The Media and the Crisis of Democracy in the Age of Bush-2

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In this study, I demonstrate the consequences of the triumph of neoliberalism and media deregulation for democracy. I argue that the tremendous concentration of power in the hands of corporate groups who control powerful media conglomerates has intensified a crisis of democracy in the United States and elsewhere. Providing case studies of how mainstream media in the United States have become tools of conservative and corporate interests since the 1980s, I discuss how the corporate media helped forge a conservative hegemony, failed to address key social problems, and promoted the candidacy of George W. Bush in the 2000 U.S. presidential election.
Key Words:

A democratic social order, as was conceived in 18th century Europe and developed in England, France, the United States and elsewhere, requires a separation of powers so that no one institution or social force dominates the society and polity. The U.S. Constitution, for instance, separated the political system into the executive, legislative, and the judiciary so that there would be a division and balance of powers between the most important political institutions. The British and U.S. constitutional orders provided for freedom of speech, assembly, and the press, while the media were conceived in France after the French revolution as the "Fourth Estate" to help provide checks and balances against corruption and excessive state power.

Yet democracy also requires a knowledgeable electorate that can participate in political affairs. Participatory democracy consists of the sovereignty of the people and thus government by, for, and of the people. In order for a free people to govern themselves, they must be adequately informed and able to participate in public debate, elections, and political activity. Freedom of the press is thus necessary to assure that the media would be free from domination by any economic or political force and could criticize the government and powerful institutions, while promoting vigorous debate on issues of common concern, thus providing citizens with the necessary information and ideas to participate intelligently in public affairs.

Consequently, liberal and participatory democracy, as it has developed over the past two centuries, involves both separation of powers in a constitutional system of checks and balances, *and* participation of its citizens in social and political affairs. Sovereignty, in this framework, rests both in the constitutional order and with the will of the people.[1] Thus, the dual democratic functions of the press have been to provide a check against excessive power and to inform the people concerning the major issues of public interest in order to allow their knowledgeable participation in public life. A free press has long been deemed vitally necessary to maintain a democratic society, and it is often claimed by champions of democracy that freedom of the press is one of the features that defines the superiority of democratic societies over competing social systems.

This concept of a free press was also extended to the broadcast media that were assigned a series of democratic responsibilities. In countries like Britain which developed a public service model of broadcasting, radio and then television were considered part of the public sector with important

duties to reproduce the national culture and provide forums of information and debate for its citizens.[2] Even in the United States, where a private industry model of broadcasting came to dominate, in the Federal Communications Act of 1934 and subsequent legislation and court decisions broadcasting was to serve the "public interest, convenience, and necessity," ascribing certain democratic functions to the media, until the overthrow of these strictures in the 1980s and 1990s.[3]

The press and then the broadcast media were thus to provide information, ideas, and debate concerning issues of public significance in order to promote a democratic public sphere. Broadcasting was conceived as a public utility, with the airwaves established as part of the public domain, subject to regulation by the government to assure that broadcasting would meet its democratic responsibilities. Yet during the two centuries of the democratic revolutions, political and corporate powers often came to dominate the media, and over the past several decades forces of deregulation have expanded private corporate control of dominant media. During the era of laissez-faire deregulation pursued in England by Thatcher and her successors and in the U.S. by the Reagan administration and subsequent regimes, much of the broadcasting regulatory apparatus was dismantled, and giant corporations took over key broadcast media or became increasingly powerful. In Europe and then throughout the world, starting with the Thatcher administration in the late 1970s, country after country deregulated its media, allowed a proliferation of private media corporations to compete with largely state-run or financed public broadcasting, and thus increased the range of corporate media organizations which weakened public service broadcasting, replacing it with a market model.

In the era of intensifying globalization of the 1990s and into the new millennium, market models of broadcasting generally emerged as dominant, and a series of global mergers took place that consolidated media ownership into ever fewer hands. The result has been that a shrinking number of giant media corporations have controlled a widening range of media in corporate conglomerates that control the press, broadcasting, film, music, and other forms of popular entertainment, as well as the most accessed Internet sites. Media have been increasingly organized on a business model, and competition between proliferating commercialized media has provided an impetus to replacing news with entertainment, to generate a tabloidization of news, and to pursue profits and sensationalism rather than public enlightenment and democracy.[4]

In this study, I demonstrate how the triumph of neo-liberalism and media deregulation helped produce a crisis of democracy in the United States. I argue that the tremendous concentration of power in the hands of business groups who control powerful media conglomerates has intensified corporate control of vital news and information and surrendered the lively and critical media necessary to ensure a vital democracy. If corporate media promote their own interests and agendas, they do not serve their democratic purposes of informing the people, allowing the public to engage in informed civic debate and thus to participate in democratic dialogue and decision-making. Moreover, if the media corporations utilize their powerful instruments of communication and information to advance their own corporate interests and those of politicians and policies that they favor, then the media have lost their democratic functions of serving to debate issues of socio-political importance and providing a critical watchdog against excessive corporate and government power and corruption and questionable policies. Further, democracy is undermined if the mainstream media do not address significant social problems when these issues threaten corporate

power or dominant economic interests. Moreover, by undermining democracy and not engaging the significant social problems of the era, the corporate media themselves become a social problem, requiring alternatives and intensification of a democratic media politics.

My argument is that once the corporate media surrendered their responsibilities to serve the public and provide a forum for democratic debate and addressing significant issues of common concern, they have largely promoted the growth of corporate and state power and undermined democracy. This results in mainstream corporate press and broadcasting media becoming arms of conservative and corporate interests which advance conservative state and corporate agendas. I illustrate this claim, first, by documenting the process of corporate media consolidation and then analyzing the nature, structure, and effects of corporate media on a global scale. I indicate how during the era of neo-liberal globalization the corporate media pursued the pro-market and deregulatory agenda advanced by the Thatcher and Reagan administrations and subsequent conservative and liberal governments in most of the Western world, while attempting to impose this model throughout the world. Providing case studies of how mainstream media in the United States have become tools of conservative and corporate interests since the 1980s, I discuss how the corporate media in the United State have helped to forge a conservative hegemony, failed to address key social problems, promoted the candidacy of George W. Bush in the 2000 U.S. presidential election, and largely supported his highly conservative domestic policies and unilateralist and militarist foreign policy.[5] Finally, I discuss how the Internet and new media can provide alternatives to the corporate media and provide some hope that more democratic media and societies can be produced that will address social problems being ignored and intensified in the current era of corporate and conservative hegemony.

The Rise of the Public Sphere and Triumph of Corporate Media

During the era of the Enlightenment and 18th century democratic revolutions, public spheres emerged where individuals could discuss and debate issues of common concern. In his influential study *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Jurgen Habermas contrasted various forms of an active, participatory public sphere in the heroic era of liberal democracy with the more privatized forms of spectator politics in a bureaucratic industrial society in which the media and elites controlled the public sphere.[6] The book delineates the historical genesis of the bourgeois public sphere, followed by an account of the structural change of the public sphere in the contemporary era with the rise of state capitalism, culture industries, and the increasingly powerful positions of economic corporations and big business in public life. On this account, powerful economic and governmental organizations took over the public sphere, while citizens were content to become primarily consumers of goods, services, political administration, and spectacle.

The classical liberal public sphere was a location where criticism of the state and existing society could circulate. The institutions and sites of the 18th century democratic public sphere included newspapers, journals, and a press independent from state ownership and control, coffee houses where individuals read newspapers and engaged in political discussion, literary salons where ideas and criticism were produced, and public assemblies which were the sites of public oratory and debate. During the 19th century, the working class developed its own oppositional public spheres in union halls, party cells and meeting places, saloons, and institutions of working class culture. With

the rise of Social Democracy and other working class movements in Europe and the United States, an alternative press, radical cultural organizations, and the spaces of the strike, sit-in, and political insurrection emerged as spaces of an oppositional public sphere.

Habermas describes a transition from the liberal public sphere that originated in the Enlightenment and the American and French revolutions to a media-dominated public sphere in the current era of what he calls "welfare state capitalism and mass democracy." This historical transformation is grounded in Horkheimer and Adorno's analysis of the culture industry, in which giant corporations have taken over the public sphere and transformed it from a sphere of rational debate into one of manipulative consumption and passivity. In this transformation, "public opinion" shifts from rational consensus emerging from debate, discussion, and reflection to the manufactured opinion of polls and political and media elites. Rational debate and consensus have thus been replaced by managed discussion and manipulation by the machinations of advertising and political consulting agencies: "Publicity loses its critical function in favor of a staged display; even arguments are transmuted into symbols to which again one can not respond by arguing but only by identifying with them."[7]

For Habermas, the function of the media has thus been transformed from facilitating rational discourse and debate within the public sphere into shaping, constructing, and limiting public discourse to those themes validated and approved by media corporations. Hence, the interconnection between a sphere of public debate and individual participation has been fractured and transmuted into that of a realm of political information and spectacle in which citizen-consumers ingest and absorb passively entertainment and information. "Citizens" thus become spectators of media presentations and discourse that mold public opinion, reducing consumer/citizens to objects of news, information, and political manipulation. In Habermas's words: "Inasmuch as the mass media today strip away the literary husks from the kind of bourgeois self-interpretation and utilize them as marketable forms for the public services provided in a culture of consumers, the original meaning is reversed."[8]

Habermas has been criticized for idealizing the bourgeois public sphere and failing to articulate the important democratic functions of alternative public spheres organized by labor, oppositional political groups, women, and other forces not adequately represented in the liberal public sphere. Nonetheless, his concept of a public sphere can serve as a normative ideal of a space in which individuals can freely discuss issues of common concern and organize to implement reforms and social change.[9]

Today's public spheres include the print and broadcast media, computer data bases, Web-sites, and Internet discussion groups, utilized by social movements, local citizens organizations, subcultures, political interest groups, and individuals who use list-serves, weblogs, and various multimedia technology to serve a diversity of political causes.[10] With the rise of our contemporary media and computer society, it is through the print and broadcast media, computers, and new technologies that political hegemony has been forged over the past several decades. From the 1980s to the present, the dominant media of information and communication in the U.S. and increasingly globally have become largely "corporate media," first, because they are owned by big corporations like NBC/RCA/General Electric, Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, Bertelsmann, ABC/Disney, and AOL/Time Warner. Secondly, these media conglomerates express the corporate point of view and advance the agendas of the organizations that own them and the politicians who they support

and in turn pursue the interests of the media conglomerates in Congress.

