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Media Epistemology and American Politics: A Comparative Study of Academic and
Industry Perspectives

I became interested in the American news media as an influence on American political culture in Dr. Mike Fitzgerald's political science class, "Pop Culture and American Politics." We spent a semester studying Hollywood feature films and the way they mirror and shape America's dominant political and cultural ideologies. Much of the semester was spent analyzing John Wayne as a pop-cultural symbol who perpetuated the rugged-individualistic ideology that shaped America's development as a liberal, capitalistic society.

But the portions of the class that struck me as most interesting were those dealing with television news media as an influence on how Americans process information concerning their society. We watched the films *Network*, *Broadcast News*, and others that conveyed skeptical ideas about the entertainmentization of news content, and read Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, which similarly espoused ideas of the trivialization of important cultural conversations. It was then that I first heard the word "epistemology," and then that I began to consider the way communications media affect how individuals process information.

Increasingly, I became interested in media epistemology as I continued my studies in journalism and political science. After reading the political philosophies of Plato, Aristotle, Luther, Calvin, Locke, Marx, and on down the line, I began to sense something missing in American politics. When Postman says we're evolving into a "Reach Out and Elect Someone" society, that argument is made more convincing when politicians are reduced to a pair of punchy quotes in a paper or a ten second sound byte on television. Little of modern American political culture compares to the understanding and involvement of the colonial American society that took time to read.

On the other hand, Hegel's theory of the dialectic would suggest that we are constantly evolving to a state that is qualitatively better than that of the past. If we consider reading to be the thesis at which we begin and watching to be the antithesis to which we have evolved, then the natural progress of society should resolve those two into something of greater utility. In other words, I can't wholly believe that the television evening news could have or will fully turn Americans into entertainment-craving illiterates who vote only for image. Regardless of a rather pessimistic body of scholarship on the subject of television news epistemology, the television is only about 50 years old, and we are quick to forget that societies were not yet capable of using the printing press to its full potential a mere 50 years after its introduction.

So, this paper is my attempt to generate a Hegelian synthesis from the contradictory opinions that either television is necessarily an entertainment medium that cannot properly convey complex cultural conversation, or television is still young as a medium and has not yet been used properly. To do this, I have researched the academic perspectives through the writings of Marshall McLuhan, Mark Miller, Neil Postman and

others, and am comparing them with the perspectives of people who work or have worked in the news industry.

Moreover, I intend to use this paper to ask normative questions about where we have been in terms of cultural communication and where it appears we are headed. And where should we be headed?

These questions are important to society because of how closely the history of American political development parallels the history of American media development. In The Medium is the Message, Marshall McLuhan says, “any understanding of social and cultural change is impossible without a knowledge of the way media work as environments” (26).

If America is truly a liberal democracy, then the quality of our political development depends on the input of individual citizens. Progress depends on conversation, and the quality of that progress depends on the quality of that conversation. So, it is not difficult to see how important epistemology becomes during a time when this society is taking more of its information from television and less from written works. When the process for receiving information changes from one medium that necessitates certain analytical skills to another that necessitates a different set, so must the process for understanding importance and truth-value. In other words, any time two people communicate, they communicate through a system, or medium. That system might be audible speech, written text, pictures, Morse code, interpretive dance, et cetera ad infinitum. Each of these media necessitates specific skills to interpret the message of the other party in the conversation, and each medium is fundamentally different from the next. Each has benefits, and each has limiting factors. It is difficult to convey complex

argument through interpretive dance, and it is equally difficult to convey love through Morse code. Thus, each medium will be best suited for certain purposes, because each medium of communication will have a certain set of ideas or subjects that will be difficult or impossible to address effectively. In this way, each medium has a logic of its own, or a method of operation for how one communicates through that medium. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to understand the logic of the dominant medium of communication a society employs, because it will affect the direction of that society's future cultural conversation and development. However, this point has been made time and again, and it has been old news since long before the time I've written it here. In fact, Postman credits this idea to Aristotle.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to periodically revisit this thesis. As societies develop, they create new technologies for communication, and the farther technology progresses, the faster it progresses. Personal computers were still science fiction at the time Marshall McLuhan published *The Medium is the Message* in 1967, and the Internet and email were still unheard of by the time Neil Postman published *Amusing Ourselves to Death* in 1985. Certainly neither of them gave much consideration to the symbiosis of television and computers that looms in the future of digital communication.

Certainly, if an informed citizenry is imperative to the democratic political process, then examining the effects of how that citizenry provides and consumes information is worth while. True, television is a medium used predominantly for entertainment, and for that reason it may trivialize the importance of news that was once considered serious, but it is also undeniable that the immediacy and power of the visual image provide something that the older print technology does not. One may also assume

that newspapers provide more detailed and logical accounts of public events and records, but again it is undeniable that with each year, the pace of life quickens, leaving less time for reading and writing. Academics fear that a society that watches instead of reads will lose the ability to logically consider news and how each story affects it, while news-industry personnel fear that a society without the option to see and experience will simply not inform itself in the first place. Both media have their limiting factors, and some combination of the better aspects of each could feasibly make the news process both immediate and powerful as well as logical. News producers should find a way to heed the cautions of the academics, while utilizing the practical knowledge that has come from fifty years of trial and error within the industry. Through this paper, I will more thoroughly explore the limits of the two main media of American communication, the television and the newspaper, to gain a better understanding as to whether or not American news media are driving American political participation into the ground. Then with a fuller understanding of the relationship between news media and political participation, I will provide a normative analysis of one probable future for the technological development of American news media.

To begin, an understanding of the inherent connection between the development of American media and the development of American history is important. Without the connection between media and historical development, one might easily dismiss the theory that social and political developments occur within boundaries set by our method of mass social discourse, making this study of news epistemology unnecessary.

However, even Aristotle argued that the medium of a society's mass communication greatly influences which ideas are convenient to express, and that those

ideas will become the important topics of social conversation (Postman 6). If we assume that important topics of conversation largely define the culture of a society, then mass media create cultures.

From the beginning, news media have helped shape American society. The powers of the printing press, radio, and television to disseminate information quickly have been used to secure many of the rights we consider “inalienable” today. Freedom of speech as guaranteed in the first amendment is the product of a society with the technology for mass public discourse for instance.

In *The American Media*, Ted Gottfried says of the printing press, “few inventions have had such far-reaching consequences for the advance of human culture” (10). By following the development of the press and its role in American socio-political development, Gottfried demonstrates that “In a very real sense, the history of American media is the history of the United States of America” (19).

Gottfried begins his American media history with John Peter Zenger, publisher of the *New York Weekly Journal* from 1733 to 1744. At the time, New York was an English colony ruled under the common law by Governor William Crosby, who essentially had no check on his power. After Crosby fired the New York chief justice Lewis Morris for deciding against him in a civil case, Morris and a group of citizens decided to put together a newspaper that they asked Zenger to publish (14). Gottfried writes,

On November 3, 1733, Zenger published the first issue of the *New York Weekly Journal* and wrote some of its articles and news stories. From the outset, this paper was very critical of Crosby. The articles attacking him—some written by Zenger, some by others—

appeared every week for a year. The governor's representatives repeatedly warned Zenger to stop the attacks or suffer the consequences. He ignored the warnings and was arrested on November 17, 1734, and was charged with 'scandalous, virulent, false and seditious' statements against the government. (14)

After ten months in prison, Zenger came to trial, and many doubted that he would go free due to English common law, which read, "a libel on the government ... is a crime" (Gottfreid 14). At this time, critical statements were considered libelous regardless of their truth. However, Gottfried says that Zenger's attorney, Andrew Hamilton, used that same common law to ensure Zenger a jury trial, during which he argued against repetitious warnings from the judge that the definition of libel should only include damaging statements that cannot be proven true. The judge warned Hamilton several times that his line of argument was irrelevant to the law as it was written, and threatened to hold him in contempt if he persisted. However, Hamilton convinced the jury to acquit Zenger on the basis that his "libel" was truthful, which undoubtedly helped secure the right to criticize government for all Americans. This right eventually survived America's early, skeptical leadership, and led to the legitimization of the newspaper as an important source of public discourse (Gottfried 15-16).

The boom in news production that America experienced in the early eighteenth hundreds was necessitated by a rapidly expanding America. The literacy rates in America were on the rise, and shortly after the War of 1812 was drawing to a close, the news media and the national government had established patterns of behavior that still stand today (Gottfried 21).

After having his praises sung for successfully defeating the British at the Battle of New Orleans, Andrew Jackson “had every reason to believe that he had the press in his hip pocket, but he was wrong” (Gottfried 22). During his presidency, the first sex-scandal story was printed, in which the press reported that Jackson had lived with his wife out of wedlock and only married her after her husband divorced her for adultery. Aside from setting the tenor for future presidential sex-scandal coverage, the story sparked Jackson’s realization that he could use the press for publicity. He created the first incarnation of the White House Press Corps which he could control, since he “had 60 full time journalists working on the government payroll” (Gottfried 23).

Following the American timeline, Gottfried discusses how yellow journalism helped set the mood for the Civil War by attacking issues like states rights and slavery. Then the invention of the telegraph, originally designed for war correspondence, provided the technology to make political issues truly national.

