OUR UNFREE PRESS

100 Years of Radical Media Criticism

criminatory: "It is sufficient answer to this argument that the 'state is not bound to cover the whole field of possible abuses.' " *Id.* at 152, 48 A.2d at 481.

81. 249 Mass. 477, 144 N.E. 400 (1924).
82. Gitlow v. New York, 268 U.S. 652 (1925).
83. 249 Mass. 477, 484, 144 N.E. 400, 402 (1924).
84. In Farmer's Educ. & Cooperative Union v. WDAY, Inc., 360 U.S. 525 (1959), a station was held not liable for the defamatory utterance of a candidate exercising his right to speak under the Federal Communications Act of 1934, 47 U.S.C. § 315 (Supp. V, 1964).
85. 384 U.S. 214 (1966).
86. ALA. CODE tit. 17 § 285 (1958).
87. 384 U.S. at 219.
88. *Id.* at 220.
89. 385 U.S. 374 (1967).
90. *Id.* at 407–08.
91. *Id.* at 420.
92. Gitlow v. New York, 268 U.S. 652 (1925).
93. Cox, *Foreword: Constitutional Adjudication and the Promotion of Human Rights,* 80 HARV. L. REV. 91 (1966). *See,* e.g., Katzenbach v. Morgan, 384 U.S. 641 (1966); South Carolina v. Katzenbach, 383 U.S. 301 (1966).
94. United States v. Price, 383 U.S. 787 (1966); United States v. Guest, 383 U.S. 745 (1966); Bullock v. United States, 265 F.2d 683 (6th Cir.) (by implication), *cert. denied,* 360 U.S. 909 (1959); Brewer v. Hoxie School District No. 46, 238 F.2d 91 (8th Cir. 1956) (by implication). *See generally* Cox, *supra* note 93, at 110–14.
95. Evans v. Newton, 382 U.S. 296 (1966); Marsh v. Alabama, 326 U.S. 501 (1946). Both decisions find that private property may become quasi-public without a statute in extreme cases. The Court should surely defer to a congressional determination in an arguable case.
96. Ferry, *supra* note 17.
97. *Id.* at 301.
98. Ginzburg v. United States, 383 U.S. 463, 493 (1966) (dissenting opinion); Roth v. United States, 354 U.S. 476, 503–07 (1957) (dissenting opinion).
99. F.2d 994 (D.C. Cir. 1966); *see* pp. 1663–66 *supra.*
100. F.2d at 1006.
101. *Cf., e.g., In re* Louis Wohl, Inc., 50 F.2d 254 (E.D. Mich. 1931).

GAYE TUCHMAN

News as the Reproduction of the Status Quo: A Summary (1978)

Let me review once more the constituent features of the news frame, stressing that frames both produce and limit meaning. To return to the analogy of news as a window frame, characteristics of the window, its size and composition, limit what may be seen. So does its placement, that is, what aspect of the unfolding scene it makes accessible. Furthermore, simultaneously, news draws on social and cultural resources to present accounts, and is itself a social and cultural resource for social actors.

Definitions of news are historically derived and embedded. At any one moment, defining what is newsworthy entails drawing on contemporary understandings of the significance of events as rules for human behavior, institutional behavior, and motives. Members of society and participants in its institutions, newsworkers have rules available to them as social resources. Among those rules as resources are some that newsworkers use to define the relationship between news and other forms of knowledge, between newsworkers and other workers, and between news organizations and other social institutions. For instance, in the 1920s, when newsworkers defined themselves as professionals and news as a veridical representation of events, they drew on two cultural resources. One was popular notions of science current in the 1920s. The second was the professionals' distrust of the "reasonableness" of public opinion, because public opinion was no longer identified as the articulation of reason. The claims to both professionalism and veridical representation served, with other factors, as resources for an additional assertion. News articulated itself as he embodiment of provisions of the First Amendment (a historical resource) and as the protector of the people (a class interest).

Needless to say, all social actors did not have to accept this definition of the role of news. But although news professionalism conflicted with the rights of owners and managers to freedom of speech as an attribute of private property ("Freedom

From *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 209–16.

