bias or distortion of any sort;"[66] in short, the news as a true image of the world. This is a laudable goal but difficult to put into practice. Yet by framing an issue, the press has a decision to make: 1) frame it according to the needs of the readers; 2) frame it according to the needs of the press; or 3) frame it so as to

accurately impart the meaning of those speaking or writing upon that issue. The last of these choices seems to adhere best to the requirements of a socially responsible press. But what is a socially responsible press?

Reportorial Practices and Social Responsibility

If we are to accuse the press of being biased, we need first to establish how we expect the press to behave. The press "takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which it operates ... [and] it reflects a system of social control whereby the relations of individuals and institutions are adjusted."[67] For America, this claim has come to mean a free and democratic press, a press concerned with democratic ideals. Originally, however, the press in America operated quite differently. Early American newspapers were a small, cottage affair that actually began as a sideline for many printers. The largest papers in the country were read by a few thousand people at most, and this was the norm until the rise of the penny press in the 1830s. These early presses did not need to be objective in the sense that we use the term today, for they had a limited, partisan audience of readers: Whigs, Democrats, Republicans, French, German, etc. Even at the onset of the twentieth century the presses were not entirely objective. Joseph Pulitzer made his fame and fortune on sensationalistic stories printed using yellow headlines; today we call his brand of reporting yellow journalism. William Randolph Hearst competed with Pulitzer for readership. He took a strong stand concerning American and Spanish relations that eventually helped "inform" the citizenry that we needed to go to war after the *USS Maine* exploded.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century papers were primarily weekly editions; the major source of news was still local and face to face. These papers, however, still reflected the viewpoint of individual owners, not a contemporary objective viewpoint. For example, Benjamin Flowers published the *Arena*, a weekly protest magazine; Samuel McClure published *McClure's Magazine*. These and other weekly papers and magazines were used to call attention to certain social conditions that existed in the country at that time. In short, objective reporting rarely existed. The purpose was often sensational stories that sold papers. Yet, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, we expect the press to be objective.[68] We use a general notion of objectivity to judge norms of reportorial practice that exist today. But from where did we acquire our notion of an objective press? We often hear members of the press justifying their requests for information or their actions with the well-worn phrase: "The public's right to know." This phrase represents well the perspective underpinning the social responsibility theory of the media, from which we derive our current notions of objective reporting.

A socially responsible press was conceived as "a partner in the search for truth" with a rational and enlightened citizenry who would look to the press to provide the necessary information to "make up their own minds as to policy."[69] It was assumed that this partnership necessitated minimal or no government control. As this perspective grew in importance, Americans have come to view the press as a Fourth Estate in this country. We see, however, concerns about source control—press ownership—emerge by the mid-1920s when the media of this country had come to be dominated by a few wealthy and powerful people. Shortly after World War II, the Commission on Freedom of the Press, the so-called Hutchins Commission, took up the issue of press ownership and responsibility. The report of the commission, *A Free and Responsible Press*, advocated a norm of "social responsibility" for future press practices. The basic premise of the commission was that "the power and near monopoly position of the media impose on them an obligation to be socially responsible."[70] This idea behind the commission's report is the bedrock upon which the contemporary notion of social responsibility is erected, and is well summed by Theodore Peterson: "Freedom carries concomitant obligations; and the press, which enjoys a privileged position under our government, is obliged to be responsible to society for carrying out certain essential functions of mass communication in contemporary society."[71]

The socially responsible view of the press underscores the common citizen's right to enough information to make educated decisions in a democratic society; it also stresses a journalist or editor's moral responsibility to ensure that the requirements for an informed citizenry occur. Six basic press functions exist under the theory of social responsibility: (1) give service to the political system by providing information, discussion, and debate; (2) help to enlighten the general public so that it might self-govern; (3) act as a defender of civil rights by assuming a role as government watchdog; (4) act as a conduit through which the economic sector might be served by bringing together buyers and sellers through advertisements; (5) provide entertainment; and (6) maintain financial independence so that reporting will not be influenced by special interests.[72] Since 1947 various extensions of this report have taken into account three aspects of contemporary media: (1) communication technology; (2) economic pressures; and (3) societal change. Social responsibility theory attempts to incorporate all three of these important considerations.

The Hutchins Commission, anticipating that the press would need guidance in realizing the above six functions, listed the following standards for press performance. First, the press must provide "a truthful, comprehensive, and intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning."[73] Second, the press must serve as a "forum for the exchange of comment and criticism."[74] Third, the press must proj-

ect "a representative picture of the constituent groups in society."[75] Fourth, the press must assume responsibility for "the presentation and clarification of the goals and values of the society" in which it operates.[76] Finally, the press must provide "full access to the day's intelligence."[77] Michael Ryan argued that "Objective journalists refuse to serve or to support any political, social, economic, or cultural interests, even those that appear to some observers as laudatory (e.g., those that oppose gun control, abortion, or the status quo; that give voice to marginalized groups; that support gun control, abortion, or the status quo; or that ignore marginalized groups)."[78] Ryan also stated that those who reject this type of reportorial practice instead "attempt to redefine journalistic practice to reflect their views of what is 'good,' and that, for them, means requiring that journalists start with personal agendas (e.g., to improve democracy, to adopt perspectives of marginalized groups, to expand freedom). All favor a 'progressive' journalism that requires deliberate ideological intervention."[79]

Communication and political science scholars have incorporated the above social responsibility standards into their work. Graber has maintained that there exist four basic functions of the press: surveillance, interpretation, socialization, and manipulation. Surveillance corresponds to the "information and news providing function of mass communication."[80] Interpretation corresponds to what Dominic A. Infante and colleagues have called correlation, "how the mass media select, interpret, and criticize the information they present to the public."[81] Socialization "involves the learning of basic values and orientations that prepare individuals to fit into their cultural milieu."[82] Finally, manipulation refers to "the deliberate manipulation of the political process."[83] This final function reported by Graber corresponds to what Infante and colleagues called mobilization: "the ability of the media to promote national interests and certain behaviors, especially during times of national crisis."[84]