Gottfried’s discussion of women of the press is the most successful in demonstrating that “the history of American media is the history of the United States” (19). In 1885, Elizabeth Jane Cochrane made headway for the women’s rights movement when she went to work for the *Dispatch* in Pittsburgh under the name Nelly Bly (Gottfried, 94). It was remarkable that she could break into an industry that was dominated by male writers, editors, and publishers. Her first real recognition would come later though when she was working for Joseph Pulitzer’s *New York World*. Bly had herself committed to Blackwell’s Island Insane Asylum for Women, and wrote an expose that prompted the discontinuation of cruel treatment of women held there. Some of thos

women Bly described as “foreign women, wholly sane, who were committed because they could not make themselves understood” (Gottfried 97).

Bly also worked in other ways to promote women’s rights. After she broke the record for traveling around the world with a time of 72 days, 6 hours, 11 minutes and 14 seconds, she went on to become one of the most adventurous war correspondents of World War One. “She reported on the eastern-front battles with both the Serbs and the Russians,” and was one of the only ones there, while other journalists were on more stable fronts (Gottfried 100). Her bravery and capability for adventurous accomplishment helped begin the erosion of strong gender stereotypes, and added proof to the argument that men are not the only ones capable of fulfilling their dreams in America. Bly and her acceptance into the national media went a long way towards thrusting the capability of women into the national spotlight.

American history is constantly intertwined with the history of American media, such that at certain points (Watergate for example) they become inseparable. It is for this reason that news is worthy of academic study, because the media of communication drives the society. Perhaps Marshal McLuhan made this point the best with *The Medium is the Message*, a philosophical essay on the implications of the technological progress of communication.

McLuhan’s fundamental thesis is that the medium of our cultural, mass communication is of greater significance than the content of that communication, because the medium dictates how the content is processed. “The medium, or process, of our time—electronic technology—is reshaping and restructuring patterns of social interdependence and every aspect of your personal life,” McLuhan writes. “Societies

have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of that communication” (8). McLuhan illustrates this point by describing how different communication “technologies” have influenced the ways men interact.

McLuhan describes how the earliest form of communication, pre-dating the phonetic alphabet, was aural. “Hearing was believing,” McLuhan says (44). This accounts for the existence of many things we now consider peripheral to direct and honest communication like parables, sayings, and clichés. Verbal communication necessitated rhymed poetry, sayings and parables, pneumonic devices that enabled a man to remember the wealth of information he would need to appear educated.

Then, a new technology developed that would allow man to expand the way he processed and consumed knowledge. “Western history was shaped for some three thousand years by the introduction of the phonetic alphabet, a medium that depends solely on the eye for communication” (44). McLuhan says the way human beings communicated did not merely change intrinsically, but the development of written communication enabled man to think in totally different ways. “The alphabet’s ... use fostered and encouraged the habit of perceiving all environment in visual and spatial terms ... The line, the continuum became the organizing principle of life,” McLuhan says (45). Written language allowed man to think in a linear manner. Reason, rationality and continuous thought became possible with the new technology of the visual, written line. “For many people, rationality has the connotation of uniformity and connectiveness ... Visual space is uniform, continuous and connected. The rational man in our Western culture is a visual man” (45).

McLuhan is warning Americans of an epistemological danger. He does not adopt an optimistic tone when he says America has shifted from a visual culture, one permeated with rationality and uniformity, to an electric culture, in which “the older training of observation has become quite irrelevant ... because it is based on psychological responses and concepts conditioned by the former technology—mechanization” (8).

McLuhan says that by abandoning a form of communication based on linear and coherent thought, Americans will also abandon the ability to think in a coherent, linear pattern. Like Gottfreid, McLuhan says the media of mass communication is driving the world that uses it. “Media, by altering the environment, evoke in us unique ratios of sense perceptions. The extension of any one sense alters the way we think and act—the way we perceive the world. When these ratios change, **men change**,” McLuhan says (41). For this reason, McLuhan says it is “impossible to understand social and cultural changes without a knowledge of the workings of the media” (8).

For the time being, McLuhan says that society is experiencing an age of anxiety because we are trying to do yesterday’s jobs with today’s technologies. Components of the American political system that existed before the introduction of television, such as extended debate or simply an ugly candidate with good ideas, no longer exist in any real sense. A candidate’s analytical ability and the substance of his platform are now penultimate at best, taking second seat to qualities that fit the medium better such as style, wit, and how they speak in short spontaneous blurbs. “At the high speeds of electric communication, purely visual means of apprehending the world are no longer possible; they are just too slow to be relevant or effective” (63). Instead of separating men through visual communication, where one man must take the time to read and understand a

thought before commenting on it in a careful and linear manner, McLuhan says electric communication connects all men. Electronic communication has effectively torn down our barriers, our family circles and the walls of our neighborhoods.

McLuhan says that the television generates a false sense of importance for itself and its content. People will watch programs or news stories simply because they are broadcast about subjects that they previously would have dismissed as being irrelevant. Furthermore, he says that the flow of information is so constant that once a person has been informed about one issue, the television has already moved on to another. This process happens ad infinitum, and no news content is likely to be considered very carefully because the wash of information is too overwhelming. "Electronic circuitry has overthrown the regime of 'time' and 'space' and pours upon us instantly and continuously the concerns of all other men" (16). He adds later: "Information pours upon us instantaneously and continuously. As soon as information is acquired, it is very rapidly replaced by still newer information" (63). Amazingly, only the major networks were producing news McLuhan's day, and already he regarded the television news stream as overwhelming. If it was then, then one might wonder how McLuhan would react today when the options for news consumption are almost unlimited. From twenty-four hour news stations like MSNBC and CNN, to the network news and magazine programs like *60 Minutes* and *Hard Copy*, one can get so bogged down in the quick jumps from one topic to another that a person cannot hope to keep straight who killed who, what natural disaster struck where and whose puppies fulfilled a sick little boy's very special Christmas wish:

All media work us over completely. They are so pervasive in their personal, political, economic, aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical and social consequences that they leave no part of us untouched, unaffected, unaltered. The medium is the message. Any understanding of social and cultural change is impossible without a knowledge of the way media work as environments. (26)

Dr. Mike Fitzgerald of the University of Tennessee political science department cut to the heart of this statement with a comment he wrote in the margin of the book.

“The medium does not convey an effect—it produces it!” But what effect is that?

In terms of television, McLuhan says the effect is the creation of a global village. “Your family circle has widened,” he says, “the whirlpool of information fathered by electric media—movies, Telstar, flight—far surpasses any possible influence mom and dad can now bring to bear. Character no longer is shaped by two earnest fumbling experts. Now all the world’s a sage” (14). If this was true at all in 1967, it is more probably true now with the advent of *Barney and Friends*, *Sesame Street*, and other popular television shows to which parents have delegated the authority of raising their children. But if character is seriously influenced by television, what happens to Americans too old for *Sesame Street*? Plenty of television’s content values violence, arrogance, or simply places the comic and entertaining over all other content of importance. The values one could learn from television are not consistent with the values necessary for governing a nation, or even simply functioning as a member of a healthy society.

It would seem that many forms of personal interaction suffer in an increasingly fast paced society. “There simply is no time for the narrative form, borrowed from earlier print technology” (126). McLuhan certainly practices what he preaches here, abandoning the continuous narrative for his 157 page book, and instead adopting a style of writing that mimics something more comfortable for a television generation. *The Medium is the Massage*, for all practical purposes, might as well be television, as it is composed of segments that read (for the most part) well within a minute. Interspersed with the fragmented text is pictures, mind puzzles, and generally anything he can use to wash the book over the reader like so many news clips and commercials. The pictures range from naked women to op art to burning people. The layout of the text and graphics is obviously as close to television as McLuhan could bring the book, and demonstrates quite nicely how absurd the logic of one medium seems when applied to another. McLuhan leaves out any blunt value statements. He never says “good” or “bad,” but he does make it clear that for us to understand a society dominated by the television, we have to understand the television.

Two thinkers who have presented well-constructed replies to McLuhan’s call for an understanding of our dominant form of social discourse are Mark Crispin Miller who wrote *Boxed In: The Culture of TV* (1988) and Neil Postman who wrote *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985). Both analyze the social implications of the shift America has made from literature to television. Miller remains distant from the far-reaching political and sociological impacts of television news media, but hones in on the impact of television on the individual. Postman deals with the societal consequences that occur

after shifting from a typographic culture to a photographic one, and zeros in on the evening news.

Miller is a Johns Hopkins educated literary critic, who is currently a JHU Associate Professor in the Writing Seminars. While in graduate school, Miller says he became interested in television as a form of communication that might deserve criticism. He says at the time, literary criticism was evolving along with popular psychology and philosophy. In his essay “The Hipness Unto Death,” Miller said that criticism was evolving “away from the purely literary object towards other kinds of texts—first of all, towards cinema” (4). Miller eventually would regard cinema and television as new forms of literature, having their own properties and needing their own academic discussion:

I came to notice that the canon was far too limited, for it ought to have included, along with Conrad and Faulkner, Fritz Lang, Josef von Sternberg, Orson Welles and Alfred Hitchcock; John Ford along with Yeats and Dos Passos...If the liberal arts curriculum is meant to introduce students to the outstanding narrative works of their own culture, it must be grossly deficient if it neglects *Chinatown*, *Nashville*, and the *Godfather* films, and omits, or barely tolerates, any guidance in the art of watching them. (Miller 5)

But Miller’s professors were bemused at best. They patronizingly told him that it was good that he “have a traditional field, and also do some bullshit on the side” (5). Naturally, the professors were ill at ease with bastardizing a legitimate academic

discipline with “entertainment.” After all, they suggested that’s what television and cinema are.