From: Our Unfree Press

of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one"), news professionalism also served the owner's articulation of other interests. For professionalism ignored the impact of the socioeconomic processes of concentration, centralization, and conglomeration on the applicability of existing ideas to economic and political life. News organizations simultaneously participated in these processes—inventing wire services, newspaper chains, news syndicates, and radio and television networks—and sought to define conglomerates and corporations as private enterprise. By invoking eighteenth-century concepts (such as its model of free speech) and applying nineteenth-century distinctions (such as public and private rights) to twentieth-century phenomena, news limits knowledge. News obfuscates social reality instead of revealing it. It confirms the legitimacy of the state by hiding the state's intimate involvement with, and support of, corporate capitalism.

Additionally, news both draws upon and reproduces institutional structures. Through its arrangement of time and space as intertwined social phenomena, the news organization disperses a news net. By identifying centralized sources of information as legitimated social institutions, news organizations and newsworkers wed themselves to specific beats and bureaus. Those sites are then objectified as the appropriate sites at which information should be gathered. Additionally, those sites of news gathering are objectified as the legitimate and legitimating sources of both information and governance. Through naive empiricism, that information is transformed into objective facts—facts as a normal, natural, taken-for-granted description and constitution of a state of affairs. And through the sources identified with facts, newsworkers create and control controversy; they contain dissent.

The dispersion of reporters to glean facts generates its own organizational structure replete with assigned responsibilities and priorities. These are the territorial, institutional, and topical chains of command. Distinctions between and among these three spheres, which necessarily overlap one another, require ongoing negotiations of responsibility and newsworthiness. At least in part, newsworthiness is a product of these negotiations intended to sort out strips of everyday occurrences as news. These negotiations also legitimate the status quo. Each day the editors reproduce their living compromise—the hierarchy among the editors. They also reestablish the supremacy of the territorial chain of command, which incorporates political beats and bureaus but excludes topical specialties such as women's news and sports. These sorts of news are thus rendered institutionally uninteresting. In contrast, the topics of the territorial chain of command—stories about legitimated institutions—receive attention and so substantiate the power of those institutions.

Social actors also produce the rhythm of daily life, which they base in societal institutions. In newswork that rhythm is embedded in the intersection of news organizations and legitimated institutions. Faced with a glut of information by the dispersion of the news net, newsworkers and news organizations battle to impose a uniform rhythm of processing upon occurrences. They impose deadlines on defined stages of processing, and so objectify a news rhythm. They draw on the way occurrences are thought to happen, in order to reproduce a state of affairs conducive to news processing. Using past experiences as guides for the present, they typify occurrences as news events. The application of a typification to an event is subject to revision, redefinition, and reformulation, as are the typifications themselves. For typifications are based in present understandings of past situations, and such understandings of the past are continually revised. For instance, the events associated with Watergate were successively cast as a break-in (spot news), a conspiracy uncovered by news investigation (soft news), a scandal prompting comment by officials (spot news), legislative and judicial investigations (continuing news), and a presidential resignation contravening historical precedent (what-a-story). Associated with taken-for-granted assumptions about institutional processes and practices, typification may generate newsworthiness.

When an occurrence does not unfold as professionals had predicted it would, the newsworkers revise the typifications applied to it. President Johnson's speech announcing that he would not run for another term of office is one example of typification and retypification, replete with a call to historical precedent—Calvin Coolidge's statement, "I will not run." That example is interesting theoretically because newsworkers had previously invoked their objectified (taken-for-granted) knowledge to predict that Johnson would turn back Senator Eugene McCarthy's campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination. They then interpreted the error as an affirmation that Johnson's announcement was particularly newsworthy. In this case, too, the invocation of professional knowledge generates newsworthiness. Furthermore, the appeal to history and the immediate redispersion of the news net to gather reaction stories about politicians' responses to the announcement also reaffirm the status quo.

News processing is itself routinized according to the way occurrences at legitimated institutions are thought to unfold; predicting the course of continuing stories at legitimated institutions enables editors to plan which reporters will be available for spot-news coverage on any one day. The news net is based in legitimated institutions. So, too, the redispersion of the news net to gather reaction stories invokes legitimated authority by seeking out governors, mayors, presidential aspirants, senators, other legislators, and quasi-legitimated leaders. It evenhandedly gathers comments from Republicans and Democrats as the embodiment of political processes and so affirms the legitimacy of those processes. The symbolic "man [or woman] on the street" contributes his or her opinion as a representation of others, not as a representative of others. Representativeness is thought to rest in either legitimated institutions or amassed quantities of supporters.