Under the rule of neo-liberalism and Bush conservatism, the most powerful corporate forces have tightened their control of both the state and the media in the interests of aggressively promoting a pro-business agenda at the expense of other social groups. The consequences of the triumph of neo-liberalism and its program of deregulation, tax breaks for the wealthy, military build-up, cut-back of social programs, and the widening of class divisions are increasingly evident in the Age of Bush-2. As a consequence of corporate media hegemony, globalized societies confront the specter of ever-increasing corporate and military power, worsening social conditions for the vast majority, and sporadic mixtures of massive apathy and explosive conflict. In this conjuncture, the corporate media continue to play a major role in managing consumer demand, producing thought and behavior congruent with the system of corporate capitalism, and creating people's sense of political events and issues. Since the media continue to become an ever-greater political power and social force, it is all the more important to carry out sustained theoretical reflections on the social functions and effects of the corporate media, analyzing their threats to democracy, and seeing the corporate media as a social problem.

The corporate media form a system and interact and overlap with each other.[11] During the 1980s and 1990s, television networks in the United States amalgamated with other major sectors of the cultural industries and corporate capital, including mergers between CBS and Westinghouse; MCA and Seagram's; Time Warner and Turner Communications; ABC, Capital Cities, and Disney; and NBC, General Electric, and Microsoft. In 1999, CBS fused with the entertainment colossus Viacom in a $38 billion megamerger. Dwarfing all previous information/entertainment corporation combinations, Time Warner and America On-Line (AOL) proposed a $163.4 billion amalgamation in January 2000, which was approved a year later. This union brought together two huge corporations involved in TV, film, magazines, newspapers, books, information databases, computers, and other media, suggesting a coming synthesis of media and computer culture, of entertainment and information in a new infotainment society.

The fact that "new media" Internet service provider and portal AOL was the majority shareholder in the deal seemed to point to the triumph of the new online Internet culture over the old media culture. The merger itself called attention to escalating synergy among information and entertainment industries and old and new media in the form of the networked economy and cyberculture. Yet the dramatic decline in the AOL/Time Warner stock price and corporate battles for control of the giant corporation illustrated the tensions between old and new media and the instabilities and uncertainties at the heart of global capitalism, and the return to dominance of the corporation by the Time Warner forces in 2003 seem to deflate some of the hype concerning "new media" and the "new economy."[12]

In Europe also there have been increasing mergers of media corporations, the rise and decline of media giants like Viviendi and Bertelsmann, and the ascendence of new conglomerates to take the place of declining media empires. In France, the Dassault group, headed by a rightwing politician who controlled a media empire has taken over the weekly Express and 14 other acquisitions, while another French rightwing group headed by Jean-Luc Lagardere, an associate of Jacques Chirac and France's biggest publisher, controls the magazine market and is attempting to expand into telecommunications.[13] In Italy, Silvio Berlusconi owns the three main private television channels and as prime minister now also controls state television, while in Spain the Prisa company controls

major newspaper and other publications, as well as radio and television networks.

These amalgamations bring together corporations involved in TV, film, magazines, newspapers, books, information data bases, computers, and other media, suggesting a coming together of media and computer culture, of entertainment and information in a new networked and multimedia infotainment society. There have also been massive mergers in the telecommunications industry as well as between cable and satellite industries with major entertainment and corporate conglomerates. By 2002, ten gigantic multinational corporations, including AOL Time Warner, Disney-ABC, General Electric-NBC, Viacom-CBS, News Corporation, Viviendi, Sony, Bertelsmann, AT&T, and Liberty Media controlled most of the production of information and entertainment throughout the globe.[14] The result is less competition and diversity and more corporate control of newspapers and journalism, television, radio, film, and other media of information and entertainment.

The corporate media, communications, and information industries are frantically scrambling to provide delivery for a wealth of services. These will include increased Internet access, wireless cellular telephones, and satellite personal communication devices, which will facilitate video, film, entertainment, and information on demand, as well as Internet shopping and more unsavory services like pornography and gambling. Consequently, the fusions of the immense infotainment conglomerates disclose a synergy between information technologies and multimedia, which combine entertainment and information, undermining distinctions between these domains and producing powerful new social forces.

The neo-liberal deregulation agenda of the 1980s and 1990s attempted to remove all major structural constraints on the broadcasting business in terms of ownership, licenses, and business practices. Furthermore, it eliminated public service requirements and many restraints on advertising and programming, thus allowing the television networks, for instance, to increase advertising, to cut back on documentaries and public service programming, and to use children's programs to dramatize commercial toys, eliminating the regulation of children's television that restricted advertising and forbad children's shows based on commercial toys. Deregulation contributed massively to the concentration, conglomeratization, and commercialization of the mainstream media. It also contributed to the collapse of the telecommunication industry that cost over half a million people their jobs in 2002 and contributed to around $2 trillion of the $7 trillion lost on the stock market the same year.[15]

Consequently, neo-liberal deregulation of the media dramatically redefined the relationships between government and broadcasting and attempted to undo decades of regulatory guidelines and policies. As a result, during the past two decades, there has been a drastic reduction of news, documentary, and public affairs broadcasting.[16] The trend toward sensationalism has been intensified with "reality programming" (i.e., tabloid journalism of the sort found in the New York *Daily News* and *Post* or British tabloids who obsess over scandals of leading politicians or the Royals). Tabloid journalism ranges from Geraldo Rivera's "exposés" of satanism and live drug busts to the gruesome murder of the week or series dedicated to tabloid-style crime and sex scandals.

In general, from the 1990s through the present, political broadcast journalism turned toward tabloid-style journalism and "liberal"/""conservative" ideological debate and away from analysis, criticism, and genuine investigative reporting that engaged social problems.[17] Furthermore, deregulation also permitted the rise of 24/7 cable news networks that presented

relentlessly conservative and one-sided programming such as one finds in the Fox and NBC cable networks. In the Reagan era of deregulation, the "fairness doctrine," which required that broadcasters present equal time to competing sides on issues, was eliminated. Hence, broadcasting networks had no constraints to prevent one-sided conservative ideology to prevail and had no requirement to provide many-sided debates and dialogue, part of the very lifeblood of democracy.[18]

Deregulation also led to dramatic conglomerate takeovers of radio stations and to reduction of radio news operations. In practice, this meant major cutting back of local news, thus depriving communities that did not have a local daily newspaper of news concerning their areas. Previously, it was radio that was the voice of these communities, but with the takeover of local radio stations by corporate conglomerates, local news and public affairs were often cut back significantly and even sometimes eliminated completely. During the 1990s and into the new millennium, consolidation and commercialization of radio continued to intensify with a small number of firms buying up more and more local radio stations, imposing standardized Top 40 music formats and nationally syndicated and mostly conservative Talk Radio shows. Moreover, 2002 *Extra!* Surveys indicate that National Public Radio continued to be dominated by white voices, while community radio was under attack from corporate and public radio takeover.[19]

Other studies in the U.S. during the first decade of broadcasting deregulation indicated an increased amount of commercial interruptions, dramatically deteriorating children's television, large cutbacks in news and public affairs programming, and a more conservative corporate climate at the networks where individuals feared for their jobs in a period of "bottom-line" corporate firing.[20] Furthermore, rightwing pressure groups used a variety of strategies to push and keep network news coverage on the right track. For instance, the "Accuracy in Media" group carried out campaigns against programs with a perceived "liberal bias" and demanded, and sometimes received, free time to answer supposedly "liberal" programs. Lawsuits by General William Westmoreland against a CBS Vietnam documentary and by Israeli General Ariel Sharon against *Time* magazine discouraged the media from criticizing conservative politicians. Although Westmoreland and Sharon lost their cases, the lawsuits had a chilling effect on the media, constraining the media against undertaking critical reporting against individuals, corporations, or groups who might sue them.[21]

During the Gulf War of 1991 and the Afghanistan war following the September 11, 2001 terror attacks, the broadcasting networks and press were subject to unprecedented pressure to conform to the views of the respective wars advanced by the Bush administration in question and the Pentagon.[22] A "pool system" that restricted access to the battlefield and that produced censorship of reporters' stories and images followed the British attempt to control news during the Falkland-Malvinas war in the early 1980s.[23] On this model, press pools sharply restrict access to the actual battlefields and the government and military do everything possible to control the flow of images, news, and information.