Within the essay, Miller recognizes that television and cinema have moved passed the classics into the advertising dominated age of sit-coms and spin-offs, but refuses to admit that the black box produces entertainment and nothing else. Miller realizes the pervasiveness of television as a medium of communication, and seeks to inform the reader of the way it could have an unhealthy control on the way we think, at least from an academic perspective.

After the Seventies, Miller says,

One could not now discern TV so clearly (if at all), because it was no longer a mere stain or imposition on some preexistent cultural environment, but had itself become the environment. Its aim was to be *everywhere*: not just to clutter our surroundings, but to become them; and this aim had suddenly been realized by TV, which was not only “on the air,” but had become the very air we breath. (8)

His point reflects those of McLuhan and Gottfried, that you cannot separate a culture from its method of mass communication. Though by the time Miller writes, the inseparability was no longer theory as it was with McLuhan in the 60s, but a reality. He notes that until the Seventies, academics were always leery of the influence of TV.

Auden wrote *The Age of Anxiety*. Orwell wrote *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and Aldus Huxley wrote *Brave New World*. All of these books commented in some way on the negative influence of television on society. Admittedly television was nothing more than a dream when Samuel Adams lived, but in light of the overt commercial intentions of television,

it still seems relevant when Adams said, “we live surrounded by the advertisement. Our notions of art, and even of literature, must be insensibly modified by this enormous mass of inescapable decay” (Miller 7).

But in the seventies, according to Miller, people began to uncritically buy into the process of television:

Ordinarily, the fact of all that earlier satire and polemic would serve as a basis for denying that the media has ever changed: ‘People have been saying this kind of thing for years,’ etc. Those writings, however, indirectly reinforce the claim that something new had happened in the Seventies—for they largely ceased at that time. All that prior alarm referred to a flood of propaganda that had not yet covered everything, but was only rising, each unprecedented wave or current eliciting fresh outcries from the generation almost drowned by it. By the late Seventies, however, there were virtually no more public outcries from a critical intelligentsia, but only TV’s triumphant flow. (7)

Triumphant, that is, because in an age when people have tired of saying “television rots your brain,” we have lost sight of our original criticism of the medium. With the advent of home video, video games, television internet connections, cable TV, and around the clock news channels, we are depending more and more on our television for information and social involvement, and the advertisers are having a heyday.

Now that TV’s content has itself been determined and homogenized by the commercial impetus that once merely

underlay the spectacle, and now that TV's basic purpose is to keep you watching, the images all point back toward that now-imperceptible managerial intention. (Miller 19)

But one wonders how television, a medium humanity was so skeptical of in the beginning, could suck society into its culture of entertainment and advertisement so completely just decades later. Miller says television creates the image for itself that its content is not worthy of critical analysis, and people have bought that image. "Thus, within the televisual environment, you prove your superiority to TV's garbage by not criticizing or refusing it, but by feeding on it, taken in by its oblique assurances that you're too smart to swallow any of it" (15).

The end result is that people who used to suspect television's purposes, now couldn't be bothered to think about it. Modern Americans accept the medium for what it is. "The generation that once laughed off TV, in short, is trying still to laugh it off while disappearing into it" (15). Miller suggests that television now understands what was so easily criticizable about itself and plays off of that. If Archie Bunker seemed a ridiculous character, Al Bundy somehow escapes that criticism because he purposefully plays up his illogical ridiculousness in a tongue and cheek manner. Miller suggests the ability to dodge criticism by creatively playing to its shortcomings is an ability unique to TV. "'Whereas,' they feared, 'A man may read an advertisement for the American Way and laugh at it,' TV protects its ads from mockery by doing all the mocking, thereby posing as an ally to the incredulous spectator" (Miller 14). Miller says that through old media, advertisement was always "overt and recognizable," but television has taken the

advertisements that pay for it all and “resubmerged them, by overwhelming the mind that would perceive them, making it only half aware” (17).

This idea is particularly frightening because it implies that television opens people up to suggestion, hypnotizing them with a regular pulse of entertainment and advertisement (which is also entertainment now, considering television commercials have their own awards show). Miller takes this point one step further:

Repeatedly subjected to TV’s small jolts, we become incapable of outright shock or intense arousal, lapsing into a constant, dull anxiety where we can hardly sense the difference between a famine and a case of body odor. The televisual montage bolsters our inability to differentiate, its spectacle of endless metamorphosis merely making all images seem as insignificant as any single image seen for hours. (324)

Miller concludes with the same point McLuhan ends with ... we need to better understand television. Miller’s ultimate point is that we need to critically read television, so that its purpose does not totally elude us, giving its creators free range to create history and society as they choose:

To read is, in this case, to undo. Such a project, however, demands that we not simply snicker at TV, presuming its stupidity and our own superiority. Rather, we need a critical approach that would take TV seriously (without extolling it), a method of deciphering TV’s component images, requiring both a meticulous attention to concrete detail, and a sense of TV’s historical situation. (Miller 19)

History and society, however, are more the specialties of Neil Postman, whose *Amusing Ourselves to Death* is a commentary on how politics and epistemology are affected when society shifts its major form of political discourse from predominantly typographic to largely photographic, or a society that watches where it used to read. Postman deals with late 20th century America's transformation from a society that took its political information from extended public debates (not affected by the interference of television) and carefully crafted essays, into one that assimilates political knowledge from thirty second television commercials, television debates, and the evening news.

The fundamental thesis of *Amusing Ourselves to Death* is that America's media of public discourse is a metaphor for its society. This thesis also includes the idea that when society undergoes a mass media shift, it sparks a subsequent epistemological shift. This is to say that a society will decide what it believes to be true (or credible) based on how well the expressed idea fits into the media used to convey it. Postman argues that America's shift from a typographic society into a photographic society that takes its ideas from thirty-second television blurbs is destroying its citizen's ability to think coherently. Moreover, he argues that it is destroying our ability to make rational choices about politics, and that by taking serious information through a device created for entertainment, we will eventually "amuse ourselves to death."

Postman begins to develop his thesis by describing an America that pored through books like sailors through bottles of rum. Postman says that "although literary rates are notoriously difficult to assess ... between 1640 and 1700, the literacy rate for men in Massachusetts and Connecticut was between 89 and 95 percent" (31). He also tells us that "Thomas Payne's *Common Sense*, published on January 10, 1776, sold more than

100,000 copies by March of the same year” (34). Today he says, “a book ... would have to sell 24,000,000 copies to do as well,” and, “the only communication event that could produce such collective attention in today’s America is the Superbowl” (35). Yet along with reading, Postman says that late 18th century Americans attended philosophical lectures and debates for entertainment. Postman quotes Alfred Bunn from 1853:

Practically every village had its lecture hall. It is a matter of wonderment...to witness the youthful workmen, the overtired artisan, the worn-out factory girl...rushing...after the toil of the day is over, into the hot atmosphere of a crowded lecture room.

(40)

Indeed, people of the mid-nineteenth century regarded intellectual debate and lecture as entertainment, but also valued its pertinence in their life. For instance, a crowd gathered in 1854 to listen to seven hours of debate between Abe Lincoln and Stephen Douglas, and neither man happened to be running for the presidency. Postman says, “these people regarded such events as essential to their political education, took them to be an integral part of their social lives, and were quite accustomed to extended oral performances” (44-45).

Postman argues that the transition from typography to photography was a long time in the making, but the accompanying epistemological shift possibly made its first major appearance in the Richard Nixon vs. John Kennedy televised debate. A common story around political science departments is how Kennedy convincingly beat Nixon in that debate according to the polls of those who watched it on television, while Nixon won according to polls of those who listened to the debate on the radio. The common

explanation is that Kennedy looked cool and collected, while Nixon looked sweaty and uncertain, though the content of his answers was good from a certain perspective.

Postman mentions that “Richard Nixon, who once claimed he lost an election because he was sabotaged by makeup men, has offered Senator Edward Kennedy advice on how to make a serious run for the presidency: lose twenty pounds” (4). Postman says, “the emergence of the image-manager and...decline of the speech writer attests to the fact that television demands a different kind of content from other media. You cannot do philosophy on television. It works against the content” (7). If it is true that “in America, God favors all those who possess both a talent and format to amuse,” then there must be truth to Postman’s statement that “we may have reached the point where cosmetics has replaced ideology as the field of expertise over which a politician must have competent control” (4-5). For Postman, America has emerged as a society in which “nothing but entertainment is news,” and the same trend is apparent in American politics (112). Otherwise, why would Americans have ever seen Michael Dukakus, who is obviously not a military man, sitting in a tank and looking ridiculous at the advice of his image consultant. The image, apart from being a bad idea, had no real relevance to his campaign, but rather was just a series of images flickering across the screen in an attempt to create a certain impression of Dukakus for the American people. But the image merely attempted to fit television’s image dominated method of communication, while having no real relevance.

Postman says that, through television commercials and the evening news, America has found a new conjunction to use in its public discourse: “Now...This.” He claims that “Now...This” separates everything from everything, and is “commonly used

on radio and television...to indicate that what one has just heard or seen has no relevance to what one is about to hear or see" (99). "Now...This" refers to the juxtaposition of natural disasters, politics, celebrities, entertainment, and commercials. Postman argues that viewers perceive this disjunction. He says that television's format has fragmented political and public discourse, which "without context, without consequences, without value...[has] no essential seriousness" (100).