Graber's conception of manipulation is important to this study since she presumes that the media maintains an agenda; moreover, her conception suggests an active role for the media in shaping the news, and consists of two distinct forms. The first of these involves writing "stories that expose misconduct in government and produce reforms" and the second involves presenting "sensational information that attracts large media audiences and enhances profits."[85] The first form of manipulation concerns us in this study. By deciding what needs to be changed or fixed in our society, the press has distinctly moved away from its perceived tradition of objective news reporting, placing one foot within the realm of social responsibility and one foot within the realm of social activism. We must remember, however, that the "mass media are an important influence on politics because they regularly and rapidly present politically crucial information to huge audiences."[86] Like Graber, I maintain

that agenda-extension is a "widely used strategy for manipulating politics."[87] I further maintain, however, that an activist press is a danger to a democratic society.

The press in this country is increasingly being charged with bias and partisan reporting.[88] This study will help to determine the nature of the bias operating in the national and regional press. That bias exists in news coverage is a rather uncontested assumption; however, the type of bias operating is not generally agreed upon. I have encountered two camps, the apologists and the realists. The apologists, well represented by the recent work of Dan Hahn, state that they do not believe the more significant biases of the press to be political (conservative or liberal). They instead suggest what they feel are "those more important, more real, biases." These are biases toward what makes money; a bias toward the visual; a bias in favor of the contemporary and immediate; a bias in support of the status quo; a bias in favor of the assumptions of American society; bias toward fairness and balance; bias in favor of bad news; and bias toward certain ways of covering stories.[89]

The realist position is represented by the work of Thomas Patterson. In a review of his work at Dartmouth College, Patterson outlined the political disposition of journalists in five countries, including the United States. Patterson's research documented the willingness of reporters to allow their personal ideologies—left-leaning in all countries—to influence their reportorial practices.[90] Another source which documents the left-leaning political bias in mainstream American news media is published regularly by the Media Research Center.[91] I will be using insights generated by both the apologists and the realists to better determine how media coverage helps or hinders transmission of the original meaning of public pronouncements on controversial issues, specifially the issues of race and homosexuality.

The effects of press agenda-setting can be seen in poll data. For example, 43% of the public agreed with the statement that the press "plays the most influential role in determining which issues and events are considered important these days," whereas only 22% said "political leaders in Washington" play the more influential role.[92] Poll data also demonstrates the political leanings of the press. Some rather startling data has emerged which strongly suggests a robust liberal leaning among members of our national press. For example, whereas 89% of Washington reporters voted for Bill Clinton in 1992, only 7% voted for George Bush. As an aside, only 4% were registered Republican, whereas 50% said they were Democrat.[93] This lop-sided registration and voting record continues when one moves beyond Washington: 44% of reporters polled nationwide considered themselves Democrats; 34% as independents; only 16% identified themselves as Republicans.[94] In addition, self-descriptions of political leanings indicate a substantial liberal bias in the press corps of

this country. Since 1980, polls of journalists have revealed a pronounced liberal leaning among both journalists and editors. One study found over 56% of the press considered themselves to be very to somewhat liberal, with only 18% considering themselves somewhat to very conservative. These studies will be discussed more fully in the final chapter of this book, but suffice it to say now that no poll of journalists to date remotely suggests anything but a heavy liberal political adherence among American journalists.[95] Contrast these journalistic self-descriptions with self-descriptions of voters in 1994. Only 14% thought of themselves as liberal to some degree; 26% thought of themselves as conservative to some degree; and 22% stated that they did not know.[96]

Of course, just because reporters and editors say they are Democrats, vote for Democrats, and say they are liberal does not mean that they cannot engage in neutral reportorial practices. However, admissions coming from the press corps itself show remarkable candor about willingness to engage in partisan politics as reportorial practice. Take, for example, former CBS News correspondent Bernard Goldberg in a *Wall Street Journal* opinion piece in 1996: "There are lots of reasons fewer people are watching network news, and one of them, I'm more convinced than ever, is that our viewers simply don't trust us. And for good reason. The old argument that the networks and other 'media elites' have a liberal bias is so blatantly true that it's hardly worth discussing anymore. No, we don't sit around in dark corners and plan strategies on how we're going to slant the news. We don't have to. It comes naturally to most reporters."[97] Evan Thomas, *Newsweek* Washington Bureau Chief from 1986 to 1996, plainly stated, "There is a liberal bias. It's demonstrable. You look at some statistics. About 85 percent of the reporters who cover the White House vote Democratic, they have for a long time. There is a, particularly at the networks, at the lower levels, among the editors and the so-called infrastructure, there is a liberal bias. There is a liberal bias at *Newsweek*, the magazine I work for."[98] Perhaps most convincing is this statement by legendary anchor Walter Cronkite: "Everybody knows that there's a liberal, that there's a heavy liberal persuasion among correspondents."[99]

My assumption is that, viewed as a whole on the national level, the press in this country operate under a norm of liberal bias (the full details of which will be discussed in the final chapter). I, like many of the reporters and scholars cited above, believe this to be the case. However, what is not generally agreed upon is the extent to which the liberal leanings of the press affect news coverage. It is my belief that this bias has great influence on how the news is framed. Thus this book illuminates *how* public utterances by political leaders on controversial issues are manipulated by press accounts. The influence of the press has a direct bearing upon the leadership ability of politicians and social leaders as they