In addition, during the two Bush family Iraq wars and the Afghanistan war, there were organized campaigns to assault networks or papers that criticized U.S. policy, that documented civilian casualties or that in any way was seen as "aiding and abetting the enemy."[24] The result is that during war, the press and broadcasting institutions in the U.S. are little more than cheerleaders for the military effort and instruments of propaganda for the state. Moreover, not only are news programs slanted toward the hegemonic positions of corporate and government elites, but discussion

shows also are dominated by conservative discourses. Although there has been a proliferation of television political discussion shows over the past decade with the rise of 24-hour cable news television, one wonders if the public interest is served by the composition of these corporate media talk shows, which almost always are limited to mainstream representatives of the two major political parties, or other white male, establishment figures, heavily slanted toward the conservative side.[25]

Hence, in the past twenty-five years, while there has been an increase in news and discussion programming, there have been less of the liberal and socially critical documentaries of the previous decades, and the dominant political discourse has been largely conservative. The corporate media in the U.S. helped forge the conservative hegemony of the 1980s by going down "on bended knee" to the Reagan administration, failing to vigorously criticize its policies. The corporate media also actively promoted the Reagan program of tax breaks for the rich and corporations, deregulation, union-busting, a massive military build-up, chauvinistic patriotism, and aggressive foreign intervention.[26] There were limits, of course, beyond which the media did not allow the zealous Reaganites to tread and the Iran/Contra coverage forced extremists out of the administration, helped induce Reagan to negotiate an arms reduction treaty with Gorbachev, diminishing Cold War tensions, and created the climate for the flourishing of a more centrist, conservative politics which helped elect George Bush.[27]

During the first Bush administration, the mainstream media in the United States provided propaganda for Bush's military interventions, following a major trend of media support for U.S. military interventions and policies.[28] This trend was particularly striking in network coverage of the Panama Invasion and the 1990-1 Persian Gulf crisis and then war. Coverage of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and Bush's immediate dispatching of troops to Saudi Arabia made it appear natural that only a military response to the Iraqi invasion was viable and tended to support Bush's military policy, making it appear that war in the Middle East was inevitable. The mainstream media helped promote the military solution through their framing of the crisis, through their omissions, and via the ways that they were manipulated and controlled by the Bush administration and Pentagon to manufacture consent to its policies. This had global consequences since the U.S. media frames tended to dominate world media presentation of the crisis in the Gulf and especially the Gulf War.[29]

Moreover, the corporate media failed to vigorously debate the political, ecological, and human consequences of the 1991 Gulf War and whether such an intervention was really in the interests of the people of the United States. Instead, the major television networks generally presented every position and action by the Bush administration and its multinational coalition positively. There were few voices seen or heard on corporate television against the slaughter of tens of thousands of Iraqis, including many civilian deaths, or the destruction of the Iraqi economic infrastructure by coalition bombing. Even the slaughter of fleeing Iraqis, after they formally announced withdrawal from Kuwait and sought a cease fire in the United Nations, was ignored or quickly passed over by the television networks in favor of joyous images of the liberation of Kuwait or a replay of alleged Iraqi atrocities against Kuwaitis. The issue of the Bush administration coalition's responsibility for much of the ecological crisis in the Gulf was not raised, even though part of the oil spills, some of the oil fires in Kuwait, and all of the ecological destruction in Iraq was caused by the U.S.-led coalition bombing.[30] Likewise, there was little coverage of the resulting mysterious diseases suffered by U.S. troops serving in the Gulf War, crippling and killing thousands

from untested anthrax vaccines, exposure to depleted-uranium weapons, and possible exposure to Iraqi chemical weapons and to burning oil and other war-related pollution.[31]

Thus, during the crisis in the Gulf and the Gulf war of 1990-1, the corporate media advanced the agenda of the Bush Administration and the Pentagon while failing to inform the public adequately or to debate the issues involved. Instead of serving as a forum for public debate, the corporate media served instead as a propaganda organ for the state, the military, and defense industries, contributing to a further centralization of state, corporate, and military power and growing manipulation and indoctrination of the public. On the whole, during the Reagan and Bush I eras, the corporate media supported the pro-business policies of the Republican party and cut back on broadcasting and investigative journalism that would focus on social problems and call for progressive social change as a solution. The corporate agenda of the media continued during the Clinton years and helped elect George W. Bush president, as I argue in the next section.

The Media in the Clinton Era and the 2000 Election

In general, the decline of TV documentaries and public affairs programming helped produce a less informed electorate, more susceptible to political manipulation. Democracy requires vigorous public debate of key issues of importance and an informed electorate able to make intelligent decisions and to participate in politics. Corporate control of the media meant that corporations could use the media to promote their own interests aggressively and to cut back on the criticism of corporate abuses that were expanding from the 1970s to the present. The tablodization of news and intense competition between various media meant that the corporate media ignored social problems and focused on scandal and tabloid entertainment rather than issues of serious public concern.

During the Clinton era, for instance, the media focused intensely on the O.J. Simpson scandals in the mid-1990s and then turned toward the Clinton sex scandals.[32] Although previously corporate media tended to support presidents in office, and had been especially uncritical of the ruling administration in the Reagan and Bush I years, during the Clinton era the media became fierce watchdogs, pouncing on every potential scandal involving the Clintons and feasting on the sex scandals that eventually exploded and took over the media in the 1990s. This was an era of rightwing talk radio, the rise of conservative television networks like Fox, and the proliferation of the Internet, which had many anti-Clinton activists and gossips like Matt Drudge, whose Web-site first broke the Bill and Monica story.

The 1990s were an era of escalating social problems caused by globalization and the abuses of corporate capitalism, ecological crisis, decline in public health, growing inequality between rich and poor, and dangerous corporate practices that would eventually explode in 2002 in the Enron, WorldCom, and other corporate scandals. It was an era of neo-liberalism in which not only were the media deregulated, but so too were corporate practices, financial markets, corporate accounting, and the global economy. The media tended to celebrate the "new economy" and the period of economic boom and growing affluence, while overlooking the dangers of an over-inflated stock market, an unregulated economy, and the growing divisions between haves and have-nots. During this era, the corporate media thus neglected social problems in favor of celebrating the capitalist economy and technological revolution. The media also overlooked the growth of terrorism, dangerous consequences of the division between haves and have-nots in the global economy, and growing

ecological problems.[33]

As noted, while the mainstream media in the U.S. tended to be largely uncritical of Reagan and Bush, they were fiercely critical of Clinton and his administration. In particular, cable 24/7 news networks like *Fox TV News* and the NBC cable networks strongly favored the Republicans while sharply criticizing Democrats and "liberals."[34] Thus, it was not surprising during the 2000 election that key sectors of the media would be highly critical of Democratic Party candidate Al Gore and give George W. Bush, son of the former president, an easy time. According to many accounts, large sectors of the media despised Gore and tended to like Bush. As Eric Alterman notes:

> The intensity of the media's anti-Gore obsession is a bit bizarre, but even more so, given the strictures of journalistic objectivity, is the lack of compunction they feel about openly demonstrating it. At an early New Hampshire debate between Gore and Bill Bradley, reporters openly booed him, "objectivity" be damned. "The 300 media types watching in the press room at Dartmouth were, to use the appropriate technical term, totally grossed out," *Time* reported. "Whenever Gore came on too strong, the room erupted in a collective jeer, like a gang of fifteen-year-old Heathers cutting down some hapless nerd."
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> *Washington Post* White House reporter Dana Milbank offers this reasoned, mature explanation: "Gore is sanctimonious, and that's sort of the worst thing you can be in the eyes of the press. And he has been disliked all along, and it was because he gives a sense that he's better than us--he's better than everybody, for that matter, but the sense that he's better than us as reporters. Whereas President Bush probably is sure that he's better than us--he's probably right, but he does not convey that sense. He does not seem to be dripping with contempt when he looks at us, and I think that has something to do with the coverage."
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> Bill Keller, who almost became executive editor of the *New York Times,* was no less scholarly than Milbank, but like any good pundit, multiplied his own resentments by 50 million. "One big reason 50 million voters went instead for an apparent lightweight they didn't entirely trust was that they didn't want to have Al Gore in their living rooms for four years," Keller wrote on the paper's Op-Ed page. Included in his argument was the behavior of his 3-year-old, who, during the 2000 campaign, "went around chanting the refrain: 'Al Gore is a snore.'" Imagine where she might have learned to do that!
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> During the 2000 election, both the *Times* and the *Post* assigned reporters to Gore who hated his guts and so repeatedly misled their readers. Katharine Seelye's and Ceci Connolly's coverage turned out to be so egregious that the two were singled out by the conservative *Financial Times* of London as "hostile to the [Gore] campaign," unable to hide their "contempt for the candidate." (And don't get me started on the topic of "Panchito" Bruni's daily valentines to George W. during this period, carried on page one of the Paper of Record (i.e. *The New York Times*).[35]

The media bias against Gore and more favorable representations of Bush came out strikingly during the 2000 U.S. presidential election. After generally ignoring the campaign during the summer and early fall, the corporate media played up the presidential debates as crucial to the election outcome. Since the 1960s the presidential debates had been popular media spectacles that were often deemed crucial to the election. Hence, as the debates began in October, genuine suspense arose and significant sectors of the populace tuned in to the three events between the presidential candidates and single disputation between the competing vice presidential candidates. On the whole, the debates were dull, in part because host Jim Lehrer asked unimaginative questions that simply allowed the candidates to feed back their standard positions on Social Security, education, Medicare, and other issues that they had already spoken about day after day. Neither Lehrer nor others involved in the debates probed the candidates' positions or asked challenging questions on a wide range of issues from globalization and the digital divide to poverty and corporate crime that had not been addressed in the campaign. Frank Rich described the first debate in the *New York Times* as a "flop show," while Dan Rather on CBS called it "pedantic, dull, unimaginative, lackluster, humdrum, you pick the word."[36]

In Election 2000, commentators on the debates tended to grade the candidates more on their performance and style than on substance, and many believe that this strongly aided Bush. In the postmodern image politics of the 2000 election, tyle became substance as both candidates endeavored to appear likable, friendly, and attractive to voters. In the presidential debates when the candidates appeared *mano a mano* to the public for the first time, not only did the media commentators focus on the form and appearance of the candidates, rather than the specific positions they took, but the networks frequently cut to "focus groups" of "undecided" voters who presented their stylistic evaluations. After the first debate, for instance, commentators noted that Gore looked "stiff" or "arrogant" while Bush appeared "likable." And after the second debate, Gore was criticized by commentators as too "passive," and then too "aggressive" after the third debate, while pundits tended to let Bush off the hook.

It was thus the spectacle of the three presidential debates and the media framing of these events that arguably provided the crucial edge for Bush.[37] At the conclusion of the first Bush–Gore debate, the initial viewer polls conducted by CBS and ABC declared Gore the winner. But the television pundits seemed to score a victory for Bush. Bob Schieffer of CBS declared, "Clearly tonight, if anyone gained from this debate, it was George Bush. He seemed to have as much of a grasp of the issues" as Gore. His colleague Gloria Borger agreed, "I think Bush did gain." CNN's Candy Crowley concluded, "They held their own, they both did.... In the end, that has to favor Bush, at least with those who felt . . . he's not ready for prime time."