The problem with television's format, in which entertainment sells and well thought-out philosophy doesn't, is mostly that a new definition of truth has arisen in America. "On television, credibility replaces reality as the decisive form of truth telling," Postman says, and the ultimate political problem this creates is that "political leaders need not trouble themselves very much with reality provided that their performances consistently generate a sense of verisimilitude" (102). In short, Americans can no longer be wholly informed about the leaders who shape the politics of this country, but will be pleased to be entertained by them. We are a nation that only cares for entertainment, drama, and witty one liners, and if one listens to Neil Postman, America can only hope that our politics, philosophy, and our ultimate truths will not permanently become jokes.

It is difficult to find a piece of scholarly work that claims television has no lasting negative impact on American culture. I think the idea would not sell in university communities, where no social impact would imply unimportance. The resultant one-sided "debate" over the influence of communications media on society, therefore, leaves little room for more and more scholarship. Television epistemology has been analyzed and reanalyzed, and most scholars essentially rehash the same arguments. McLuhan said

media matters. Miller said why it matters to me as a person, and Postman said why it matters to society. The rest could be considered derivative scholarship.

Media Worlds in the PostJournalism Era by David Altheide and Robert Snow and *The Interplay of Influence* by Kathleen Jamieson and Karlyn Campbell are prime examples of this derivative scholarship.

Altheide and Snow argue that journalism is dead because journalists have tried to adapt it to a medium that could not support its life. They say, "Journalism is so thoroughly limited by the mass media formats that for all practical purposes it has been recast as information mechanics. We are postjournalism and very much in the age of media 'talent,' 'performers' and 'actors' who play caricatures of journalists" (52). Altheide and Snow argue that since journalism is faked through an entertainment medium, the world becomes distorted to viewers because some types of stories like murders and scandals are more entertaining than others. "Serious personal attacks happen rarely, but they are regarded as typical and quite common by American citizens because virtually all mass media reports about crime focus on the most spectacular, dramatic and violent" (2). To assure us that entertainment is the ultimate goal of the nightly news, they give the words of former president of NBC news Reuven Frank:

Every news story should, without any sacrifice of probity or responsibility, display the attributes of fiction, of drama. It should have structure and conflict, problem and denouement, rising action and falling action, a beginning, a middle, and an end. (quoted by Altheide & Snow 47)

They add that sensationalism is a problem, because the necessity of the medium to make news entertaining distorts the viewer's perception of the actual society, and with no relevance of one topic to the next, the possibility exists for the viewer to only remember the spectacle and forget the consequences. One potential danger is the increased likelihood of "copycat" crime:

With images of blood, guns, psychopaths and suffering in front of them, and inside their heads, it is quite difficult to offer programmatic criticisms of our current approach to crime and accompanying issues such as prisons...As long as crime and mayhem are represented in such familiar and 'fun' formats, new information will not be forthcoming, but only a cycling of affirmations tied to previous popular culture. (2)

This is certainly a point worth considering after the follow-up shootings in the wake of the media blitz surrounding Columbine High School.

The Interplay of Influence revisits Postman's argument that attractiveness surpasses consistent accuracy as the prime news value of television:

Because anchorpersons seem to be an important factor in ratings and because they are relatively subject to change, there is widespread use of "skin-testing" by national rating services to measure audience response to anchors, a form of testing that may measure sexiness or empathy, but cannot measure journalistic competence or ability. (47)

Chapter 3, "News as Persuasion," provides insight into the intentions of television news producers, and gives some legitimacy to entertainment and sensationalism as a part of the television journalist's world. With everyone's finger poised on the remote control, producers know the presentation of news better be good as well as the stories. While Miller tells us that the goal of television is to keep the audience watching more and more commercials, Jamieson and Campbell provide insight into how the savvy producer can do just that. Camera angles and focal lengths can influence people's perception of a news source as credible. "Facticity is produced by meeting an event 'head on,' with camera angle fixed to simulate the angle of a person of average height confronting a person eye to eye" (52). Also, over time, dramatic close-ups can create a sense of intimacy with a newsperson, synthesizing an actual relationship with a viewer. Nitpicky accuracy becomes less important because the ultimate credibility of an interpersonal relationship has been established.

Special effects tools can also spice up the news. Jamieson and Campbell say:

To emphasize elements in a news story, news directors can use stop action, freeze frame, slow motion, or a zoom lens to focus a postage-stamp sized image on the screen. With a CHYRON 4 character generator, they can superimpose text in colors. The QUANTEL 5000 Plus, a computerized switcher, enables directors to mold electronic images. (53)

Jamieson and Campbell quote ABC director Mike Buddy as having said, "This is where we add the bells and whistles." He said, "We tell the story graphically... We try to make the graphics move the story forward instead of being a reference mark" (53).

The Interplay of Influence also discusses editing to entertainmentize the news.

Quotes are cropped to make them more punchy, and whole speeches can be chopped to fit them into time constraints. This can be problematic, because sometimes the context can be lost, or the whole character of the interview can be skewed. Jamieson and Campbell discuss one interview by Geraldo Rivera that sums up the problem of editing for entertainment value. By editing in the questions of an interview with Joseph Ross of the National Electrical Code after the interview was over, Rivera was able to make an answer that was given seem more sensational. The interview question aired as, "Did you make a mistake in the critical period?" but was actually asked as, "Do you admit that a mistake was made?" according to John Weisman.

A Historical Alternative

Having analyzed a small sample of the academic scholarship concerning mass media epistemology as it relates to the American political process, one might assume that the American society is predestined to implode into one fashion-conscious ball as our political ignorance reaches critical mass. It is difficult to imagine a democratic America that could still function if the academics are correct. When style replaces substance, it is only logical that an uninformed and misguided electorate might cease to make rational choices concerning its public officials.

This may be true to a certain extent, but I find difficulty believing that the invention of television single-handedly changed the news process to such a degree that Americans became uninterested in American politics. While a general trivialization of content seems to be one of the limiting factors of the television as a news medium, television does provide a quick and interesting glimpse at the top issues of the day. The

fact that a person watches the television news in no way limits his or her ability to read about those stories in a newspaper. If Americans are not actively following the course of national and local events, then a problem may exist for the country when it comes time to go to the polls. In fact, a citizenry that does not understand the issues facing a society may often make poor decisions at the polls, but I'm not sure that the epistemological shift Postman discussed can shoulder the blame for this phenomenon alone. There are too many other factors to modern American life, our socio-economic system being the most prominent, that make life blast by faster and faster every year, which leads me to believe that the dominant news medium of this society is only one factor in the passive attitude Americans take towards news and politics.

Dr. Wayne Cutler, a University of Tennessee professor of history and Director of the James K. Polk Project, also said that the irrelevance of some of some of our news content to actual American politics is driving citizens to take less interest, yet that is occurring only recently. America has been moving away from mass political involvement since before the introduction of the television, and a look at the historical and economic issues facing America through its industrialization might adequately paint the rest of the picture.

In terms of trivialization, Cutler says that the news is not adequately distinguishing between serious content and entertainment. "I think that's one of the problems, that people have to go through the actual function of sorting out and scratching their heads and saying, "well, what really did happen today?" I mean, how important is it to the scheme of our national political life as to when they return Elian to Cuba or not?" Cutler said. Over time issues like the Gonzales issue wear people out with the news

process, because they are given so much play for issues that have no real impact on every day life in America. "It has been dramatized beyond its own potential, and it now trivializes everything else in the news for that day," Cutler said.

However, the medium of television, to a certain degree, replacing written news is not the first trivializing influence on American politics. As a scholar of Jacksonian America, Cutler said that the American political involvement was downsized naturally through the transition from a largely agrarian economy to an industrial one. There were elements to early American society that necessitated involvement that simply do not still exist.

The fact that Americans of the Jacksonian era voted in public was a large impetus for citizens to know the ins and outs of their party's political platform. When citizens would go to the precinct on election day, there were no ballots and anyone who cared to pay attention could easily see who all of their neighbors voted for. The ideological attachment of individual citizens to a political party was considered public business, and was published in the newspapers. The implication of this was that people had to be sure that they really did support the ideas of a candidate and his party, because to change your mind in public would mean that you were either spineless or uneducated.

"You see," said Cutler, "if you vote in public, and you put somebody in office who does a lousy job, everybody in the county blames you for it...If you have an electoral system in which your neighbors know how you vote at every election, and then you have to go back to that same crowd and stand in front of them the next time, they're going to hoot you down. You know, they make fun of you."

So, the electorate of Jacksonian America was more involved with the political process because it was on the forefront of social issues. People were not only accountable for who they voted for, but also for showing up to vote. Since the political affiliations of the citizens were posted in the newspapers, if you didn't show up at the polls, Cutler pointed out, your friends came to get you.

There is strong correlation between the 85 percent voting of Jacksonian America, the notably high literacy rates, and the stage of America's economic development, Cutler said. "When Polk was...running for president, the electorate was white male. But, the literacy rate in Tennessee's 1840 census was higher than it is today among white males. People understood. They felt they had an obligation to read up on what was going on," Cutler said. Because everyone would know whether everyone else had helped elect a politician that did either a good or a bad job, people had to understand the issues and arguments fully before making any sort of public statement. It was not looked upon favorably to claim membership in the independent party.

In Jacksonian America everything revolved around political parties, including the newspapers. "Newspapers, by the way, were owned by the politicians. It was the party press, though in most towns there was a Whig newspaper and a Democrat newspaper. And they were unblushing in their partisanship, with no attempt to be judicious or balanced," Cutler said. Editors of the newspapers were hired to serve the needs of the party, and convince the electorate to become involved. Since there was a paper for each candidate, the papers took the responsibility to educate the electorate on the appropriate issues and arguments. If the arguments were no good, members of that party would suffer in political discussions, which provided ample motivation to produce a quality news

source. Reading and self education was also an inexpensive form of entertainment, So citizens would read everything.

