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## 3

## WHY DEMOCRACIES NEED AN UNLOVABLE PRESS

Michael Schudson

## Editor's Note

Criticism of the press abounds in this volume. The press, its critics say, relies too much on official sources; it abides by outdated, constraining norms; it keeps its nose too close to daily events and conventional wisdom and revels in conflicts and cynicism. All true, concedes sociologist Michael Schudson. But in a surprising twist, he shows that these vices may actually be virtues. To understand why unlovable features of the press are vital for democracy, imagine a press without these flaws, a press that avoided official sources and conflicts, abandoned the restraints of journalistic norms, and shied away from reporting the day's events in favor of erudite analyses that never hint at politicians' ulterior motives. Would that be a lovely dream or an awful nightmare?

At the time of writing, Michael Schudson was a professor of communication and adjunct professor of sociology at the University of California. He was the author or editor of eight books, including *The Sociology of News* (2003) and *The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life* (1998). Schudson is one of the foremost students of the history and sociology of the American news media. He also studies advertising and popular culture.

Alexis de Tocqueville, widely cited for his view that the American press is a necessary and vital institution for American democracy, did not actually have much affection for it. He objected to its violence and vulgarity. He saw it as a virtue of the American system that newspapers were widely dispersed around the country rather than concentrated in a capital city—they could

Source: Michael Schudson, "Why Democracies Need an Unlovable Press," in *Freeing the Presses: The First Amendment in Action*, ed. Timothy E. Cook, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005, 73–86. Copyright © 2005 by Louisiana State University Press. Reprinted by permission of Louisiana State University Press.

do less harm this way. He confessed, "I admit that I do not feel toward freedom of the press that complete and instantaneous love which one accords to things by their nature supremely good. I love it more from considering the evils it prevents than on account of the good it does."<sup>1</sup>

It may well be, taking a leaf from Tocqueville, that today's efforts to make journalism more serious, more responsible, and, generally speaking, nicer, are misplaced. I want to propose that most critics of journalism, in and outside journalism itself, have attacked just those features of the press that, for all their defects, best protect robust public discussion and promote democracy. The focus of the news media on events, rather than trends and structures; the fixation of the press on conflict whenever and wherever it erupts; the cynicism of journalists with respect to politics and politicians; and the alienation of journalists from the communities they cover make the media hard for people to love but hard for democracies to do without. These are the features that most regularly enable the press to maintain a capacity for subverting established power.

This is not to suggest that there is anything wrong with in-depth reporting of the sort that Pulitzer juries and media critics applaud and I greatly admire. Nor do I mean to suggest that the dialogue of democracy should jettison editorial writers, op-ed columnists, investigative reporters, and expert analysts who can produce gems of explanatory journalism. That would be absurd. But I do mean to suggest that the power of the press to afflict the comfortable derives more often than not from the journalistic equivalent of ambulance chasing. Just as the ambulance-chasing trial lawyer sees another person's tragedy as a million-dollar opportunity, the newshound reporter sees it as an attention-grabbing, career-advancing, front-page sensation. I want to explore here the ways the most narrow and unlovable features of news may make the most vital of contributions to democracy.

### The Press as an Establishment Institution

The press is presumably the bastion of free expression in a democracy, but too often it has been one of the institutions that limits the range of expression, especially expression that is critical of leading centers of power in society. Almost all social scientific studies of the news reveal that journalists themselves, of their own volition, limit the range of opinion present in the news. There are at least three significant ways this happens. First, there is source-dependence. Reporters rely on and reproduce the views of their primary sources, and these tend to be high government officials. Second, reporters and editors operate according to a set of professional norms that are themselves constraints on expression. Third, journalists operate within conventional bounds of opinion, opinions common among a largely secular, college-educated, upper middle class. All of this has been

abundantly documented. . . . I will quickly review this literature, but only as a preface to arguing that this account of the compliant press has been overdrawn.