Even more helpful to Bush was the focus on Gore's debate performance. Gore was criticized for his sighs and style (a "bully," declared ABC's Sam Donaldson) and was savaged for alleged misstatements. The Republicans immediately spun that Gore had "lied" when he told a story of a young Florida girl forced to stand in class because of a shortage of desks. The school principal of the locale in question denied this, but the media had a field day, with a Murdoch-owned *New York Post* boldface headline trumpeting "LIAR! LIAR!" Subsequent interviews indicated that the girl *did* have to stand and that there *was* a desk shortage, and testimony from her father and a picture confirmed this, but the spin was on that Gore was a "liar." Moreover, Gore had misspoken during the first debate in a story illustrating his work in making the Federal Emergency Management

Administration (FEMA) more efficient, claiming that he had visited Texas with its director after a recent hurricane. As it turns out, although Gore had played a major role in improving FEMA and had frequently traveled with its director to crisis sites, and while he had been to Texas after the hurricane, the fact that he had not accompanied the director in the case cited accelerated claims that Gore was a "serial exaggerator," or even liar, who could not be trusted.

This Republican mantra was repeated throughout the rest of the campaign, and whereas the press piled on Gore every time there was a minor misstatement, Bush was able to get away with whoppers in the debate and on the campaign trail on substantial issues.[38] For example, when he claimed in a debate with Gore that he was for a "patients' bill of rights" that would allow patients to sue their HMOs (Home Maintenance Organizations) for malpractice, in fact, Bush had blocked such policies in Texas and opposed a bill in Congress that would allow patients the right to sue. And few critics skewered Bush over the misstatement in the second debate, delivered with a highly inappropriate smirk, that the three racists who had brutally killed a black man in Texas were going to be executed. In fact, one had testified against the others and had been given a life sentence in exchange; moreover, because all cases were under appeal it was simply wrong for the governor to claim that they were going to be executed, since this undercut their right of appeal. The media also had given Bush a pass on the record number of executions performed under his reign in Texas, the lax review procedures, and the large number of contested executions where there were questions of mental competence, proper legal procedures, and even evidence that raised doubts about Bush's execution of specific prisoners.

Thus, although a fierce debate over prescription drugs in the first debate led to allegations by Gore that Bush was misrepresenting his own prescription drug plan, driving Bush to verbally assault Gore, the media did not bother to look and see that Bush *had* misrepresented his plan. Nor did many note that Gore was correct, despite Bush's impassioned denials, that seniors earning more than $25,000 a year would get no help from Bush's plan for four or five years. Moreover, after the third and arguably decisive presidential debate, the MSNBC commentators and punditry were heavily weighted toward pro-Bush voices. In questioning Republican vice presidential candidate Dick Cheney about the third debate, Chris Matthews lobbed an easy question to him attacking Al Gore; moments later when Democratic House Majority Leader Dick Gephardt came on, once again Matthews assailed Gore in his question. Pollster Frank Luntz presented a focus group of "undecided" voters, the majority of which had switched to Bush during the debate and who uttered primarily anti-Gore sentiments when interviewed (MSNBC forgot to mention that Luntz is a Republican activist). Former Republican Senator Alan Simpson was allowed to throw barbs at Gore, to the delight and assent of host Brian Williams, while there was no Democrat allowed to counter the Republican in this segment. The pundits, including Matthews, former Reagan-Bush speechwriter and professional Republican ideologue Peggy Noonan, and ethically challenged plagiarist Mike Barnacle, all uttered pro-Bush messages, while the two more liberal pundits provided more balanced analysis of the pros and cons of both sides in the debate rather than just spin for Bush.

Gore was on the defensive for several weeks after the debates, and Bush's polls steadily rose.[39] Moreover, the tremendous amount of coverage of the polls no doubt helped Bush. While Gore had been rising in the polls from his convention up until the debates, occasionally experiencing a healthy lead, the polls were favorable to Bush from the conclusion of the first debate until the election.

Almost every night, the television news opened with the polls, which usually showed Bush ahead, sometimes by 10 points or more. As the election night results would show, these polls were off the mark but they became *the* story of the election as the November 7 vote approached.[40]

The polls were indeed one of the scandals of what would turn out to be outrageously shameful media coverage of the campaign. It became increasingly clear that the polls were notoriously flawed during the 2000 campaign. Poll fatigue had set in with the public, and the major polling organizations admitted that they were getting a less than 50 percent response rate. Moreover, the national polls were irrelevant because in an Electoral College system it is the number of states won that is the key to victory and not national polling figures. Yet despite all their flaws, network news coverage focused on the polls, or the strategies, mechanics, and ups and downs of the campaigns, rather than the key issues or the public's real concerns. With a declining amount of news coverage on the major network news, and sound-bites in which news and information were condensed into even smaller fragments, media focus on the horse race and strategic dimension of the presidential campaigns meant that less and less time would be devoted to discussion of issues, the candidates, and the stakes of the election.

In this environment, the campaigns sought to create positive images of their candidates through daily photo opportunities and television ads, thus contributing to intensification of a superficial politics of the image. The television ads presented positive spectacles of the candidates' virtues and negative representations of their opponents' flaws. Contested states such as Florida were saturated with wall-to-wall advertising, and consequently Election 2000 campaign costs were the highest in history in which a record $3 billion was dispersed. The ads were closely scrutinized for distortion, exaggerations, and lies, with Internet Web-zines such as *Slate* and some TV networks providing regular analysis of the ads, while replaying and closely analyzing the more controversial ones.[41]

Bush's turnaround in the polls in October after his numbers had been steadily dipping for weeks was apparently boosted by what was perceived as his successful appearance on the debates and on popular talk shows, such as *Oprah,* where an image of the much-beloved African American talk hostess giving him a smooch was widely circulated. Some claimed that the talk shows were a natural for the more relaxed Bush, although there were questions over whether his appearance on the *David Letterman Show* hurt or helped his efforts, as he appeared giddy and was unable to answer effectively the tough questions that Letterman posed.

In any case, both candidates made appearances on the major late-night talk shows, as well as other popular television venues previously off-limits to presidential candidates. In general, television spectacle helps to boost the chances of the most telegenic candidate, and according to media commentary, Bush repeatedly scored high in ratings in “the likeability factor.” Polls continued to present Bush as more popular than Al Gore, and most media commentators predicted that he would win the election handily.

In the postmodern politics of promotion, candidates are packaged as commodities, marketed as a brand name, and sold as a bill of goods. In a presidential race, campaigns are dominated by image consultants, advertising mavens, spin doctors, and political operatives who concoct daily photo opportunities to make the campaign look appealing, “messages” to sound attractive, and “events” to present the candidates in an attractive format. Such campaigns are, of course, expensive and require tremendous budgets that make competing impossible for candidates without access to the megafortunes needed to run a media politics campaign. In turn, such megaspectacles render

politicians beholden to those who cough up the massive amount of dollars to pay for the extravaganzas and the vast apparatus of producers, spinners, and operatives to create them.

Bush's brand name was his family trademark, son of the former president and Bush dynasty heir apparent, with his own distinctive "compassionate conservatism." The latter phrase shows the bogus and spurious nature of presidential packaging, as there is little "compassion" in the record of the Texas governor who executed a record number of prison inmates, who cut welfare lists and social programs, and who promised more of the same on the national level.[42] In the politics of presidential marketing, however, creation of image takes precedence over ideas, style replaces substance, and presentation trumps policy. With politics becoming a branch of marketing, the more marketable candidate is easier to sell. Thus, it is not surprising that Bush's image, style, and presentation trumped Gore's ideas, experience, and policies with large segments of the public.

Bush had another major asset in the competition for votes and marketing of the candidates. Cultural historians make distinctions between "character," based on one's moral fiber and history of behavior, and "personality," which has to do with how one presents oneself to others.[43] The new culture of personality emphasizes charm, likeability, attractiveness, and the ability to present oneself in positive images. Bush was clearly Mr. Personality, instantly likable, a hale-fellow-well-met and friendly glad-hander who was able to charm audiences. He was becoming a media celebrity whose achievements and accomplishments were few, but he was able to play effectively the "presidential contender" and provide a resonant personality. Moreover, Bush was able to transmit his likable qualities via television, whereas Gore frequently had more difficulty in coming across as personable and in translating his considerable intelligence and experience into easily consumable sound-bites and images.[44]

The Texas governor, who was to many observers more of a figure of personality than character, was also able to turn the "character issue" -- with the complicity of the press -— against Gore and convince audiences that he, George W. Bush, was a man of "character" as well as personality. The Bush camp used the term "character" as a code word to remind audiences of the moral lapses of Bill Clinton,and of Gore's association with the president, in a sustained collapse of one into the other. The Bush campaign also systematically attacked Gore's character and credibility, and the media bought into this.[45]

Furthermore, Bush, more than the deadly serious and wonkish Gore, was entertaining; he was amusing and affable in debates, even if not commanding in argumentation and substantive position. Like Ronald Reagan, Bush looked good on the run, with a friendly smile and wave, and in general seemed able to banter and connect with his audiences better than Gore. Bush's misstatements and errors were amusing, and on late-night talk shows he poked fun at himself for his mispronunciations and gaffes; *Slate* compiled a list of "Bushisms," and they were as entertaining as David Letterman's Top Ten list and Jay Leno's nightly NBC monologue, which often made jokes about Gore and Bush.