“The government hired newspapers to print the proceedings of the Congress, so news and the senators’ and representatives’ speeches were published. There not being a lot of free published stuff, and newspapers being cheap, it had a big readership,” Cutler said. And, as Postman points out, one of the more prominent social activities was a debate, or a speech. At this point in history, the electorate craved any political input they could have. “Guys took great pride in knowing what was in the details of what was in the Independent Treasury bill,” Cutler said, “and why it was important to take government funds out of the hands of private banks and put them into separate government offices—why Jackson was opposed to having the banking industry consolidated and dominated by a national bank.”

And the result was often that the citizens were so educated about the matter that the politicians had to try to keep one step ahead. “When they went on the stump and gave a three hour speech, if the politician couldn’t remember the argument or the fine details of the argument, sometimes the opposition would be present, and they would start stomping their feet and hooting them down because they missed key points of the argument,” Cutler said.

It is easy to explain why Americans behaved this way, why they read the news, and why they had a depth of political knowledge that might never be obtained again in this country. “They believed that they ran the country,” Cutler said. “The electorate assumed the tradition of the nobility. The nobility, in the past, has always governed. And

then if all white males are going to govern, then all white males have to be educated to the issues.”

The fact that we now watch television instead of reading newspapers more thoroughly is not the only reason Americans do not take this degree of interest in politics anymore. Americans have lost sight of the ideals of the revolution, and the new American economy has something to do with that.

The electorate in Jacksonian America was white male, but also each voter had to be self employed. If you were a waged worker, you could not vote, because it was assumed that you would be forced to vote the way your employer told you to. When the industrial revolution came along, the same system of socio-political involvement was no longer possible.

What happened was 95 percent of the American people were very poor, but they were self-employed on the farms. When 50-60 percent of them go to the cities to start working in the factories in the industrial revolution, they become waged. And as waged hands they're vulnerable. If they vote against their employer, they're out of a job. And so the protective system then is to vote in secret, but once you get the secret vote, you've also hidden accountability in that clemency. (Cutler)

The secret ballot was both a blessing and a curse for American politics. On the one hand it was an absolutely necessary adjustment to enable citizens to go to the polls. Without the secret ballot, voting could have dropped from 85 percent to 5 percent instead of to where it has dropped now. Instead, we vote in secret, and while that protects the right of

the average citizen to voice an opinion, it provides an escape route where those opinions don't have to be grounded in thorough study of the issues.

"I think that the secret ballot protected voters," Cutler said, "and as long as the political machines were viable, they got out the votes. But increasingly they had to go to subterfuges to get the vote out. In the big cities, there's strong evidence that a bottle of liquor got people to the vote." Without the social pressures placed on economically autonomous citizens, the motivation was not there to vote or to be informed. The pace of life in America quickened, and work and income placed restraints on the time people used to use for themselves. When the numbers dropped at the polls, parties were not satisfied with the untapped potential votes:

The parties had to find other ways to get them to the polls, they dumbed down the appeals and started resorting to other techniques to bring it out. In other words, people took their responsibility for their vote less seriously, in part because it was hidden. And I think then the parties have to find ways to get them to the polls and get them to vote, and that in itself sort of corrupted the system. (Cutler)

Whereas in the past, people could know if their neighbors were helping or hurting the republic by assessing the efficacy of their neighbor's candidate in office, now the phrase is commonly heard at parties that "gentlemen don't discuss politics." We shy away from real political conversation not because the potential for an argument exists—that potential was always there—we shy away from it now because culturally we perceive the argument is no longer necessary. "News [had become] an issue, and being informed became an issue, because you voted publicly, and you were held accountable for your

vote. Today you don't have to know that stuff because nobody is going to blame you. They don't even know whether you voted. So we have no system of accountability in our system now," Cutler said. "Nobody blames Wayne Cutler if Bill Clinton fouls up. They don't know whether I voted for Clinton or Bush or Clinton or Dole. So, there's no accountability for Wayne Cutler and his vote. I not only vote in secret, but I'm not accountable for it."

The secret ballot alone did not cause the apolitical development of recent generations, Cutler said. The news media and cultural development both contributed. We have evolved to where children look on politics as something dirty as opposed to noble. According to Cutler, "now we have a different situation. When women, for example, vote, you have a situation where man and woman may not be of the same political party. And then what does that say to the children? Are they going to vote with dad or with mom when they grow up? Often they just don't vote. They become apolitical."

The entertainmentization of the evening news is also a function of an apolitical American culture. The medium of television news is not blameless in the transformation of America from a nation that actively sought information to keep elected officials in check to one that actively seeks *Seinfeld* reruns and *Ally McBeale*. America's leaders are no longer Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln, but Ronald Reagan and Jesse "The Body" Ventura.

Now we have to glamorize our politicians. We have to create politicians who can be sold. They have to have certain market skills and marketability. You can't elect ugly politicians anymore. Have you noticed? We have pin-up politicians, and so style has come to overshadow

substance. Promises have overshadowed accomplishment, and the public has accepted that. (Cutler)

This is essentially no different from what Postman argued in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, but Cutler said that the blame does not fall solely on the shoulders of television. There was something more fundamental driving the American divergence from political involvement, which can be explained economically and socially. “I think that the acceptability of dumbed down news and so forth and the rise of independence in voting—the anti party sense of things—is a result in part of a lack of real accountability on the part of voting,” Cutler said.

The Industry Perspective

If television news is dumbed down at all, that is more a function of the youth of the medium as opposed to an inability, said Gene Policinski, a founding editor of *USA Today* and director of media relations for The Freedom Forum: First Amendment Institute at Vanderbilt University. Patrick McMurtry, the local news anchor for the FOX 43 10 O’clock news said that the perception of television news as “dumbed down” comes from cynical academics have overlooked the real purpose of television news. Both Policinski and McMurtry say that academics are slow to point out the possible benefits of television as a visual accompaniment to the printed word, and the positive impact television may have when understood in terms of its proper function. Obviously, television conveys information differently than writing, but different should not necessarily mean worse. The immediacy of television news and the impact of the visual image could greatly augment the quality of news dissemination if citizens chose not to abandon the fuller understanding that comes with reading. If reading provides thorough

and logical stories that television doesn't, one could just as easily say television news provides an impact through moving pictures and spontaneity that reading can't. Some combination of both would arguably provide the best possible process of news consumption.

Policinski reaffirms McLuhan's thesis that a fundamental difference exists between reading and watching, and said that each medium of communication necessarily has its strengths and weaknesses. The fact that television is best suited to fast paced entertainment is a limiting factor on its ability to convey involved arguments and complex public discourse. As he said,

I think broadcast news is consumed passively like all television.

Particularly, I think the news suffers because it is being conveyed on what is still an entertainment medium, and I think our basic technique for reception is very different. Reading requires a proactive act, that is you must first of all decide to focus your attention on a specific line and word as opposed to television where you simply turn on the device and noise and images wash over you.

The passivity of television gives it a hypnotic quality if consumed in large amounts, which, as Miller suggested, will cause the viewer to merely sit back and take it in like eye candy. The television is unlike a book or a paper that has a first page and a last page. TV just keeps going, and the longer it remains turned on, the more information a person has to sort through to remember anything that might have been important. Reading is different. A person can really only read until he is finished with whatever he is reading.

The whole written work is typically cohesive, and the process of moving from start to finish engages the reader.

Policinski agrees with this, and said that reading also has physiological benefits apart from merely being mentally engaging. "Reading, I think, has a certain fundamental process in the brain, from my understanding, that improves memory," Policinski said.

"People who read a great deal often are able to speak publicly or simply express themselves in a better fashion. I have to think that based on what I've read that some of that is a mechanical change." He went on to back that with information he had read comparing the mental acuity of Alzheimer's patients who read frequently with those who do not. "Alzheimer's patients, for example, if they continue to read and then to give back out the information, that they retain a mental sharpness and acuity that other Alzheimer's patients do not (Policinski)."

Additionally, Policinski claims a problem inherent to the medium of television is that it necessitates a greater peripheral vision for the viewer than reading. Undoubtedly every child repetitiously has heard, "don't sit so close to the TV." Because of the distance, viewers are to a certain degree detached from television no matter how interested they are in the subject matter. "I think that the potential for being distracted while watching television is significantly higher again because we've trained ourselves to be in a room perhaps where there's other people talking. Or you may even be reading while you're 'watching' television," Policinski said. When looking at the basic impact of the medium as compared to reading, he said, "I think that simply your field of vision is much greater. Your peripheral vision will pick up other people in the room. It will pick up the bird in the window, and that kind of thing." So television lacks the command for

attention and concentration that a newspaper or book might, giving it an inherent disadvantage when a news director attempts to create a news program viewers will pay attention to. This makes a certain degree of sensationalism necessary, because news stations have to keep the interest of the viewers to produce advertising revenue. Since, higher ratings mean more advertising revenue, some news content is necessarily sensationalized on television to draw an audience large enough to cover expected profit margins.

