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## The Mass Media and Democracy

Between the Modern and the Postmodern

James W. Carey

John Chancellor was upset. Impeccably groomed and spoken, this visual icon of virtually the entire history of television journalism could hardly contain his distress. Beneath his characteristically genial manner, his anger showed, as he lectured at Columbia University's Du Pont Forum on what went wrong in the 1992 U.S. presidential election.<sup>1</sup> The catalog took more than 30 minutes: The election was the worst in history, worse even than the monumentally smarmy campaign of 1988; one no longer needed to belong to a political party to run for president; talk-show hosts displaced journalists; the public filled the air with silly questions on ersatz television debates and call-in radio programs; e-mail, "800-numbers," computer bulletin boards, private satellite hook-ups and electronic mail had conspired with talk-show hosts Seno Hall and Rush Limbaugh, and interviewers Larry King and Tabitha Soren to evacuate the role of journalism from presidential politics. In sum, Chancellor asserted that network journalism had declined, and the new news of endlessly chattering e-mail messages cluttered the electronic highway with trivia.

All good stories have a villain at the center, and this one was no exception: It had Ross Perot. Perot's electronic campaign circumvented party organization, presidential primaries and a national convention, as volunteers placed him on the ballot in state after state. Perot ignored local newspapers, radio and television news, in effect, told the national press that he could win without them -- or by running against them. Perot demonstrated it was possible to run with one's own money and avoid restrictions on

John Chancellor, "Seeing the Future," Keynote Speech, Alfred I. Du Pont-Columbia University Forum, 28 January 1993 (New York: Graduate School of Journalism, Columbia University, 1993).

unds.<sup>2</sup> He laid down new rules for presidential ecifics; stay away from journalists; hold as few as possible; stay away from the serious interest and cultivate electronic populism by exploiting , after all, needs Sam Donaldson? Worse yet, hancellor?

t of all mourned — and who can blame him — e and that of journalists like him. In his view, ft to challenge the candidates, to hold their feet ility of campaigning was in decline because rect access to the public through media that eat nor intimidation. All this gave rise to the eneration of journalists who had been affected orld War: The new media had greased the n politics for demagogues and demagoguery. ountered the vampire of postmodern politics :without a crucifix.

ives to remind the reader that the following he mass media and democracy — which are d — occurs at a particularly opaque historical g is afoot in modern societies that seems pecu- decline of certain media that have defined the nications and democracy since at least the end ld War. The media have changed decisively in th as technologies and institutions. Yet democ- also; the ends of political life have been recon- ars. There is a widespread demand for less *pro* resentation, whether by the press or elected ore real participation.

es only signal that the meanings of democracy on are historically variable. The meaning of as over time because forms of communication duct politics change. The meaning of commu- ges over time depending on the central im- irations of democratic politics. Neither

communication nor democracy is a transcendent concept; they do not exist outside history. The meaning of these terms varies with available media and with whatever concrete notions of democracy happen to be popular at any particular time.

The journalistic side of the twentieth century can be defined as the struggle for democracy and an independent media against propaganda and subservience to the state. That struggle culminated during the first half of this century in the seizure of the means of communication by the demagogues of the 1930s and 1940s — Adolf Hitler and Josef Stalin — and their Cold War incarnation of the 1950s, Joseph McCarthy — the ghost that still haunts U.S. journalism.<sup>3</sup>

While this struggle was imprinted upon the generation of the time, the fear of demagoguery seemed a curious hangover of a forgotten age for those in the post-McCarthy generations. Similarly, the quest for so-called objectivity seemed to a younger generation a curious absence of passion and commitment: a deliberate sitting out of history.

This historical, generational divide is what the hyperbolic phrase in the title “between the modern and the postmodern” is designed to catch. For John Chancellor was right — if only by implication — about one thing: A medium implies and constitutes a way of life. Whatever democracy as a way of life may be, it is constituted by particular media of communication and institutional arrangements through which politics is conducted, whether speech in the agora, the colonial newspaper and the pamphlet in the taverns of Philadelphia, the omnibus daily in the commercial city or the television network in an industrialized nation. Similarly, a medium of communication is defined by the democratic aspirations of those involved in politics: a conversation among equals, the organ of a political ideology, a watchdog on the state, an instrument of dialogue on public issues, a device for transmitting information or an arena for the struggle of interest groups. Modern journalism began around 1890 with the advent of

did not take federal matching funds, he was exempt from the filing requirements that bound other candidates.

3. See Edwin F. Bayley, *Joe McCarthy and the Press* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1981).

of communication and has had a pretty long w seems to be about up. Yet, there was democracy journalism; and there will be democracy after it, and dangerous transitions to be negotiated. The low contrast two historically specific forms of the w between journalism and democracy: journalism in a d journalism in a *national society*. The first form original understanding of the press and the First the United States.<sup>5</sup> The second form, in which the e as a watchdog on the state, has been typical of id that now seems to be coming to an end. These important because it appears that the struggle e public life through new forms of communica- e television and talk radio are heavily inspired by racy and public life from the colonial and early s. This article then discusses the potential for democracy in the years ahead.

ussion focuses primarily on U.S. experience. an be instructive in a more international context ons. New forms of communication rarely meet : United States: They are allowed to diffuse rap- ite deeply into the social fabric. Developments in s frequently foreshadow, though they never du- : that will occur in other countries. Second, the communication, and the creation of transnational markets — which are features of the contempo- ave introduced similar problematic elements into of all democracies, not just the United States. The ywhere be part of the apparatus by which the f the governors to the governed is achieved. Yet, ning of democracy and communication varies aries across nations as well. Thus, ultimately, the accountability and the role of the press in each examined on a country-by-country basis.