The American public seems to like entertaining and interesting politicians and politics and sometimes to resent media critiques of politicians they like. Hence, when stories broke a few days before the election that Bush had been arrested twenty years before on a DWI charge and had since covered this over and even lied about it, the populace and polls did not punish him. When asked of highs and lows of the campaign on election night, Bush said with his trademark smirk that even the lows "turned out to be good for us," alluding to polls that indicate that Bush got a rise in popularity

after revelations of his drunk driving charge. As with Clinton's survival of his sex scandals and the Republican impeachment campaign, it seems as if the public empathizes with the politicians' foibles and resents moral indictments of at least those with whom voters sympathize. Obviously, Clinton was a highly empathetic personality with whom voters could sympathize, and many resented the Republican moral crusade against him. Similarly, voters liked Bush and seemed not to be affected by the embarrassing disclosure of his DWI record and its longtime cover-up.[46]

Talk radio was an important medium during the campaign, just as it had been over the last decade in U.S. politics. It was the relatively new form of unrestrained talk radio that first mobilized conservatives against Bill Clinton after his election in 1992, providing a basis of indignation and anger that fueled the circulation of the details of the Clinton sex scandal and generated support for his impeachment. Of course, the very excesses of rightwing talk radio provided a backlash, and some stations chose liberals to counter the conservative hosts, but most liberal programs were soon cancelled and by 2000 rightwing hosts completely dominated talk radio.

Indeed, during Election 2000 and the ensuing struggle for the presidency, rightwing talk radio had a comeback, energizing its old audience and finding new ones, while projecting the hatred of Clinton onto Gore. The narcissistic and demagogic Rush Limbaugh, who mercifully had been taken off television because of declining ratings and who had seemed to disappear from the front stage of national mainstream media, reappeared in all his virulent un-glory, frequently appearing on NBC channels, which rehabilitated the discredited demagogue to celebrity and credibility.[47] Limbaugh and other rightwing blowhards grew louder and more aggressive than ever, demonizing Gore and mobilizing conservative constituents to vote for Bush, helping as well to organize against the Democrat candidate once the post-election struggle for the presidency erupted.

Moreover, and importantly, major research studies of the nexus between media and politics revealed that both the broadcast media and the press were pro-Bush and that this bias perhaps won the Republican enough votes ultimately to wrest the election victory from Gore and the Democrats. A study by the Pew Research Center and the Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ) examined 2,400 newspaper, television, and Internet stories in five different weeks between February and June 2000, and indicated that 76 percent of the coverage included one of two themes: that Gore lies and exaggerates or is marred by scandal. The most common theme about Bush, the study found, was that he is a "different kind of Republican." A follow-up PEJ report concluded:

> In the culminating weeks of the 2000 presidential race, the press coverage was strikingly negative, and Vice President Al Gore has gotten the worst of it, according to a new study released today by the Committee of Concerned Journalists.
>
> Gore's coverage was decidedly more negative, more focused on the internal politics of campaigning and had less to do with citizens than did his Republican rival.

> In contrast, George W. Bush was twice as likely as Gore to get coverage that was positive in tone. Coverage of the governor was also more issue-oriented and more likely to be directly connected to citizens.
>
> These are some of the key findings of a major new study of press coverage in newspapers, television and on the Internet during key weeks in September and October.[48]

Hence, the coding of Gore in the mainstream media was that he tended to exaggerate and even lie and was implicated in many scandals in the Clinton administration, while the media bought the Bush line that he was a different type of Republican, a "compassionate conservative," and "a reformer with results" who worked with Democrats and Republicans in Texas "to get things done." When the election would heat up in the fall, the Bush campaign would exploit these motifs, and the mainstream media would generally go along with this line, without serious investigation of Bush's record or his own exaggerations.[49]

One of the most utilized examples of Gore the liar and "serial exaggerator" was the alleged claim that he had invented the Internet. In fact, Gore had made no such claim, although the media, the Republican spinners, and Bush himself constantly referred to this urban myth. Bush burst out in one of the debates that "his opponent" claimed to "have invented the Internet" and then smirked in contempt and during the election often repeated the joke, caught many times in news footage: "You've heard Al Gore say he invented the Internet. Well, if he was so smart, why do all the addresses begin with 'W'?"

This lie about Gore, and Bush's systematic exploitation of the myth, speaks volumes about the quality of the Bush campaign and media complicity in its spin. First, it is simply untrue that Gore claimed he "invented" the Internet.[50] Second, it is interesting how Bush and his handlers utilized the "W" as a trademark to distinguish Bush from his father and how Bush became popularly identified as W, or the Texas-inflected "Dubya." Whereas JFK's initials were an apt summary of his style and achievements, and LBJ earned the gravity of his initials through many years in the Senate, culminating in becoming Senate Majority leader, then gaining the vice presidency and presidency, George W. Bush was popularly referred to as "W," an empty signifier that really didn't stand for anything in particular, although had the media probed the infamous "W" they would have discovered a truly spectacular story.

For, in fact, the "W" in Bush junior's name referred to Herbert Walker, the father of the woman, Dorothy Walker, whom George W. Bush's grandfather, Prescott Bush, married (the H.W. in Bush senior's name referred to Herbert Walker, pointing to the largely unknown origins of Bush family power and money). As I note below, Prescott Bush managed the bank that helped fund Hitler and the Nazis and Herbert Walker, Prescott Bush's close business associate, helped run businesses for Stalin's Russia and Mussolini's Italy, as well as Hitler's Germany.[51] One of the scandals of Election 2000 is that the press did not press into Bush family history and its unsavory connections and activities but instead largely focused on the day-to-day campaign activities and daily spins of the candidates, how they were faring in the polls, and the personalities of the candidates.

Bush's appeal was predicated on his being "just folks," a "good guy," like "you and me." Thus, his anti-intellectualism and lack of intellectual gravity, exhibited every time he opened his mouth and mangled the English language, helped promote voter identification. As a sometime Republican speechwriter Doug Gamble once mused, "Bush's shallow intellect perfectly reflects an

increasingly dumbed-down America. To many Americans Bush is 'just like us,' a Fox-TV President for a Fox-TV society."[52]

The media rarely challenged Bush who seemed to have not only charmed large sectors of the American public but was effective in schmoozing the media. Another survey released of press coverage after the conventions showed a decisive partiality for Bush. The Center for Media and Public Affairs (CMPA) study of television election news coverage before, during, and after the conventions (released on August 14) concluded, "Network evening news coverage of the GOP convention was more favorable toward George W. Bush, while Al Gore received mostly unfavorable TV references, according to a new study released by the CMPA." The study also found that "Bush has received more favorable coverage than Gore throughout the 2000 campaign, reversing a trend that favored Bill Clinton over his GOP opponents in 1992 and 1996."[53]

Surprisingly perhaps, Bush fared as well with the print media and establishment press as with television. Supporting the studies of pro-Bush bias, Charlie Peters reported in the *Washington Monthly* that according to the PEJ studies, the *New York Times* front page "carried nine anti-Gore articles and six anti-Bush; 12 pro-Gore and 21 pro-Bush."[54] Howard Kurtz, media critic of the *Washington Post,* reported: "Those who believe the media were easier on Bush will find some support in a new Project for Excellence in Journalism study. Examining television, newspaper, and Internet coverage from the last week in September through the third week in October, the report says Bush got nearly twice as many stories as Gore."[55] Moreover, only one in ten of the pieces analyzed the candidates' policy differences, with two-thirds focusing on the candidates' performance, strategy, or tactics. Twenty-four percent of the Bush stories were positive, compared to 13 percent for Gore, while the Bush stories focused more on issues than character or campaign strategy.

A German group, Media Tenor, also documented a persistent anti-Gore and pro-Bush bias in mainstream media presentation of the candidates.[56] Thus three different research projects found strong media bias in the election coverage. To be sure, such "positive" and "negative" scoring of images and discourses is difficult, debatable, and not always completely accurate, but I would argue that even more significant than alleged bias in news stories in the mainstream media is the preponderance of conservative punditry and, even more significant, the exclusion of widespread media documentation and discussion of key aspects of George W. Bush's life, record in business and government, and obvious lack of qualifications for the presidency.

In his 1992 book *Fooling America,* Robert Parry documented the pack journalism of the mainstream media in the 1980s and 1990s. Parry argued that the horde follows "conventional wisdom," recycling the dominant and predictable opinions, while failing to pursue stories or develop positions outside of or against the prevailing views of the day.[57] During Campaign 2000, journalists on the whole tended to accept the line of the Bush campaign concerning Gore's purported negatives, while promoting the Bush-camp view that Bush was a uniter, not a divider, a "compassionate conservative," and someone who pursued "bipartisan" politics in order "to get things done."

Clearly, media pundits tended to favor Bush over Gore. As Eric Alterman demonstrated in *Sound and Fury: The Making of the Punditocracy*, conservatives had trained a cadre of media commentators, well versed in the art of soundbite and staying on message, and there were many, many more conservatives than liberals on the airwaves.[58] The conservative punditocracy trashed

Gore daily, while Bush escaped critical scrutiny of his record in Texas, his limited experience, his problematic proposals, and his almost daily misstatements. The conservative pundits, however, aggressively promoted the Republican message of the day and served as ubiquitous shock troops for the Bush machine.

The bias in the mainstream media favoritism toward Bush not only came through in how the media presented and framed the two opposing candidates, but in how they failed to pursue George W. Bush's family history, scandalous business career, dubious record as governor, lack of qualifications for the presidency, and serious character flaws. None of the many newspaper, magazine, and television reports on the Bush and Gore family history mentioned the reports on the origins of the Bush dynasty fortune in a bank that financed German fascism or pursued the Bush family financial scandals that continued through Jeb, Neil, and George W. Bush.[59]

During the Battle for the White House a story appeared in the Saragosa *Herald-Tribune Coast News* entitled "Author Links Bush Family to Nazis" (Decenber 4, 2000), which claimed that Prescott Bush (George's father and W.'s grandfather) was a principle figure in the Union Banking Corporation in the late 1930s and 1940s. The article cited a lecture by John Loftus, a former prosecutor in the Justice Department's Nazi War Crimes Unit and author of a book with Mark Aarons entitled *The Secret War against the Jews.*[60] Loftus noted that Prescott Bush was a director of the Union Banking Corporation, which was secretly owned by leading Nazi industrialists and helped finance the Third Reich; when the bank was liquidated in 1951, the Bushes made $1.5 million from their investment.