McMurtry said that the aesthetic and sensational is essential to the televised evening news, supporting Postman's claim that broadcast news places unnecessary importance on style and not enough on substance. A trend still exists in the news industry to place more emphasis on the way an anchor or reporter looks rather than on the quality of his or her reporting. McMurtry said,

I think that if all things were equal and one person is better looking than the other one, the better looking one would get hired. Unless it was something like an investigative reporter, where you don't want a real pretty boy or a real beauty queen. You want somebody who's more like Colombo, maybe. If someone's better looking than another person, and the other person is a little bit better of a journalist, I still say that most of the time they would go with the better looking one. (McMurtry)

This is not to say that skill is completely second to physical appearance. "When a station looks to hire a reporter or an anchor, they first look for good writing skills," McMurtry said. However, he said writing ability is not necessarily paramount. "You look to see if they got the angle to the story, the obvious angle, or if they went out of their way and

found something even more interesting. Then you look to see if they are communicating with the public, or if they're staring at the camera," McMurtry said. Because good writing skills can always be taught and the ability to play well on screen takes natural talent, news stations will often take the more audience pleasing face when there are marginal differences in journalistic ability.

McMurtry also said that the television evening news has the potential to pander to a entertainment audience. It's true, he said, that broadcast news will be slightly more sensationalistic than the newspapers, but that is necessary to get people to watch. For instance, Fox 43 will pay close attention to what programming airs during the hour before its newscast, and tailor their commercials to that audience. "We try to find something in our newscast, or if it's not in our newscast, we try to put something in that audience would be interested in. And we tease it to them," McMurtry said. If the program that airs from nine to ten is *Ally McBeale*, "we'll tell them something women 18-35 will be interested in. We'll make sure we tease that. As far as the impact it has on us selecting stories to go on our news cast, because of—well, we all want high ratings" (McMurtry).

The fact that ratings decisions overshadow content decisions lends credence to Postman's argument that American politics is trivialized through the inadequacies of television. McMurtry takes this a step further:

Our news director follows, kind of, my philosophy that we both like politics and think that's important. But research shows that people don't care. People don't want to see city council stories. They don't want to hear tax stories in their local news. Unfortunately, I think that they're important, but TV has increasingly become a slave to research and

consultants. And the research and consultants say that John Q. Public doesn't care about city, state, or national politics. They probably care a little more about the local politicians, but they just don't care. (McMurtry)

McMurtry demonstrated with the teaser script for April 4, 2000. "Let me show you this," he told me. "This is what's good and bad about TV news. This is another piece. It doesn't get much more sensationalistic than this." The script said that the image was to be a cockroach crawling through lettuce, while the voice-over said, "find out which local restaurants have roaches in their salad bars." The teaser was designed to lure the women who watch *Ally McBeale* into the newscast, but the whole newscast was not similarly sensationalistic, McMurtry said:

By hooking them and bringing them in, then you can present it in a more journalistically sound manner. On pieces, you go for catchy things that are gonna' make people interested, because you have to catch them like that [snaps his fingers]. And that's why you put one sentence on it. That's one sentence. That's three seconds or four seconds. You better have them hooked in four seconds or they're moving on. (McMurtry)

McMurtry's comment implies that people are not inherently interested in the news content itself, but are somewhat engaged by the production values. One might find difficulty determining whether or not this is a direct result of viewers conditioned to take their news through an entertainment medium, but certainly this indicates that viewers want their news content packaged the same way their entertainment content is packaged.

Policinski insisted that does not necessarily mean television is any less capable than other media of producing an informed citizenry. When Neil Postman says that

philosophy and television are incompatible, Policinski says no. The problem is not that television, as a medium, cannot convey the information. The problem is that television cannot convey information like writing, and that's how news producers have attacked the production. One issue gets one story. However, the logic of the medium is different, and the way the information is packaged must be different:

I think you can find people who can do the graphics. You can write the script on any subject for television to cover. The question is just, how much are you willing to devote in terms of your resources. But it's the medium's unwillingness as opposed to its inability. Now, they'll argue that their unwillingness is motivated by the fact that only 500,000 people in the country would ever watch, but I'm always suspicious of that.

(Policinski)

If there is a problem with information being conveyed insufficiently through television, Policinski places the blame on the inability of the people working within the medium as opposed to an inability of the medium itself. He says that even the minutia of specialized federal legislation could be covered in a way that would effectively communicate the necessary information to the electorate. How a president handles the federal budget is an example of a mind-bogelingly complex issue that could be addressed by an innovative television news crew for the benefit of the voters. Yet, the broadcast news is slow to tackle this issue. "As a profession," he said, "we don't train people to cover the federal budget in an interesting way." But there is evidence that people are interested in how the government is spending taxpayer dollars. "Look what happens when you focus on a particular element of the federal budget like waste, fraud, and abuse."

The television news media did not develop the formula, but when Sen. William Proxmire created something he called the Silver Fleece awards, an attempt to expose the extravagance and wastefulness of federal agencies, people tuned in:

That was the kind of award on having the \$5000 toilet or buying the \$800 wrench. And people feared getting one. The Air Force would spend thousands of dollars trying to convince Proxmire's staff that this was not a wasteful product. And so did the Army, and the Navy and Marines I'm sure, but I'm just familiar with the Air Force part. And they were tremendously successful on television. (Policinski)

60 Minutes ran a Silver Fleece special, and networks picked up the stories after Proxmire had done the research. But the networks aren't devoting resources to investigating this kind of story, Policinski said. He also said,

If we devoted the resources of the news medium to covering the federal budget that we do to covering other things, we'd have an interesting thing. It's not the fault of the reader or the viewer that they don't like or understand or want to watch pieces on the federal budget, but they're blamed when programmers don't put that on the air. In truth, it's a failure by the medium, by the news media to cover it in a proper fashion. I mean, I can do you a whiz-bang... Given enough time and resources, I'll make the federal budget sing and dance every day for six months. (Policinski)

But the broadcast news teams do not do an adequate job of producing stories that seem relevant to the viewer. Naturally the technical information washes over the viewer when they hear it, Policinski said. The news casts are "fundamentally saying that the Air Force

expended money on toilets for aircraft as part of a multi-billion dollar allocation for construction of the B something whatever, and it cost this much and that's it" (Policinski). Of course nobody is listening. To drone on, uninterrupted, about the Air Force and tax dollars is a different kind of drone from the norm of television, which displays exciting pictures and sounds. If anything television creates a drone of excitement, an endless succession of quick sound and color, or action or humor. However, a good reporter could use the logic of the medium to bring the story to the viewer's attention. Policinski said,

We should look at it and say, "my God, they have a plunger, a rubber plunger with a wooden handle, and it cost \$380. You could go down to the local hardware store and get one for \$1.98." Hold up the \$1.98 one. Hold up the \$300 one in front of the screen, and say, "they are the same product. See, it says made by the same people here. This one just has an Air Force registration number on it." (Policinski)

Part of the reason viewers have placed the emphasis on the sensational and the entertaining could be the misunderstanding of the news media personnel about how in depth they can get on an issue before losing the average viewer. This misunderstanding could have led to the dumbing down process, through which the content of serious news stories is oversimplified, and made boring. McMurtry claims the television news industry is presently taking measures to correct the dumbing down process. "We were taught in journalism 101 that the average TV audience reads at a third grade level," McMurtry said. "Well, that's bullshit. And that's really not true of news, because you have a higher percentage of high school graduates and college graduates watching news than any other

opposite, that people wanted briefer stories written with a much higher degree of skill, to pack as much or more information into a shorter span of reading. (Policinski)

For television, the logic should work the same way. The trick is not to cut the quality of the information presented in a piece, but rather to find a creative way to convey information in palatable packages. “The barrier of the thirty second Sesame Street generation tells the media to work better and more intelligently,” Policinski said.

Yet, no matter how intelligently the television news media work, viewers would be fooling themselves to think that TV could ever take the place of books and papers in terms of the quality of analysis. Television will always be fast and flashy at its best, and books will tend to be more patient and thorough. A citizenry that ceases to read is doing itself a disservice, because television itself can never become as active as reading. This is not to say that television does not stand to improve the way it treats news content, but is to say that if citizens are watching television instead of reading, that’s not the fault of the news producers. McMurtry said that television news was never meant to take the place of print information, and cannot take its place.

Broadcast news is a “mixed bag,” McMurtry said. It sacrifices something of the relevance and coherence of papers and books, but provides an immediacy and intimacy that older print technologies cannot match. Television, in terms of the political process, allows the viewer to see the body language and facial expressions of the politicians, which might provide a fuller picture to the polished quote that appears in the papers. Also, television news personalizes aspects of foreign or non-local issues, so that

segment of the schedule that's on." Operating under this theory, the evening news can provide more information to those who want it, while discarding some of the entertainmentization that created the problem of irrelevance in the first place. When news stations attack complex issues, often they will give a brief summary of the issue, show some pictures, and play some sound bytes. The thinking in the past was that this was all the consumer was capable of understanding, because when government or financial stories would air, the viewer would change the channel. However, dumbed-down stories might have caused viewers to switch because the stories were frustrating. They did not adequately address the issue to the point that the viewer could formulate an educated opinion, and then there was no reason to watch. Policinski claims the television news media could make complex stories interesting if they would put some effort into devising creative ways to package it. Entertaining is not necessarily a bad quality for the evening news, because people will watch something that is entertaining, but the problem comes when news media sensationalize something that could be interesting on its own merit.

If quick and punchy is the logic of the medium, then why should the evening news try to operate outside that logic? For a generation that learned to read, in part, through *Sesame Street*, the 30-60 second format might be the best way to convey information. "If I can teach you the letter M," Policinski said, "I can teach you the value of the first Amendment in 30 seconds...in bits and pieces. Now, that's a mechanical thing. That's process." He relates the punchy format of the evening news to his first experiences as a founding editor at *USA Today*:

People called it the short attention span theatre. You know, it was for Joe Six Pack, who couldn't focus on things. It turned out it was just the

Americans can see how our country and leaders are either affecting or not affecting others.