### Dependence on Official Sources

Media scholars have consistently found that official sources dominate the news. This is invariably presented as a criticism of the media. If the media were to fulfill their democratic role, they would offer a wide variety of opinions and perspectives and would encourage citizens to choose among them in considering public policies. If the media allow politicians to set the public agenda, they may unduly narrow public discussion and so diminish democracy. This is the argument made, for instance, by W. Lance Bennett in his account of the "indexing" function of the press. For Bennett, the media "tend to 'index' the range of voices and viewpoints in both news and editorials according to the range of views expressed in mainstream government debate about a given topic." Bennett argues that this helps perpetuate a "world in which governments are able to define their own publics and where 'democracy' becomes whatever the government ends up doing."<sup>2</sup>

Sociologist Herbert Gans makes an argument about official sources related to Bennett's. For him, the routines of daily journalism undermine democracy. If supporting democracy means encouraging citizens to be active, informed, and critical, then the standard operating procedures of mainstream journalism subvert their own best intentions. Since most news is "top down," relaying the views of high government officials over lower government officials, all government officials over unofficial groups and oppositional groups, and groups of any sort over unorganized citizens, it diminishes the standing and efficacy of individual citizens.<sup>3</sup>

Whether the normative implications of journalism's favoring high government officials are as dire as Gans fears may be doubted, but it is indisputable that news media coverage emphasizes the views and actions of leading politicians and other top government officials. It is likewise indisputable that this limits the range of opinion to which the general public is exposed.

### The Constraints of Professional Culture

Journalists favor high government officials—but why? The answer is that they work within a professional culture or a set of professional values that holds that a journalist's obligation is to report government affairs to serve the informational functions that make democracy work. . . . That is, in the work of political reporting, journalists emphasize "players, policies, and predictions of what will happen next."<sup>4</sup> So even when the press goes to outside experts rather than inside government officials, they seek people with experience in government, access to and knowledge of the chief players

in government, and a ready willingness to speak in the terms of government officials, interpreting and predicting unfolding events. . . .

### The Constraints of Conventional Wisdom

Journalists swim in conventional wisdom. They are wrapped up in daily events, and it would be disconcerting for them and for their readers if they took a long view. It might also be disconcerting for them to take a comparative (non-American) view. It would certainly be disconcerting for them to spend too much time with academics or others removed from the daily fray of political life. It is in relation to the conventional wisdom that journalists know how to identify “a story.” Individual journalists may take issue with convention. Some journalists who work for publications with nonconventional audiences may write with unconventional assumptions and unusual points of departure. But the mainstream journalist writing for a standard news institution is likely to be ignorant of, or, if informed, dismissive of opinions outside the fold.

In Washington, in state capitals, and even more in smaller countries, journalists pick up conventional wisdom through lives intertwined with the lives of politicians. In France, for instance, Thomas Ferenczi, associate editor of *Le Monde*, complains that journalists and politicians—and it does not matter if they are left-wing or right-wing—belong to the same “microcosm”: “when they are young they go to the same schools, later they live in the same areas, go to the same holiday resorts, and so on.” Ferenczi warns, “There is real danger for democracy here: namely, that, journalists and politicians, because they are so closely linked, have their own, narrow, idea of what the media should cover . . . and ignore the interests of the people.”<sup>5</sup> This is less of a problem in the more pluralistic United States than it is in France. In the United States, there is a more widely dispersed journalistic elite—at least across two cities, New York and Washington, and with important pockets of opinion shapers in Los Angeles, Chicago, and Cambridge-Boston, rather than concentrated in one—and it is much more diverse in social and educational background. However, the same general phenomenon occurs.

Other factors also limit the range of opinion in the American media, vitally important factors, although they lie outside the news media as such. For instance, the American political system generally offers a narrower political spectrum, and one less accommodating of minorities, than most other democratic systems. Ralph Nader complained bitterly after the 2000 election that he had not been well covered in the press. Why, he asked, when he was raising real issues, did he get no coverage while Al Gore and George W. Bush, the Tweedle-dum and Tweedle-dee of American politics, were covered every time they blew their noses?<sup>6</sup> The answer seemed pretty straightforward: Ralph Nader was not going to be elected president of the United

States in 2000. Either Al Gore or George W. Bush would. The press—as part of its conventional wisdom—believed its job was to follow what the American political system had tossed up for it. It was not the job of the press to offer the public a wide range of issues but to cover, analyze, and discuss the issues the two viable candidates were presenting. Imagine, however, if Ralph Nader had been running for president in Germany. Would the German press have shown greater interest in his ideas? Yes, but not because the German press is better or more democratic, but because Germany has a parliamentary political system. It is because if Ralph Nader received 5 percent of the vote in Germany, his party would receive 5 percent of the seats in Parliament and would be a force, potentially a decisive force, in forming a government. If Ralph Nader received 5 percent of the vote in the United States, he would get no seats in Congress.