A Lexis-Nexis search indicated that there were no references to the origins of the Bush family fortune in Union Banking Corporation that financed national socialism until an article by Michael Kranish, "Triumphs, Troubles shape generations," *Boston Globe* (April 23, 2001), including the following:

> Prescott Bush was surely aghast at a sensational article the New York *Herald Tribune* splashed on its front page in July 1942. "Hitler's Angel Has 3 Million in US Bank" read the headline above a story reporting that Adolf Hitler's financier had stowed the fortune in Union Banking Corp, possibly to be held for "Nazi bigwigs."
>
> Bush knew all about the New York bank: He was one of its seven directors. If the Nazi tie became known, it would be a potential "embarrassment," Bush and his partners at Brown Brothers Harriman worried, explaining to government regulators that their position was merely an unpaid courtesy for a client. The situation grew more serious when the government seized Union's assets under the Trading with the Enemy Act, the sort of action that could have ruined Bush's political dreams.
>
> As it turned out, his involvement wasn't pursued by the press or political opponents during his Senate campaigns a decade later.

Although the Loftus and Aaron's study provided a well-documented exploration of connections between a major Nazi bank and the Bush dynasty, this episode was never explored by

the U.S. corporate media. Neglect of the unsavory origins of the Bush family fortune and later financial scandals of the Bush family is one of the major journalistic and academic outrages in U.S. history. Indeed, most books and articles on the Bushes are whitewashes that repeat the same myths, and there has been little investigative study of the family by the U.S. media, political, and academic establishment.

There was also no probing of the Bush family involvement during Election 2000 in the savings and loan (S&L) scandal, arguably one of the biggest financial debacles in U.S. history, costing U.S. taxpayers over half a trillion dollars to bail out the failed S&L institutions which had gone on a spending orgy after deregulation in the early 1980s. George H. W. Bush and James Baker were instrumental in the deregulation of the industry during the Reagan administration, and their families and friends had bought up and looted S&Ls, including the Silverado S&L scandal involving Neil Bush.[61]

Moreover, the political scandals that Bush senior had been involved in were not explored by the corporate media in the 2000 election, such as the Iran-Contra scandal, the U.S. arming of Saddam Hussein, or the misdeeds of the CIA under Bush's directorship.[62] In addition, there was almost no reporting on George W. Bush's personal or financial history, which included reports of using favoritism to get out of military service and then going AWOL, failing to complete his military reserve service. There was little discussion of his checkered business career, including allegations that his father's friends bailed out his failing oil industry and that he then unloaded his own stock in the Harken energy company that had bailed him out, selling before revelations of a bad financial report and failing to report the sale to the Securities and Exchange Commission, giving rise to charges of "insider trading." Bush's poor record as Texas governor was also not probed, nor were his personal failings and inexperience that should have disqualified him from serving as president.[63]

Books, articles, and easily accessible Internet sites document the entire scandalous history of George W. Bush and his dubious dynasty. Yet the lazy and arguably corrupt functionaries of the mainstream corporate media failed to probe this rich mine of headlines and stories — whereas there were few embarrassments or negative aspects of Al Gore's past that were not mined and endlessly discussed on talk radio and among conservative television punditry. Likewise, there were few in-depth discussions of the record of Bush's vice-presidential choice Dick Cheney, the major role he would play in a Bush White House, and his precarious health. Cheney had one of most hard-right voting records in Congress and was heavily involved in the oil industry as CEO of Halliburton industries, one of the worst polluters and most ruthless corporations in an industry known for its hardball Robber Barons.[64]

Bush thus benefited significantly from media coverage of Election 2000; major studies and indicators suggest that the media were heavily prejudiced in his favor, and I have argued that Bush also was assisted by the domination of conservative punditry and the failure to investigate adequately his history, record and qualifications, the scandals that his family has been involved in, and the record of his running mate Dick Cheney, one of the most hard-right political operatives of the present era. There had been little investigative reporting on Bush and a preponderance of favorable stories for Bush and unfavorable ones for Gore, as evidenced in the CMPA, PEJ, and Media Tenor studies cited above. Likewise, television pundits seemed to favor Bush over Gore. Media critic David Corn noted that commentators such as John McLaughlin, Mary Matalin, Peggy Noonan, and many of the Sunday network talk-show hosts prophesized a sizable Bush victory and

tended to favor the Texas governor.[65]

Yet the election was the closest in history, and election night and the aftermath comprised one of the most enthralling and gripping media spectacles in recent history. Despite the drama of the election, however, there was little self-criticism of the role of the media in Election 2000, and with the September 11 terror attacks discussion of electoral problems was off the agenda. While there were efforts to reform election finances and voting technology, there were no significant reforms of the U.S. electoral system that appeared to be dysfunctional in Election 2000 with arguable malfunctioning of the media, voter technology, and the democratic system itself.[66] Discussion of electoral college reform disappeared, and no commissions studied the full array of flaws in the U.S. voting system that made possible the scandals of Election 2000. Thus U.S. democracy remains in crisis, and there will probably be no significant reform until a critical mass of people see the flaws of the U.S. system and demand democratic reform.

The Internet and the Prospects for Democratic Media

The only way that a democratic social order can be maintained is for the mainstream media to assume their democratic functions of critically discussing all issues of public concern and social problems from a variety of viewpoints and fostering vigorous public debate. The democratic imperative that the press and broadcasting provide a variety of views on issues of public interest and controversy has been increasingly sacrificed, as has their responsibilities to serve as a check against excessive government or corporate power and corruption. As I have documented, there is a crisis of democracy in the U.S. in part because the mainstream corporate media have been biased toward Republicans and conservatives over the past two decades. While the media should play critical watchdog roles on both parties, they have arguably been fiercely critical of Clinton, Gore, and major Democratic party candidates, while giving Reagan and Bush senior and junior a relatively easy ride. Mainstream corporate media tend to promote the interests of the corporations that own them, which tend to be pro-market and anti-regulation, and have largely advanced the interests of corporate institutions and conservative politics.

To remedy this situation, first there must be a revitalization of the media reform movement, recognition of the importance of media politics in the struggle for democratization and the creation of a just society, and support and development of alternative media.[67] Democratizing the media system will require development of a vigorous reform movement and recognition for all progressive social movements of the importance of invigorating the media system for forward looking social change and for addressing urgent social problems and issues. This process will involve sustained critique of the corporate media, calls for re-regulation, and the revitalization of public television, cultivation of community and public radio, improved public access television, an expansion of investigative and public service journalism, and full democratic utilization of the Internet. Since corporations control the mainstream press, broadcasting, and other major institutions of culture and communication, there is little hope that the corporate media will be democratized without major pressure or increased government regulation of a sort that is not on the horizon in the present moment in most parts of the world.

The Internet, by contrast, provides potential for a democratic revitalization of the public sphere. The Internet makes accessible more information available to a greater number of people,

more easily, and from a wider array of sources than any instrument of information and communication in history. It is constantly astonishing to discover the extensive array of material available, articulating every conceivable point of view and providing news, opinion, and sources of a striking variety and diversity. Moreover, the Internet allows two-way communication and democratic participation in public dialogue, activity that is essential to producing a vital democracy.

One of the major contradictions of the current era is that for the wired world at least, and increasingly the public at large, a rich and diverse information environment is expanding, consisting of a broad spectrum of radio and television broadcasting networks; print media and publications; and the global village of the Internet, which itself contains the most varied and extensive sources of information and entertainment ever assembled in a single medium. The Internet can send disparate types and sources of information and images instantly throughout the world and is increasingly being used by a variety of oppositional groups.[68] Yet it is also true that thanks to media mergers of the past decade, fewer hands control the dominant media broadcasting and print outlets, which can be utilized by powerful corporate and political interests for specific partisan ends, as I document in this study. To be sure, much of the world is not yet wired, many people do not even read, and different inhabitants in various parts of the globe receive their information and culture in very dissimilar ways through varying sources, media, and forms. Thus, the type and quality of information vary tremendously, depending on an individual's access and ability to interpret and contextualize it properly.

Democracy, however, requires informed citizens and access to information, and thus the viability of democracy is dependent on citizens seeking out crucial information, having the ability to access and appraise it, and to engage in public conversations about issues of importance. Democratic media reform and alternative media are thus crucial to revitalizing and even preserving the democratic project in the face of powerful corporate and political forces. How media can be democratized and what alternative media can be developed will of course be different in various parts of the world, but without a democratic media politics and alternative media democracy itself cannot survive in a vigorous form, nor will a wide range of social problems be engaged or even addressed.

Notes

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[1] The conception of democracy that I am drawing upon here has been developed in Douglas Kellner, *Television and the Crisis of Democracy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990); and Douglas Kellner, *Grand Theft 2000* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001). In this study, I focus on the role of the media of democracy and how corporate media have undermined democracy in the past decades.

[2] Michael Tracey, *Decline and Fall of Public Service Broadcasting* (Oxford, UK and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

3. See the discussion of the media and democracy in Kellner, *Television and the Crisis of Democracy*, Chapters 2 and 3; on the Federal Communications Act of 1934 and the battle for democratic media in the 1930s, see Robert McChesney, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy* (New York: The New Press, 2000). For an excellent history and overview of media and politics in the United States, see David Halberstam, *The Powers That Be* (New York: Knopf., 1979).

4. On media consolidation and its impact over the past two decades, see Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media.* (New York: Pantheon, 1988); Ben Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly*, 6th ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997); Herbert Schiller, *Culture, Inc.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Kellner, *Television and the Crisis of Democracy*; and Robert McChesney, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*.

[5] My case studies draw on books I have written on the Gulf War, the 2000 U.S. presidential election, the September 11 terror attacks and subsequent Terror War, and the expansion of media spectacle into the realms of the economy, polity, and everyday life. See, Douglas Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992); Kellner, *Grand Theft 2000*; Douglas Kellner, *September 11 and Terror War: The Dangers of the Bush Legacy* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003); Douglas Kellner, *Media Spectacle* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003).

[6] Jurgen Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1989).