Although typifications limit the idiosyncrasy of occurrences as the raw material of news, they still enable great flexibility. Newsworkers' activities are relatively unsupervised, and the lack of direct supervision provides room for newsworkers to

claim professionalism and to both modify and ignore organizational rules. Sharing and hoarding, working together at the scene of stories, reading one another's work, socializing together, newsworkers produce professional understandings of how work is to be done. These understandings are subject to negotiation and reformulation: Editors and bureau chiefs negotiate who will cover a story and how it will be covered. Reporters negotiate their intricate relationships with one another and with sources, including the kind and amount of sharing appropriate to situations. Through this ongoing interaction, they identify the sorts of people who will serve as good sources of information about occurrences at legitimated institutions. Again invoking past experience, they extend those ideas and practices to social movements as well, creating quasi-legitimated leaders as they do so. They also blur distinctions between public and private, for they objectify political representatives and bureaucrats as "the city," "the state," or "the country." They identify the population as "the public." Simultaneously, then, politicians and bureaucrats are said to be representatives and are divorced from the population they are said to represent. Newsworkers and the news itself are left to adjudicate between "the city" (or country) and "the public." The newsworkers legitimate the role they have claimed for themselves and they legitimate politicians and bureaucrats as embodiments of political units.

Additionally, through their interaction with sources and with one another, newsworkers develop ways of identifying facts. Facts and the need for facts, sources and methods of reporting are mutually self-constituting phenomena. I do not mean to imply either that one person's fact is another's bias or that facticity is relative and unobjective. Rather, I mean that methods of identifying facts, including methods of identifying appropriate sources, objectify social life and, at times, *reify* social phenomena.

Berger and Luckmann explain:

> Reification can be described as an extreme step in the process of objectification, whereby the objectivated world loses its comprehensibility as a human enterprise and becomes fixated as a non-human, non-humanizable inert facticity. . . . Man [sic], the producer of the world, is apprehended as its product, and human activity as an epiphenomenon of non-human processes [1967: 89].

As we have seen, news sometimes uses symbols as the representation of reality and presents them as the product of forces outside human control. That is the typical presentation of economic activity and civil disorders, such as riots. These facets of social life are presented as alien, reified forces, akin to fluctuations in the weather, a natural phenomenon. Indeed, television's visual representation of the

web of facticity frames riots and tornadoes in a similar manner and insistently distinguishes them from interviews with talking heads.

The reification of economic activity and civil disorders also reaffirms the status quo. First, reification affirms that the individual is powerless to battle either the forces of nature or the forces of the economy. The individual as symbol is presented as a representation of a common plight. The news consumer is encouraged to sympathize or to rejoice, but not to organize politically. Writing of radio, Lazarsfeld and Merton describe the news consumer's reaction as a narcotizing dysfunction:

> The individual takes his secondary [media] contact with the world of political reality . . . as a vicarious performance. He comes to mistake *knowing* about problems of the day for *doing* something about them. His social conscience remains spotlessly clean. He is concerned. He is informed. . . . But, after he has gotten through his dinner and listened to his favorite radio programs and after he has read his second newspaper of the day, it is time for bed [1948, reprinted 1964: 464].

That dysfunction is partially based on the news consumers' relationship to the media: Walter Cronkite of CBS or James Reston of the *New York Times* may enter their homes, but neither Cronkite nor Reston interacts directly with the consumer. They do not mutually negotiate definitions of reality.

Second, news presentations soothe the news consumers even as they reify social forces. To present the facts, newsworkers go to centralized sources responsible for handling the problems created by reified forces. Accordingly, a governor and a high-ranking officer in the National Guard may be quoted to describe a riot or a flood area. They may also be quoted about what they are doing to solve the crisis. Similarly, the president's economic advisors may describe a problem and the solution they propose. If they fail, it is because they contend with reified "natural forces." If they succeed, success symbolizes the legitimacy of their activities. If experts look into a "freak accident," it is to ensure that a similar disaster could never happen again. By implication, news consumers have decided correctly by watching television, reading the newspaper, and going to bed. They are ill equipped to deal with reified forces, and legitimated experts and authorities are doing everything they can.