So there are many reasons why media discourse in the United States fails to approximate an ideal of robust and wide-open discussion. Even so, journalism as it functions today is still a practice that offends powerful groups, speaks truth to power, and provides access for a diversity of opinion. How and why does this happen despite all that constrains it? The standard sociological analysis of news places it in so airless a box that exceptional journalistic forays are not readily explained. They are the exceptions that prove the rule. They are the ones that got away from the powers of constraint and co-optation and routine. But these “exceptions” happen every year, every week, at some level every day. How can we explain that?

### Strategic Opportunities for Free Expression Eventfulness

There is a fundamental truth about journalism that all journalists recognize but almost all social scientists do not: things happen. Not only do things happen, but, as the bumper sticker says, shit happens. That is what provides a supply of occurrences for journalists to work with. Shit even happens to the rich and powerful, and it makes for a great story when it does.

Because shit happens, journalists gain some freedom from official opinion, professional routines, and conventional wisdom. Journalism is an event-centered discourse, more responsive to accidents and explosions in the external world than to fashions in ideas among cultural elites. The journalists’ sense of themselves as street-smart, nose-to-the-ground adventurers in places where people do not want them has an element of truth to it, and it is very much linked to event-centeredness.

News, like bread or sausage, is something people make. Scholars emphasize the manufacturing process. Journalists emphasize the raw material their work brings them to; they insist that their jobs recurrently place them before

novel, unprecedented, and unanticipated events. While sociologists observe how this world of surprises is tamed, journalists typically emphasize that the effort at domestication falls short.<sup>7</sup>

The journalists have a point. Sometimes something happens that is not accounted for in any sociology or media studies. Take President Bill Clinton's efforts to create a system of national service. This was part of his 1992 campaign, and he mentioned it as one of the priorities of his administration the day after his election. He appointed a friend, Eli Segal, to run a new Office of National Service, and Segal set to work to get appropriate legislation through Congress. The administration's efforts led to passage of the National and Community Service Trust Act, which Clinton signed into law in September 1993. One year later, AmeriCorps would be officially launched. Segal took charge of orchestrating a major public relations event that would feature President Clinton swearing in nine thousand AmeriCorps volunteers at sixteen sites around the country by satellite hook-up. Every detail was checked, every contingency plan was rehearsed. Segal looked forward to a triumphant day on the South Lawn of the White House followed by extensive, favorable news coverage. At 4:30 a.m. on the morning of the ceremony, Segal's phone rang. The event as planned would have to be scrapped. Why? Because at that hour a deranged pilot crashed his Cessna aircraft into the back of the White House precisely on the spot where the ceremony was to be staged. The news media predictably went gaga over this bizarre and unprecedented event and could scarcely be bothered by the launching of AmeriCorps—no doubt more important than the plane crash, but infinitely more routine.<sup>8</sup>

Social scientists insist that most news is produced by Eli Segals, not deranged pilots. Quantitatively, they are right; the vast majority of daily news items on television or in print come from planned, intentional events, press releases, press conferences, and scheduled interviews. Even so, journalists find their joy and their identity in the adrenaline rush that comes only from deranged pilots, hurricanes, upset victories in baseball or politics, triumphs against all odds, tragedy or scandal in the lap of luxury, and other unplanned and unanticipated scandals, accidents, mishaps, gaffes, embarrassments, and wonders. The scholars delight in revealing how much of news is produced by the best laid plans of government officials who maneuver news to their own purposes; the journalists enjoy being first to the scene when the best laid plans go awry.

On September 13, 1994, the *New York Times*' lead story, and two related stories, covered the plane crash at the White House. Other news was swamped. The story on AmeriCorps ran on page seventeen. Even there it seemed to be folded into the big story of the day. The third paragraph read: "Some 850 were inducted as more than 2,000 dignitaries and supporters took part in the ceremony on the North Lawn of the White House. They

were kept sweltering there for more than two hours, and an elaborately synchronized satellite television transmission was thrown awry because of the crash of a light plane early this morning on the South Lawn where the event was supposed to have taken place."

Journalists make their own stories, but not from materials they have personally selected. Materials are thrust upon them. It can even be argued, as Regina Lawrence has contended, that in recent years news has become more event-driven and less institution-driven. Moreover, the news media take events not as ends in themselves but as "jumping-off points for thematic exploration of social issues." Content analysis of news over the past one hundred years indicates that journalists pay increasing attention to context, to reporting events in detail especially when they serve as "invitations for the news media to grapple, however gracefully or clumsily, with political and social issues."<sup>9</sup> This preoccupation with unpredictable events keeps something uncontrollable at the forefront of journalism. The archetypal news story, the kind that makes a career, the sort every reporter longs for, is one that is unroutinized and unrehearsed. It gives journalism its recurrent anarchic potential. And it is built into the very bloodstream of news organizations, it is the circulatory system that keeps the enterprise oxygenated.