[7] Max Horkheimer and T.W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Seabury, 1989), 206.

[8] Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 171.

[9] On the influence of Habermas's concept of the public sphere, see the studies in Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992); and Douglas Kellner, "Habermas, the Public Sphere, and Democracy: A Critical Intervention," in *Perspectives on Habermas*, ed. Lewis Hahn (Chicago: Open Court Press, 2000).

[10] On new public spheres and technopolitics, see Douglas Kellner, "Globalization From Below? Toward a Radical Democratic Technopolitics," *Angelaki* 4:2 (1999): 101-113; Steven Best and

Douglas Kellner, *The Postmodern Adventure. Science Technology, and Cultural Studies at the Third Millennium* (New York and London: Guilford and Routledge, 2001); and Kahn and Kellner, (2003) "Internet Subcultures and Oppositional Politics," The Post-Subcultures Reader. London: Berg Publishers.

11. See Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; and the studies of the structure and impact of contemporary culture industry in Robert McChesney, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy;* and Best and Kellner, *The Postmodern Adventure.*

[12] Kellner, *Media Spectacle*.

[13] Ramonet, Ignacio (2002) "A less free press." Le Monde diplomatique (December; www.mondediplo.com/200212/01/press).

[14] See the charts on media mergers and concentration in David Croteau and Williams Hoynes, *The Business of Media. Corporate Media and the Public Interest* (Thousand Oaks, Cal: Pine Forge Press, 2001),

75ff. and in Mark Crispin Miller's, "What's Wrong with This Picture?" *The Nation,* 7 January 2002.

[15] Paul Starr, "The Great Telecom Implosion," *The American Prospect*, 9 September 2002, 20-24.

16. A survey by a Ralph Nader-affiliated public interest group, Essential Information, carried out a study that indicated that in comparison with 1979, programming in 1988 carried 39% less local public affairs programming, while 15% of all stations carried no news at all; program-length commercials, prohibited until the 1980s, constituted about 2.6% of airtime. See Jim Donahue, "Shortchanging the Viewer." Washington, D.C.: Essential Information. There was also a demonstrable decline of documentaries produced by the television networks from the 1980s to the present. Whereas each network broadcast around twenty documentaries a year during the 1960s, by 1985 all three networks together were broadcasting a mere fourteen hours worth. Instead, news magazines such as ABC's *20/20* and CBS's *West 57th Street* and then *60 Minutes Two* appeared, which imitated CBS's popular *60 Minutes*, a trend that has accelerated in the 2000s. While some episodes of these programs contain fine examples of investigative journalism, exposing corporate and political abuses, much of the news magazines tend toward entertainment, focusing on personalities and sensational stories.

[17] Kellner, *Media Spectacle*.

[18] Kellner, *Television and the Crisis of Democracy*.

19. See the reports from *Extra!,* "White Noise. Voices of Color Scarce on Urban Public Radio" and "No Community Voices Wanted," Sept.-Oct. 2002. William Safire cites a Gannett report that indicates that in 1996 while the largest two radio chains owned 115 stations, by 2003 they owned more than 1,400; a handful of radio company owners used to generate only one-fifth of industry revenue, while today the top five take in 55% of all money spent on local radio and the number of station owners has plummeted by a third. See Safire, "On Media Giantism," *The New York Times*, 20 January 2003. Moreover, Clear Channel communications, which dominates radio, is relentlessly conservative, strongly supporting George W. Bush, organizing pro-war concerts during the intense debates over Bush's Iraq policy, and attacking and blackballing performers like the Dixie Chicks

who criticized Bush's policies.
[20] Kellner, *Television and the Crisis of Democracy*.
[21] For a detailed study of the effects of deregulation on media culture in the 1990s, see McChesney, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*.
[22] See Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*; Kellner, *September 11 and Terror War: The Dangers of the Bush Legacy*.
[23] Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*.
[24] Kellner, *September 11 and the Terror War: The Dangers of the Bush Legacy*.
25. A 1989 study of ABC's nightly talk show, *Nightline,* hosted by Ted Koppel, for example, indicates that over a six month period Koppel's guests were almost always white, male, conservative spokespeople with Henry Kissinger, Alexander Haig Jerry Falwell, and Elliot Abrams the most frequent guests. Another FAIR study of Public Television's *The MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour* showed that it was even more conservative in its biases, and a 1991 FAIR study of the Persian Gulf war coverage indicated that almost no anti-war spokespeople turned up on network news and discussion programming dedicated to the war. A 2002 study carried out by a German-based media analysis firm Media Tenor and published in FAIR's *Extra!* indicated that the three major U.S. network news operations at ABC, CBS, and NBC used news sources that were 92% white, 85% male, and, where party affiliation was identifiable 75% were Republican. Big business had 35 times more representatives than labor, Latinos, Asian-Americans, and Arab-Americans were almost invisible; "experts" came from primarily elite institutions and rarely non-governmental organizations, and the established political party and executive branch were strongly favored. See FAIR, *Expose of Nightline* (New York, 1989); FAIR, Press Release on *Nightline* and *MacNeil-Lehrer* Coverage, New York, 1990; and Press Release on Gulf War Coverage, New York, 1991; and *Extra!* "Power Sources: On party, gender, race and class, TV news looks to the most powerful groups," May-June 2002. For comprehensive documentation of rightwing domination of mainstream media punditry see Eric Alterman, *Sound and Fury. The Making of the Punditocracy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999); and Eric Alterman, *What Liberal Media? The Truth About BIAS and the News* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).
[26] Michael Parenti, *Inventing Reality* (New York: Saint Martin's, 1986); Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media;* Hertsgaard, *On Bended Knee*.
[27] Kellner, *Television and the Crisis of Democracy*.
[28] Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*.
[29] Ibid.
[30] See Ramsey Clark, et. al. *The Fire This Time. U.S. War Crimes in the Gulf* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1992); Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*.
[31] See Seymour Hersh, *Against All Enemies. Gulf War Syndrome: The War between America's Ailing Veterans and Their Government* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998).
[32] Kellner, *Media Spectacle*.
[33] Kellner, *September 11 and Terror War: The Dangers of the Bush Legacy*.
[34] Kellner, *Grand Theft 2000;* Kellner, *September 11 and Terror War: The Dangers of the Bush Legacy;* Alterman, *What Liberal Media? The Truth About BIAS and the News*.

[35] Alterman, "Al Gore, democrat," *The Nation*, 21 October 2002. Alterman repeats this analysis in *What Liberal Media? The Truth About BIAS and the News* and writes a whole chapter documenting mainstream media hatred toward Gore and complicity toward Bush (pp. 148-174). His book systematically devastates the myth of the "liberal media," savaging books that make this claim and providing extensive documentation of its nullity.

[36] The following analysis draws on *Grand Theft 2000* which provides more detailed notes and sources, as well as studies that came out following publication of my book.

[37] I made this argument in *Grand Theft 2000* and it has been confirmed in other studies of Election 2000. Ceaser and Busch write: "Everything turned around for George W. Bush during the period of the debates… it was the cumulative effect of the three debates themselves that carried him past the vice president." See, James W. Ceaser and Andrew E. Busch, *The Perfect Tie* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), 148-150. My argument is that it was the framing of the debate by the media that was decisive; see a similar analysis in Alterman's, *What Liberal Media? The Truth About BIAS and the News,* pp. 160ff, who provides further examples of how the media framed the debates in ways positive toward Bush and negatively toward Gore.

[38] See the analysis of "Twenty-Five Bush Flubs in the Second Debate" and "Fifteen [Bush] Flubs in the Third Debate" at http://www.tompaine.com/news/2000/10/20/index.html. Republican pundits, however, obsessively pursued the theme that Gore was a liar. In the 11 October 2000 *Wall Street Journal*, the grossly over inflated Republican ideologue William Bennett wrote: "Albert Arnold Gore Jr. is a habitual liar. . . . The vice president lies reflexively, promiscuously, even pathologically." In fact, the alleged lies that Gore "promiscuously" promulgated were largely Republican propaganda; see the devastating critique in Alterman, *What Liberal Media? The Truth About BIAS and the*, 159ff.

[39] A note on polls: The majority of the mainstream media polls on the eve of the election put Bush in the lead, sometimes as much as by 10 points during the final days of the election campaign (although the Zogby/Reuters and CBS News polls put Gore slightly ahead in the popular vote). Joan Didion reports, by contrast, that seven major academic pollsters presenting their data at the September 2000 American Political Science Association convention all predicted a big Gore victory, ranging from 60.3 percent to 52 percent of the vote. See Didion, "In God's Country," *The New York Review of Books,* 2 November 2000. Academic pollsters tend to use rational-choice models and base their results on economic indicators and in-depth interviews; they seem, however, to downplay moral values, issues of character, the role of media spectacle, and the fluctuating events of the election campaigns. Indeed, the academic pollsters argue that the electorate is basically fixed one or two months before the election. Arguably, however, U.S. politics is more volatile and unpredictable and swayed by the contingencies of media spectacle, as Election 2000 and its aftermath dramatically demonstrate. Robert G. Kaiser's "Experts Offer Mea Culpas for Predicting Gore Win," *The Washington Post,* 9 February 2001, presents interviews with major political scientists who had predicted a strong win for Gore based on their mathematical models and data collected months before election day, seeing Gore winning from 52.8 to 60.3 percent of the national votes. One professor admitted that the "election outcome left a bit of egg on the faces of the academic forecasters," whereas others blamed a poor Gore

campaign, "Clinton fatigue," and an unexpectedly strong showing by Ralph Nader. One defiant forecaster said that the election was simply weird, "on the fringe of our known world, a stochastic [random] shock."