In addition to reifying some phenomena, the mutual constitution of facts and sources imposes sequences of questions and answers on news events. By their very availability as resources, these professionally validated sequences encourage a trained incapacity to grasp the significance of new ideas. Instead, new ideas and emerging social issues—innovations—are framed by past experience and are typified as soft news. Lacking the appropriate questions and answers, blind to the pos-

sibility that there are questions and answers they do not know, reporters may not "be able to get a handle" on innovation. To make it a suitable topic of news, they may dismiss it, mock it, or otherwise transform it. The news professionals have many justifications they can invoke to explain their inability to deal with innovation. All are their own organizational and professional objectifications of experiences as constraints or resources. Among the constraints are the press of work, the omnipresence of deadlines, and the struggle to present factual accounts of events. Collectively derived typifications serve as constraint and resource: They are intended to facilitate news processing. But if an occurrence does not readily present itself as news easily packaged in a known narrative form, that occurrence is either soft news (requiring more reportorial time and editorial attention) or nonnews. It is dismissed by the limits inherent in the news frame.

To do otherwise, news professionals would have to question the very premises of the news net and their own routine practices. They would have to see the ways their affirmation of professionalism serves to legitimate both news as an account and social institutions as the source of news. They would have to recognize the inherent limitations of the narrative forms associated with the web of facticity. And they would have to come to terms with news as an indexical and reflexive phenomenon—a resource for social action in their own lives, in the lives of news consumers, and in the lives of the socially, politically, and economically powerful.

It seems trite to observe that knowledge is power. Yet that rationalist dictum is both a tenet of our society and a ruling premise of newswork. For power may be realized through the dissemination of some knowledge and the suppression of other ideas. And it may be reinforced by the way knowledge is framed as a resource for social action. News, I have argued, is a social resource whose construction limits an analytic understanding of contemporary life. Through its dispersion of the news net, its typifications, the claimed professionalism of newsworkers, the mutual constitution of fact and source, the representational forms of the news narrative, the claim to First Amendment rights of both private property and professionalism—through all these phenomena, objectified as constraints or as resources—news legitimates the status quo.

I do not mean to accuse newsworkers of bias. The news professionals rightfully insist that those who shout "bias" be able to define objective truth in a definitive manner. I do not claim that ability. But I do claim that it is valuable to identify news as an artful accomplishment attuned to specific understandings of social reality. Those understandings, constituted in specific work processes and practices, legitimate the status quo. Furthermore, I claim that the theories developed here might fruitfully be applied to the social construction of other sorts of knowledge and other ideologies.

EDWARD S. HERMAN and NOAM CHOMSKY

Propaganda Mill
(1988)

It is a primary function of the mass media in the United States to mobilize public support for the special interests that dominate the Government and the private sector.

This is our conclusion after years of studying the media. Perhaps it is an obvious point—but the common assumption seems to be that the media are independent and committed to discovering and reporting the truth. Leaders of the media claim that their news judgments rest on unbiased, objective criteria. We contend, on the other hand, that the powerful are able to fix the premises of discourse, decide what the general populace will be allowed to see, hear, and think about, and "manage" public opinion by mounting regular propaganda campaigns.

We do not claim this is all the mass media do, but we believe the propaganda function to be a very important aspect of their overall service.

In countries where the levers of power are in the hands of a state bureaucracy, monopolistic control of the media, often supplemented by official censorship, makes it clear that media serve the ends of the dominant elite. It is much more difficult to see a propaganda system at work where the media are private and formal censorship is absent.

This is especially true where the media actively compete, periodically attack and expose corporate and governmental malfeasance, and aggressively portray themselves as spokesmen for free speech and the general community interest. What is not evident (and remains undiscussed in the media) is the severely limited access to the private media system and the effect of money and power on the system's performance.

Critiques of this kind are often dismissed by Establishment commentators as "conspiracy theories," but this is merely an evasion. We don't rely on any kind of conspiracy hypothesis to explain the performance of the media; in fact, our treatment is much closer to a "free-market" analysis.

From *The Progressive*, June 1988, 14–17.