### Conflict

Almost all journalists relish conflict. Almost all media criticism attacks journalists for emphasizing conflict. But conflict, like events, provides a recurrent resource for embarrassing the powerful.

Consider a story by Randal C. Archibold that appeared in the *New York Times* on January 11, 2003, with the headline "Nuclear Plant Disaster Plan Is Inadequate, Report Says." To summarize, New York governor George Pataki had commissioned a report on safety at the Indian Point nuclear power plant just thirty-five miles away from midtown Manhattan. The report was produced by a consulting group the governor hired, Witt Associates. James Lee Witt, its chief executive, was formerly the director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. So journalists knew the report was being written, knew its chief author was a high-ranking former federal official, and knew roughly when it would appear. This sounds like the kind of government-centered "official" news story critics complain about.

But was it? Why did Governor Pataki commission the report? Clearly, he commissioned it after the September 11 terrorist attack made more urgent the concerns that citizens and citizens' groups had already expressed about the safety of the Indian Point nuclear reactor. . . . The Witt report, whose conclusion could not have been fully anticipated by the governor or anyone else if it was to have legitimacy, declared that the disaster preparedness plan was inadequate for protecting people from unacceptable levels of radiation

in case of a release at the plant. The elected executive of Westchester County, Andrew J. Spano, commented, "the bottom line is the plant shouldn't be here." The reporter made it clear that Witt Associates did not remark on whether the plant should be shut down but, at the same time, noted that the report's view of the emergency plans for the plant "largely reflected complaints voiced for years by opponents of Indian Point."

The Witt report became news not because the governor's office generated it, but because the governor acted in the face of raging controversy. The continuing controversy made the story news and made the news story interesting. In the end, the report obviously gave support to the environmentalists and others who have urged that Indian Point be shut down. The news story helped keep opponents of government policy alert, encouraged, and legitimated.

### Cynicism

Political reporters in the past generation have increasingly made it a point not only to report the statements and actions of leading public officials but to report on the motives behind the actions as best as they can. They report not only the show and the dazzle that the politician wants foregrounded, but the efforts that go into the show and the calculations behind them. They may not intend to undercut the politicians, but they do intend not to be manipulated. The result is a portrait of politicians as self-interested, cynically manipulative, and contemptuous of the general public.

Take, for instance, the *New York Times*' April 16, 2003, front-page story on the proposed Bush tax cut, "In a Concession, Bush Lowers Goal of Tax Cut Plan." The story began by curtly observing that President Bush lowered his target for a tax cut in a tacit admission that his original package was "dead." Then reporter Elisabeth Bumiller cited White House advisers who said "that they were now on a war footing with Capitol Hill" to pass the biggest tax cut they could. They, along with other Republican strategists, said "it was imperative for Mr. Bush to be seen as fighting hard for the economy to avoid the fate of his father, who lost the White House after his victory in the 1991 Persian Gulf war in large part because voters viewed him as disengaged from domestic concerns." The orientation of the story was to the timing and style of the president's speech on the economy, not to its substance. The background—strategy and image—is the foreground. This kind of a story, once exceptional, has become standard.<sup>10</sup>

At the end of September 2003, Laura Bush went to Paris as part of the ceremonies signaling the American reentry to UNESCO after a boycott of nearly two decades. The First Lady's trip was, of course, a well-planned public relations gesture. Would anyone have suspected otherwise? But Elaine Sciolino, the *Times*' veteran foreign correspondent and chief Paris

correspondent, made a point of it, noting that Mrs. Bush did not face the American flag as the American national anthem was sung. "Instead, she stood perpendicular to it, enabling photographers to capture her in profile, with the flag and the Eiffel Tower behind. The scene was carefully planned for days by a White House advance team, much to the amusement of long-time UNESCO employees."<sup>11</sup>

. . . This kind of reporting may not be a sign of a press that motivates or mobilizes or turns people into good citizens. It may do more to reinforce political apathy than to refurbish political will. But it may be just what democracy requires of the press.

### Outsider News

Why is Trent Lott no longer majority leader of the U.S. Senate? The answer is that on December 5, 2002, he made remarks at Senator Strom Thurmond's one hundredth birthday party that suggested we would all be better off if Senator Thurmond, running on a segregationist platform for the presidency in 1948, had won the election. The room apparently was full of politicians and journalists, none of whom immediately caught the significance of the remark. . . .