“What TV news does is it gives viewers a chance to see how politicians answer questions off the cuff without any coaching,” McMurtry said. “If it wasn’t for TV news doing that, all we would see would be 30-second pre-produced commercials that really paint the candidate in a very positive way.” Sometimes, the real news is in a leader’s inability or refusal to answer a question, and the ability of the viewer to see how a candidate reacts when surprised, offended or, upset could be useful in helping the electorate form a more complete opinion of how a candidate might comport himself when dealing with other leaders.

“If it wasn’t for the TV news, we never would have heard any questions about ‘Dubya’ and cocaine,” according to McMurtry, and Bush’s answer that the press should essentially mind their own business might not have played the same on paper. It was his body language that told the tale. “Now, a pertinent factor in this election, I believe,” he added, “was brought up because of TV news. It was interesting to watch the way that he refused to answer that question, and that had an impact in the early stages of the primary, in my opinion.”

The spontaneity of the medium also has its drawbacks, like the fact that Bush was not given the time to fully justify his refusal to answer. “The 15-second sound bite, which is now, by the way, a 10-second sound bite,” McMurtry points out, “puts the candidate’s face on the air. It gets him making what is usually a spontaneous answer, but unfortunately it doesn’t give him a chance to make a complete answer.”

The fact that McMurtry and others who have worked in the industry like Policinski are aware of both the limitations and strengths of television places the medium in a positive position in terms of future development. Both McMurtry's and Policinski's acknowledgement of the strengths and weaknesses of their medium suggests that those making decisions for the news industry have a solid grasp of where their media stand and where they need to be 10-15 years from now. At least in terms of production, which affects the way viewers perceive the essential seriousness of content, Americans can expect a degree of improvement in their media outlets.

The Technological Future of News

Possibly the most significant change in the future of American news consumption will be the convergence of digital television and the Internet. The marriage of the computer and the television into one household appliance will make the synthesis of typographic and videographic news possible. Just as television stations' websites have begun to display news clips and stories about daily events, making the Internet more like television, television will become more like the Internet. An article from TechnoFILE.com says that the television and home computer are quickly converging on one another, and soon will be the same device:

The other side of the convergence coin is digital television, which is marrying the computer monitor with the TV, while products like WebTV and WebSurfer bring the Internet to the idiot box. Adding a soon-to-be-widely-available TV-PC—a real computer that displays on your TV—will complete the other side of this convergence. (Bray)

In Japan, Hitachi has already created a personal computer that “delivers personal television capabilities...including the ability to pause live TV broadcasts, digitally record shows and watch DVD movies” (TechnoFILE). And with the combination of digital television and personal computers, one can only speculate where the market will go with the addition of the wireless Internet.

The International Data Corp reports that wireless web surfers will probably outnumber the people with direct hardwire connections by as early as 2003. According to Iain Gillott, an analyst at IDC:

By mid-2001, all new digital cellular and PCS handsets will support the Wireless Application Protocol (WAP), leading to a dramatic increase in the number of people who will be able to access the Internet using wireless devices. (Sykes)

Notebook computers will become capable of surfing the web and playing the news from any remote location. Students at Johns Hopkins University already have a wireless Internet connection within their buildings, but as companies move to make the Internet mobile, satellites will provide the same wireless service around the globe. Because a satellite can service so many more people than a single direct connection, prices can be expected to drop as the technology becomes more stable and standardized.

In short, American citizens will transition from having set times and limited places when and where they can passively watch the evening news to having almost unlimited control of their news consumption. Interactivity and selectivity of content will make news consumption something that engages consumers, as opposed to something that washes over them. The option to read and watch will coexist. This brings something

of the best aspects of written news together with something of the best aspects of the televised news. The synthesis of the two media could generate something that, if used properly, would be qualitatively better than the individual components.

An adjustment period will be necessary, as there has been with print, television, and the Internet. People will have to adjust to the idea of reading off of a screen instead of paper, but the environmental benefits alone should make this process worth while. Also, the speed of America's technological innovation coupled with the FCC mandated Dec. 31, 2006, switch to digital television broadcast should push the process along, as should the interest of a new technologically curious and savvy generation.

The new information technology will shift the paradigm of television and written news operating independent of one another, and news producers should find a way to exploit the strong qualities of each medium. When television news fulfills its purpose, it should serve as an entry point into a story for a consumer. It should use the devices of the medium to interest people in a situation as opposed to turn them off of it, and hopefully people will be interested enough in an issue to read further about it through the other media at their disposal. "If the viewer sees something on the news—if they see something about George Dubya and allegations of cocaine, we're only going to be able to give it a minute and a half," McMurtry said. "Just by the nature of our 30-minute news cast, we can only give it a minute and a half. Well, the people who are interested in it, will go to the Internet and find more." McMurtry said that those who create the television news recognize that they will have an altered responsibility when the inevitable media convergence occurs. "What we're going to be is the appetizer," McMurtry said. "The Internet will be the main course, and then truly well thought out, well written books on

the subject will be the desert.” As with the teaser commercials strategically placed in the programming before the news, the broadcast news itself is a sort of teaser for those who might not know they are interested in finding more in depth coverage on a particular issue.

The appetizer theory of broadcast news would suggest a different degree of responsibility for the networks in terms of keeping a democratic nation informed. Instead of operating as the sole news source, McMurtry knows that if viewers are interested in an issue, they have the option of reading more into it through an ever-increasing multiplicity of American news sources. His responsibility is not to inform fully, but to present concise and accurate introductions to bigger pictures that will help viewers select what news they choose to follow in depth.

If I can write it in a way that keeps them interested, then the chances are better that they'll remember it, or hear about it or talk about it. That's how things change is through discussion or word of mouth. It's not what we say on the news. It's what people say after hearing what we say. All I can hope is that I did my job, and that people will talk about what I think is important the next day. (McMurtry)

With that in mind, McMurtry said the aesthetic considerations of the news crew serve to impress a story on an individual who might not be compelled to watch otherwise. This is consistent with Policinski's and Postman's statements that an informed citizenry is necessary to a functioning democracy. Television simply fulfills a responsibility of the news media that written material cannot touch. “I'd say we try to pick hiper more video interesting stories,” McMurtry said. “That's the way you're supposed to do TV news

anyway. I think people forget about that. In fact, I know that sometimes we cut the boring local stories instead of interesting national stories with great video.” If the decline of American interest in politics can be explained as the fault of something other than television and American popular culture, then the argument could be made that television, in some respects, is at least keeping Americans aware of what issues they might read about. Television news necessarily serves as a smorgasbord of content, because the function of the videographic news is to be a menu that entices viewers to participate more fully in the news process. Postman called this process of linear progression through a non-linear set of stories “irrelevance,” and this assessment is probably accurate. Yet, Policinski said the content of the television news is not what generates the irrelevance, but rather the format.

“We have confused, and maybe have been led to confuse, this access to huge amounts of information with being drowned in a sea of irrelevance. Only if you don’t have control of it,” Policinski said. He disagrees with Postman here, who argues that newscasts inherently sandwich unrelated segments together creating general irrelevance of everything to everything. The “now...this” phenomenon is merely more noticeable on television than it is in the newspaper. Not every newspaper story has relevance to the story next to it on the page. Often they are totally irrelevant to one another, but because the readers can browse the headlines and pick the content they are going to consume, they don’t perceive the same irrelevance they might if forced to read from left to right, top to bottom every news story and advertisement in the paper. Policinski said the issue of irrelevance becomes moot if the consumer can have a degree of selection throughout the newscast. It’s all about how the information is organized and presented:

If you sit there and look at the entire sum of all the news information that's going out, you could still probably try to convince yourself that it's the Tower of Babel. You have 500 channels, none of which is the definitive channel, and therefore most of it is irrelevant to you. But that's like standing outside a library and saying, 'Tower of Babel. My God, there are 10,000,000 volumes in there, most of which I'll never see, don't need or I'm not interested in. Therefore that library is really irrelevant to me, because there's only 1000 books I'll ever read and it has 10,000,000 volumes.' Well, that's a foolish assessment. (Policinski)

The key for Policinski is control. Libraries have card catalogues that help readers navigate the seemingly endless stacks of books, but if they didn't, a person might never find the information he was looking for. With the limited number of networks and cable channels that television has offered in the past, there has been more of this irrelevant ordering of information. Networks had to appeal to wider audiences to keep the ratings up, which meant a little bit of everything in terms of news content on a normal news day. This was not ideal, but was understandable, Policinski said, because of the youth of the medium.

"There has always been an adjusting period for any new medium," Policinski said. "I suspect everyone had to get used to hauling around the stone tablets instead of just conveying information verbally." The truth of the matter is that television is only about 50-60 years old and the Internet is about 5 times younger.

If you think about it, mass public education certainly wasn't under way in the 1400s, when Gutenberg introduced the press. Think of Gutenberg

twenty years post. There weren't massive public education programs certainly in that era. Six hundred years later there are massive public education systems in every country, and one of their basic functions is to teach people to read. But there was certainly a couple-hundred-year gap, I would think, before reading and books became the province of the ordinary people. (Policinski)

Policinski says modern America is in the middle zone of television news, where viewers are making the transition from having someone else manage their news content to having the technology to manage it themselves. Whereas the party press decided which issues were significant in colonial America, television is beginning to grant voters carte blanche over the issues about which they inform themselves. Only now are people beginning to have the skills to utilize such massive quantities of information.