[40] Summarizing research that documented the prevalence of horse race reporting and poll standing in the election, Owen (2002: 127f) notes that "CMPA [Center for Media and Public Affairs] data indicated that 71 percent of network news stories focused on the horse race, compared to 48 percent in 1996 and 58 percent in 1992"; Project for Excellence in Journalism "found that stories in print on TV, and on the web about the debates were more about performance (53%) than substance. Fewer than 10 percent of debate stories focused on issues, and few compared the policy positions of the candidates"; Diana Owen, "Media Mayhem" Performance of the Press in Election 2000," in Sabato 2002: 123-157. Stephen Hess, senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, "revealed that two-thirds of the networks general election stories were supported by polls, a figure that increased as the campaign got down to the wire." Owens concluded that: "The dominant news frame became the close election" (p. 127).

[41] On political ads, see Dana Milbank, *Smashmouth* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 359ff; and the study of television advertising by the Alliance for Better Campaigns, in Danny Schechter, *Mediocracy 2000—Hail to the Thief: How the Media Stole the U.S. Presidential Election* (Electronic book available at www.mediachannel.org, 2001), 77–92. In an illuminating study of ads in Election 2000, Lynda Lee Kaid argues that Bush's TV ads established eye contact with viewers in 26 percent of his spots compared to only 6 percent for Gore. Bush was three times more likely than Gore to be shown with a smiling expression; and Bush was shown in close-up or tight shots in 41 percent of his ads compared to 24 percent for Gore, thus using video imagery to sell Bush's "personality" to voters. See Kaid, "Videostyle and Technological Distortions in the 2000 Political Spots," *International Communications Association Convention*, Washington, D.C., May 2001.

[42] See the following books on Bush's record: Molly Ivins and Lou Dubose, *Shrub: The Short but Happy Political Life of George W. Bush* (New York: Random House, 2000); Elizabeth Mitchell, Revenge of the Bush Dynasty (new York: Hyperion, 2000); Paul Begala, *Is Our Children Learning? The Case against George W. Bush* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000); James Hatfield, *Fortunate Son: George W. Bush and the Making of An American President* (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2001); and Mark Crispin Miller, *The Bush Dyslexicon* (New York: Norton, 2001).

[43] See Warren Sussman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon, 1984); and Neil Gabler, *Life the Movie: How Entertainment Conquered Reality* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), p. 197.

[44] For an excellent analysis of the qualifications of Gore to be president and lack of substantial achievements and qualifications of Bush, see Alterman, *What Liberal Media? The Truth About BIAS and the News*, pp. 148ff.

[45] See, Kellner, Grand Theft 2000; Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Paul Waldman, *The Press Effect: Politicians, Journalists, and the Stories that Shape the Political World* (New York: Oxford, 2003); and Alterman, *What Liberal Media? The Truth About BIAS and the News*.

[46] On Bush's DWI incident and how his campaign and the Gore camp dealt with it, see Timothy J. Burger, "In the Driver's Seat: The Bush DUI," in Larry A. Sabato, ed., *Overtime! The Election 2000 Thriller* (New York: Longman, 2002), pp. 69-93.

[47] Rightwing ideologue Rush Limbaugh emerged as "the highest paid info-broadcaster in history," clocking in with $30 million this year, more than the network anchors combined (http://www.drudgereport.com/rr.htm). It was later admitted that Limbaugh was losing his hearing during the election period, providing a revealing image of an aggressive conservativism that feigned dialogue but really wasn't hearing anything except its own ideological voice. During summer 2003, it came out that Limbaugh's hearing loss could have been a result of overdose of a dangerous painkiller OxyContin and it was also revealed that he was addicted to pain pills, had associates illegally procure massive amounts of the drug, voluntarily entered a rehabilitation center, and faced criminal charges for his illegal drug activities. See the Newsweek cover story "'I Am Addicated to Prescription Pain Medication'" (October 20, 2003).

[48] For the PEJ report, see http://www.journalism.org/publ. research/campaign1.html. For a good overview of the PEJ findings and critique of mainstream media news coverage of the election, see Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, "Campaign Lite: Why Reporters Won't Tell Us What We Need to Know," *Washington Monthly,* January–February 2001.

[49] In *The Press Effect*, Jamieson and Waldman document in detail the negative framing of Gore, but assume that the media are largely skeptical and critical of presidential candidates and stress the negative media representations of Bush as not intellectually up to the job, claiming that the dominant frames were Pinocchio vs. Dumbo, Gore as lying panderer and Bush as inexperienced dolt. This analysis overlooks the documentation that I am stressing here which indicates that Bush got many more positive representations than Gore and that therefore the media largely followed the Bush campaign in presenting their positive image of Bush as "compassionate conservative," while replicating the Bushites' negative image of Gore as liar and not to be trusted. See Jamieson and Waldman, *The Press Effect*, 42.

[50] For convincing demolitions of the allegation that Gore claimed to "invent" the Internet, see "The Red Herring Interview: E-Gore" *Red Herring,* October 30, 2000. A story in *Wired* falsely reported that Gore asserted that he "invented" the Internet, whereas in fact he had simply stated that "I took the initiative in Congress" to help "create" the Internet, a completely accurate statement that key members of the high-tech community involved in producing the Internet confirmed. The Republicans continued to spread the false smear about Gore, including George W. Bush who baited Gore in a debate with the lie and repeated it constantly in his stump speech. This is an example of Republican use of the "Big Lie" technique, where a falsehood is stated over and over as if it were a truth, which would come to characterize "Bushspeak" during the Battle for the White House and Bush presidency. See Kellner, *Grand Theft 2000*, chapter 9.

[51] John Loftus and Mark Aarons, *The Secret War Against the Jews* (New York: Saint Martin's, 1994).

[52] Doug Gamble, cited in Martin A. Lee, www.sfbg.com/reality/ 12.html. See also Jake Tapper's discussion of Bush's "Dumb Chic," *Salon*, 2 November 2000, and Miller's probing analysis in *The Bush Dyslexicon*. *New York Times* correspondent Frank Bruni's history of Bush and the

2000 election, by contrast, puts on display how Bush seduced the press. While Bruni complains about Bush's superficiality and the shallowness of political campaigns in the media age, his book exhibits the shallowness of the press and political correspondents. See Frank Bruni, *Ambling into History* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002).

[53] Cited on www.cmpa.com/pressrel/electpr2.htm. The Center for Media and Public Affairs (CMPA) is run by Robert Lichter, who has generally been perceived as a conservative critic of the media's liberal bias (although he claims to be a neutral social scientist), so it is interesting that his organization found a bias in favor of Bush. Later CMPA findings indicate that Gore's positive network news coverage went up sharply after the Democratic convention, as did Gore's ratings (Sept. 5, 2000). But a study released by CMPA on October 18 indicated that "network news coverage of Al Gore turned sharply negative after the first presidential debate." It appears that CMPA's positive/negative network news codings of the candidates correlate remarkably with the candidates' rise and fall in the polls, although since polls themselves came under dramatic attack in the election, it is obviously not clear what exact impact positive and negative presentations of candidates on television news and in print have on voters. See also the discussion of positive/negative coding and the work of the German group Media Tenor in Markus Rettich, "Into the White House through the Television Screen," in *Mediocracy 2000—Hail to the Thief: How the Media Stole the U.S. Presidential Election*, ed. Danny Schechter (Electronic book available at www.mediachannel.org, 2001), 100–102.

[54] Charlie Peters, "Tilting at Windmills," *Washington Monthly,* November 2000 at http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/tailting/2000/0011.tilting.html.

[55] Howard Kurtz, "Ready, Aim, Blame You Know Who," *Washington Post*, November 6, 2000, p. C01.

[56] See the summary in Schechter, *Mediocracy 2000—Hail to the Thief*, 100f. and the Web site www.medien-tenor.de/english/

[57] Robert Parry, *Fooling America: How Washington Insiders Twist the Truth and Manufacture the Conventional Wisdom* (New York: Morrow, 1992).

[58] Alterman, *Sound and Fury.*

[59] In addition to the Loftus and Aarons' book cited above, Prescott Bush and Herbert Walker's involvement in the Union National Bank had earlier been documented in a biography of George H. W. Bush (Tarpley and Chaitkin 1992, 26–44), although, unfortunately, the authors were disciples of Lyndon LeRouche and their often solid and damning scholarship was undermined by LaRouchite conspiracy theories. See Webster Griffin Tarpley and Anton Chaitkin, *George Bush. The Unauthorized Biography* (Washington, D.C.: Executive Intelligence Review, 1992).

On other Bush family scandals and history, ignored by the mainstream media, see the books listed in Note 37 above.

[60] John Loftus and Mark Aarons, *The Secret War against the Jews* (New York: Saint Martin's Griffin, 1994).

[61] Pete Brewton, *The Mafia, CIA & George Bush* (New York: SPI Books, 1992).

[62] See Kellner, *Television and the Crisis of Democracy*; Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*; Parry, *Fooling America.*

[63] On books that probe George W. Bush's history and record, see Ivins and Dubose, *Shrub,* Mitchell, Revenge of the Bush Dynasty; Begala, *Is Our Children Learning?*; Hatfield, *Fortunate Son*; and Miller, *The Bush Dyslexicon*. See also the Web-sites note in the note below.

[64] Web-sites that document the history of Bush family scandals and George W. Bush's history include www.moldea.com; www.bushwatch.com; http:/prorev.com/bush3.htm; and www.gwbush.com/. For a useful overview of Cheney's health, history, voting record and hardright credentials, see Begala, *Is Our Children Learning? The Case against George W. Bush*, 126–36.

[65] See David Corn's column collected at tompaine.com/news/2000/11/24.

[66] See Kellner, *Grand Theft 2000.*

[67] For more detailed proposals for democratizing the media and producing alternative media and politics, see Kellner, *Television and the Crisis of Democracy* and "Globalization From Below? Toward a Radical Democratic Technopolitics"; Robert McChesney, *Corporate Media and the Threat to Democracy* (New York: Seven
Stories Press, 1997) and *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*; Best and Kellner, *The Postmodern Adventure*; and Jeffrey Chester and Gary O. Larson, "A 12-Step Program for Media Democracy," *The Nation*, 23 July 2002.

[68] See Kellner, "Globalization From Below? Toward a Radical Democratic Technopolitics,"; Best and Kellner, *The Postmodern Adventure.*