But if no one at the party recognized Lott's remarks as a story, how did it become news and force Lott's resignation from his leadership post? The first part of the answer is that several practitioners of the still novel "blogs," or personal Web sites of a kind of highly individualized public diary, took note of Lott's remarks, including several prominent and widely read bloggers. . . . Although mainstream press outlets, both print and broadcast, noted the remarks (and C-SPAN had aired them), the bloggers pressed the fact that Thurmond ran as a segregationist and that Lott had taken many conservative stands through the years, including speaking before white supremacist groups and voting against the Civil Rights Act of 1990. Matt Drudge, in his online report, even found that Senator Lott had made an almost identical statement in praise of Thurmond in 1980.

Thanks to the "blogosphere," the party that Senator Lott and nearly everyone else present regarded as an insider event was available for outsider news. Moreover, as Heather Gorgura argues, the bloggers succeeded in getting the "dump Lott" bandwagon moving not simply by pointing out an indiscreet remark, but, in documenting Senator Lott's long and consistent history of association with organizations and policies offensive to African Americans, by persuading mainstream journalists that Lott's remarks were not casual and thoughtless but representative of a racism Lott had repeatedly expressed and acted upon.<sup>12</sup>

. . . The cyber-pamphleteers today can attract broad attention, including the attention of the old media. They do so, I might point out, by name-calling

sensationalism. The most prominent and most consequential cases are that of Matt Drudge breaking the Monica Lewinsky story—"The president is an adulterer"—and the bloggers who cried, "The senator is a racist." An unlovable press, indeed, but perhaps just what democracy requires.

Outsiders are always troublemakers. The news media are supposed to be institutionalized outsiders even though they have in fact become institutionalized insiders. There is much more that might be done to keep journalists at arm's length from their sources. This is something that journalism education could orient itself to more conscientiously—for instance, insisting that journalism students take a course in comparative politics or a course on the politics and culture of some society besides the United States. A serious U.S. history course would also help. The idea would be to disorient rather than orient the prospective journalist. Disorientation—and ultimately alienation of journalists—helps the press to be free.

Social scientists regularly observe how much reporters have become insiders, socializing with their sources, flattered by their intimacy with the rich and powerful, dependent on intimacy for the leaks and leads officialdom can provide. All of this is true, but it is all the more reason to observe carefully and nurture those ways in which journalists remain outsiders. Bloggers in the Trent Lott case, although journalists, took up outposts on journalism's frontier. But even standard issue journalists are outsiders to the conventional opinions of government officials in several respects. For one, they advance the journalistic agenda of finding something novel that will set tongues a-flutter across a million living rooms, breakfast tables, bars, lunchrooms, and lines at Starbucks. Second, journalists have access to and professional interest in nonofficial sources of news. Most important of these nonofficial sources is public opinion as measured by polls or by informal journalistic "taking of the pulse" of public opinion. The American press in particular has a populist streak that inclines it toward a sampling of civilian views. A front-page story in the April 24, 2003, *Chicago Tribune*, for instance, by Jill Zuckman, the *Tribune's* chief congressional correspondent, and datelined Northfield, Wisconsin, was based on both national opinion polls and local interviewing of people who objected to the USA Patriot Act.

... [People] had a surprising amount to say about their fears for domestic civil liberties. So the topic Zuckman wrote about was not what she intended to cover, but her populist instinct made it possible to report on a phenomenon that elites did not anticipate and that the administration could not have found comforting.<sup>13</sup>

## Conclusion

Journalists are not free agents. They are constrained by a set of complex institutional relations that lead them to reproduce day after day the opinions

and views of establishment figures, especially high government officials. They are constrained by broad conventional wisdom that they are not particularly well located nor well enough educated to buck and they are powerfully constrained by the conventions and routines of their own professionalism. At the same time, they are not without some resources for expanding the range of expression in the news. What structures do or could preserve their capacity to speak freely and to expand the range of voices and views they represent in their reporting? What journalistic predispositions do or could enable them to take advantage of their limited but real autonomy to fulfill the potential of a free press for vigorous, robust discussion of public issues? I am defending, somewhat to my surprise, what is usually attacked as the worst features of the American press—a preoccupation with events, a morbid sports-minded fascination with gladiatorial combat, a deep, anti-political cynicism, and a strong alienation of journalists from the communities they cover.