"Your ability to control your immediate environment and what you can take from it is the key." There is too much information now to handle all of it at once. Policinski compares sorting through the information to sailing on the ocean verses being set adrift. "It is one thing if you're cast adrift with a little inner tube in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. It's another thing if you're standing at the wheel of a 60 foot (sailboat) under way, fully provisioned, with a compass and all the things one needs to navigate. It's still the same ocean. It's still the same massive overload," Policinski said. But as technology progresses, and the Internet and television are fully integrated, the viewer will have a much greater degree of control over the information he receives and in what quantity he receives it:

Over the next fifty years, certainly no more than that and maybe much less, we'll find a breakdown in the linear quality of television. Television will become this huge split, nothing-in-real-time entity. So, the evening news could last for three hours if you took all the breakouts. And then you could just have your thirty-second update on the Wall Street market if you don't care, otherwise you could extend it to an hour of economics coverage. Those are not fanciful systems. They are in operation in Canada, and I think in Ohio now. (Policinski)

Furthermore, with the coming of digital cable and satellite television, Policinski said the multiplicity of channels will bring some context back to the news. Now, if the viewer wants financial news he can watch FNN or MSNBC. If he wants to watch news about the judicial system, there's Court TV, and we have the History Channel for history. These are only the most obvious individualized interest channels. If the argument before was that what the viewer witnessed had no relevance to what he saw before or would see after, the homogenization of news content through specialized channels brings a context back to the news, making it less of a wash of useless entertainment. Maybe someday, we will even have the waste, fraud, and abuse channel.

But McMurtry said that the format of the broadcast news story is not likely to change too much in the next ten years with the inevitable marriage of television and the internet through digital cable. Here, he breaks from Policinski, who said that there would likely be an interest in even a local news channel with the fragmentation of the television market.

“We haven’t discussed format change so much as local TV news becoming obsolete,” McMurtry said. “I think that will happen within ten years, and if it’s not obsolete, it will be pared down so significantly.” One of the problems facing local news affiliates of major networks is funding. Fox Entertainment Group does not pay Fox 43 to carry network commercials and programming, which the other networks do for their affiliates. But it looks like the trend is for the other networks to follow what Fox is doing in this area. “NBC is the one following up on it right now. What that means is areas of revenue that stations have relied on for years are drying up,” McMurtry said. This will become a serious issue when the FCC mandates the switch from broadcast to digital, and stations have to purchase multi-million dollar digital towers. That will put many stations in the red, and cause many of them to be sold to large news companies like Gannett, McMurtry said.

McMurtry and Craig Edwards, the Fox 43 meteorologist, said the problem will be solved through the Internet:

Look at how many different news information sources you have on the internet. You used to have the local radio station would have local news, the newspaper, the TV station, and now you’ve got thousands of places on the net to get it. It’s going to keep expanding just like television in the first place was national, and then it spread out into local markets. Well, the Internet is going to do the same thing. (McMurtry)

The ease and control the Internet bring to the acquisition of news information, combined with its speed will make it a better way to take local news than through television. An

added bonus will be the ability to view your local news from any place on the globe with a computer:

I think every TV station is going to have streaming video, and the quality of it when they go to broad band is going to be so much better. It's going to be like broadcast anyway. I think that your computer is going to be integrated into your TV set so that you can pop up any TV station anywhere you want and watch the news. I think that's going to be a primary function, I really do. I think it's going to make a huge difference.

You'll be able to watch news any time you want. (Edwards)

Also, the interactivity of the Internet will ameliorate the problem of viewers having to passively watch an entire newscast in the order selected for them. A degree of control will be added to visual news. The option will still exist for viewers to catch the short stories, but other options will also develop with the technology.

"Things have evolved at this point to hit it quick. I don't see that changing. The efforts will still be there to hold it to a set length. What you might find is that perhaps they'll develop a second version of the story that's longer, more in depth and that kind of thing," Edwards said. This is not dissimilar to Policinski's comment that every new medium has a necessary adjustment period. It is probably true that replacing reading with watching would be to replace actively participating with passively observing. Yet, in the future, a greater degree of control over the news process could bring some of the activity back to information acquisition. Even the physical movement and decision making process involved in either jumping past a story or viewing the extended version would engage the viewer with the medium to a greater extent than he or she is now. Then maybe

then Americans will cease to sit back and let television's eternal flow wash the sea of irrelevance over them. If the viewer is actively paying attention and interacting with the news process, then it becomes less of a wash. This type of selection and interaction gives control to the viewers, and they cease to be simply set adrift in the endless sea of irrelevant information.

Conclusion

When I set out to research this paper, I wanted a synthesis of what I had considered the academic and industry perspectives about how the television evening news affects the way viewers perceive and sort information about their socio-political world. I began with the assumption that television as a medium is distinctly different from writing, and with the perspective that Neil Postman was correct that we are destroying ourselves as a society by paying too much attention to television. I had not yet considered Miller, who said that our lack of attention to television places us in danger of becoming sucked into its unending commercial flow. But after reading McLuhan, Miller and Postman, I was ready to believe that television, as colloquial as it may seem, really does rot your brain.

However, given some perspective on the reading, I began to wonder why. Why, if America is on the decline, is the economy booming? Why, if America is only watching, do bookstores still carry every major newspaper? Why is Amazon.com so popular? Why, 50-60 years after the introduction of television is America essentially doing just fine?

The federal government may be wasteful, fraudulent and abusive. President Clinton may be scandalous and Jesse Ventura may have been elected Governor of

Minnesota, but unemployment is down and matriculation at major universities is up, and our technology is improving in terms of medicine, science and entertainment.

America does not seem to be in a tailspin, destined to become the next middle-eastern nationalistic brawl. Does it really matter if the American electorate uses what Dr. Cutler calls the “wimp” factor to decide who not to elect, as opposed to reading thoroughly the platforms of each candidate. If the parties owned the presses that controlled the information the citizens had access to in Jacksonian America, why should we be any more suspicious of the choices they supply us with now?

Obviously this is an erroneous line of thought, but there is some merit to wondering what the real dangers are of living in a society that uses the television as one of its sources of information. The operative phrase here is “one of.” If, in the 1960s, America had switched from books to television, then this society would have a serious problem. McLuhan knew from the beginning that we would be manipulated; Miller said we would be brainwashed. However, America has not forgotten books, and has simply added television to its methods of discourse. It would be interesting to study whether the smaller portion of American society that still takes the time to vote overlaps with that portion of the population that still takes the time to read. My assumption would be that it does.

Probably the most powerful argument against television as a method of mass-communication is that it is passive. People may eat while watching it, or fall asleep, or just let it wash over them. Over time, television does all become the same pulsing lights and droning sound. But now with the evolution of the Internet and digital television, the ability will exist to make even visual news interactive. If Americans can control the

stories they watch on the screen by selecting them, that circumvents the danger that one boring or offbeat story will zone viewers out for the important content that might come next. By adding the selective process back to the news, people will watch the information they deem relevant, and discard the rest. Essentially, this makes the television like a newspaper in terms of relevance between stories. If viewers have the option of either taking more information on some aspect of the news or skipping ahead as Policinski, McMurtry, and Edwards said, they will have made the choice. The freedom to move fluidly throughout the program will allow for more in depth coverage. The potential exists for the success of stories longer than 30-60 seconds, because viewers will not be forced to sit through them if they want to move on to the next story.

The potential also exists to bring more context back to visual news by archiving stories and cross-referencing them either through direct links or a search engine. In this way, a single story ceases to exist as only 30-60 seconds isolated between unrelated material.

Furthermore, text based coverage will become available through the Internet, and will be accessible through either the digital television or the home computer. Undoubtedly, these two devices will be one and the same in the near future as it becomes more economical to own one large computing appliance than a separate television, computer, home stereo, house alarm, et cetera.

No longer will our news hours be 6 and 11 p.m. We will have the freedom to take news and information when we want, and be entertained when we want. News will no longer be the bit of television that interrupts afternoon programming and prime time, so

networks and affiliates will not have to entertainmentize the content to keep would-be situation comedy viewers happy and watching.

In an ideal world, the convergence of the television and the Internet will combine the stimulus of visual communication that Policinski values, with the selectivity that he says television lacks. It could combine the impact of instantaneous news that Policinski and McMurtry said drives people to watch with a context and relevance that Postman said television was incapable of. The internet has the potential to make news consumption interactive, requiring thought and participation on the part of the consumer, as opposed to remaining passive and being simultaneously watched and ignored as Miller says television is. The synthesis will cease to pour the concerns of all other men on the viewer as McLuhan said. Instead, the synthesis of television and the Internet will allow the consumer the freedom to choose the issues on which he will place value.

Hopefully, the transformation from a society that passively takes whatever is dealt to it as news into one that makes decisions about content for itself will ameliorate a portion of the “dumbing down” of news content. This transformation could bring Americans closer to the feeling that the news is both relevant and worthwhile, and the political process is not to be taken for granted. If Americans continue to remain detached from the political process, it should never be said that the news media did not take measures to create a contrary affect. If technology allows control of the national communication medium to be placed back in the hands of the electorate, news producers will be one step closer to creating a product with greater relevance and seriousness.

COLLEGE SCHOLARS PROJECT APPROVAL

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Scholar

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Mentor

Media Epistemology and America Politics

Project Title and Completion Date

COMMITTEE MEMBERS' SIGNATURES

(Minimum 3 Required)

[Signature]

Michael R. Fitzgerald

Paul Blanton

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