I hasten to add that the journalists I most admire get behind and beneath events, illuminate trends and structures and moods and not just conflicts, believe in the virtues and values of political life and the hopes it inspires, and feel connected and committed to their communities—global, national, or local. The journalists of greatest imagination discover the nonevents that conceal their drama so well. They recognize the story in conflicts that never arose because of strong leadership or a stroke of luck, or the conflict that was resolved peacefully over a painstakingly long time without sparking a front-page "event." But I propose, nonetheless, that some of the greatest service the media provide for democracy lies in characteristics that few people regard as very nice or ennobling about the press. These features of journalism—and perhaps these features more than others—make news a valuable force in a democratic society, and this means that—if all goes well—we are saddled with a necessary institution we are not likely ever to love.

## Notes

1. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, edited by J. P. Mayer (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1969), 180.
2. W. Lance Bennett, "Toward a Theory of Press-State Relations in the United States." *Journal of Communication* 40 (spring 1990): 103–25, quotes at 106, 125.
3. Herbert Gans, *Democracy and the News* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2003). Gans and Bennett, like many other contemporary theorists, both presume that the press at its best should not only report the doings of government but that it should do so in a way to encourage and provide for the participation of ordinary citizens, informing them in advance of governmental decisions so that they can make their voices heard. This is by no means an undisputed assumption. As John Zaller has argued, the job of the press in a mass democracy may be to help people evaluate leaders, not policies. The press should try to make it possible

- for the public to evaluate leaders after they have acted, not policies before they have been put in place. See John Zaller, "Elite Leadership of Mass Opinion: New Evidence from the Gulf War," in *Taken by Storm: The Media, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Gulf War*, edited by W. Lance Bennett and David L. Paletz (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1994), 201–2.
4. Janet Steele, "Experts and the Operational Bias of Television News: The Case of the Persian Gulf War," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 72 (1995): 799–812, quote at 799.
  5. Thomas Ferenczi, "The Media and Democracy," *CSD Bulletin*, 8 no. 1 (winter 2000–2001): 1–2.
  6. Ralph Nader, "My Untold Story," *Brill's Content* (February 2001), 100–3, 153–4.
  7. Scholars . . . have provided important explanations for this autonomy. Daniel Hallin sees autonomy provided structurally by divisions among elites. See Daniel C. Hallin, *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986). Laws that make it tough to sue for libel also enhance autonomy. These explanations direct attention to structural opportunities for aggressive reporting, but they do not provide journalists with a motive to pursue challenge and critique.
  8. Steven Waldman, *The Bill* (New York: Viking, 1995), 240.
  9. Regina Lawrence, *The Politics of Force* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2000), 188.
  10. This is not to mention background stories that are exclusively focused on stagecraft. See, for instance, Elisabeth Bumiller, "Keepers of Bush Image Lift Stagecraft to New Heights," *New York Times*, May 16, 2003, p. 1.
  11. *New York Times*, September 30, 2003, A4.
  12. Heather E. Gorgura, "Lott Gets a Blogging: Did the Amateur Journalists of the Blogosphere Bring Down Trent Lott?" (unpublished paper, University of Washington, March 2003). This student paper is extremely thoughtful and well documented.
  13. Email to the author from Jill Zuckman, September 20, 2003.

## 4

## POLITICAL COMMUNICATION: OLD AND NEW MEDIA RELATIONSHIPS

Michael Gurevitch, Stephen Coleman, and Jay G. Blumler

## Editor's Note

The environment in which political communication operates is in turmoil. Established media are battling to retain as much of their influence over news production as possible. They are merging well-seasoned practices of the past with new ways of news dissemination made possible by evolving communications technologies. Meanwhile, professional and lay competition for audiences for political news is escalating. The future of news broadcasting is murky. Current structures may not survive. Gurevitch, Coleman, and Blumler shed much-needed light on the moving scene, explaining the role of televised news in the past, the ongoing changes, and the implications for democratic politics in the twenty-first century.

When this essay was written, Michael Gurevitch was an emeritus professor at the Phillip Merrill College of Journalism of the University of Maryland, Stephen Coleman was a professor of political communication and the codirector of the Centre for Digital Citizenship at the Institute for Communications Studies at the University of Leeds, and Jay G. Blumler was an emeritus professor of public communication at the University of Leeds and an emeritus professor of journalism at the University of Maryland. Gurevitch and Blumler are among the leading, internationally recognized founders of the political communication field. All three authors have published numerous important studies about the mass media's political influence.

. . . But as the new medium became settled, ubiquitous, and seemingly invulnerable, it came to seem as if politics in electoral democracies—a game

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