nationalism refers to both print and broadcast journalism.

print and broadcast news media, both of which are covered, though ifferent ways, under the "freedom of press" clause of the First

## EVOLUTION OF THE PUBLIC

The original understanding of journalism, politics and democ- racy in the United States emerged in the public houses and tav- erns of the colonial era. Pubs were presided over by publicans who were often publishers. Publicans picked up information from conversations in the pub and from travellers who often recorded what they had seen and heard on their journeys in log books stationed at the end of the bar. Publishers then recorded such conversation and gossip and printed it, in order that it might be preserved and circulated. They also printed speeches, orations, sermons, offers of goods for sale and political opinions of those who gathered in public places, largely merchants and traders. Newspapers, which were circulated in public houses, animated conversation and discussion. Consequently, journalism — re- flected speech — was the ongoing flow of conversation, not in the halls of the legislatures, but in the public houses.

This context provides the original understanding of the *public*: a group of merchants, traders, citizens and political activists — often strangers — who gathered to discuss the news. Describing Philadelphia on the eve of the Revolutionary War, Sam Bass Warner observed that

gossip in the taverns provided Philadelphia's basic cells of com- munity life...Every ward of the city had its inns and taverns and the London Coffee House served as central communication node of the entire city....Out of the meetings at the neighborhood tavern came much of the commonplace community develop- ment...essential to the governance of the city...and made it possi- ble...to form effective committees of correspondence.<sup>6</sup>

6. Sam Bass Warner, *Private City: Philadelphia in Three Stages of Its Growth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968) pp. 19-20; Alvin Couldner, *The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976) pp. 95-6. Lest we be swept away by romanticism, it should be noted how tragically flawed the original idea of the public was, and it was this flaw that had something to do with the decline of the public sphere. It was a public, effectively restricted by race, class and gender; that is, the public consisted of middle-class men who had an interest and stake in public affairs, commerce, business or trade. Later, when public space began to fill with workers and artisans of another class, these merchants retreated into private spaces and the men's clubs that are still a feature of large cities. But these fatal imperfections do not diminish the historical importance of the public, as it was then defined, or the power of the concept to illuminate politics.

United States, the public is an abstraction and a form. "The public's right to know" is the worn journalism. The press justifies itself in the name of press exists to inform it, to serve as its extended to represent and protect its interest. All privileges of the press, such as freedom of information, right to keep news sources confidential, are in the name of the public.

Eighteenth-century public, which inspired democratic press, has a humble origin. It was brought into existence by the printing press of the eighteenth-century city and the printing concrete social group who gathered in public to read the news together, dispute the meaning of the news, and to take political action. The public is a social form by the news and, in turn, the news is a form of the public. The public formed by the news was sufficiently developed so that strangers were drawn into contact with one another. Technology of newspapers and pamphlets, which provided a focus for discussion and conversation. The public is a society of conversationalists — or disputants. It came during the modern period, a fiction or an era when a group of people sitting at home watching television and invisibly reading newspapers. Nor is it a public opinion poll.

The public, in turn, depended on public habits, manners, and customs as the ability to welcome strangers, to avoid a public mask and to shun the personal. As the public was taken to be both critical and rational. It was not that nothing in public was taken for granted; the speaker was responsible for giving reasons for any assertion; and there was no intrinsic appeal to the public was, thus, more than a group of people in a public square. It was a seat of political power, located in the state and the private sector. It was the only power could wear the face of rationality, for it was where private interest might be transcended. The factor in the relationship between the public and the press is that journalism was not an end in itself, but was

justified in terms of its ability to serve and bring into existence an actual social arrangement, a particular form of democracy as discourse in a sphere of independent, rational, political influence. While freedom of the press was valued as an individual right, the importance of the press was predicated on the unspoken premise of the existence of the public, and not the reverse.

#### THE PUBLIC AND THE MEANING OF THE FIRST AMENDMENT

Today, the First Amendment is often viewed as a loose collection of clauses on the freedoms of religion, assembly, speech and the press. Typically, U.S. citizens array the separate rights contained in each clause and the legal cases that fall under them. Today, the modern slogan "freedom of the press" belongs to those who own the presses or to journalists and the organizations for which they work. When read against the background of public life, however, the First Amendment is not a casual and loose collection of separate clauses or high-minded principles. It does not deed freedom of the press as a property right to journalists or any particular group. The First Amendment is simply a compact description of public life as it existed at the time the Founding Fathers developed the U.S. Constitution, and as they hoped it would continue to exist.

The First Amendment says that people are free to gather together, to have public spaces and to speak to one another free of the intrusion of the state or its representatives. They are further free to share what they have to say beyond the immediate place of utterance. Freedom of the press, in this case, means simply the right and ability to record and preserve, to enlarge and disseminate the conversation of the culture.

The public remains the implicit term of the First Amendment. It is the God term — the worshipped concept — of liberal society and the press. Without the public, neither the press nor democracy makes any sense. Today, however, this original conception of a public of discussion and disputation, independent of both the press and the state, has been abandoned. Public opinion, for example, no longer refers to opinions expressed in public and then recorded in the press. Public opinion is now formed by the press and modeled by the public opinion industry, polling and

s.<sup>7</sup> With the rise of the polling industry, the prevailing of the public went into eclipse. The public has by the interest group as the object of analysis and actor, and the public has ceased to have a real much of the nineteenth century, political parties principal means of influencing the distribution of resources and government privileges. But late in the st and pressure groups developed as a new vehicle governments. Thus, voting according to the party became less important, and interest groups operate sector and behind the scenes to manipulate . As a result, the public faded into a statistical audience whose opinions counted only insofar as racted the pressure of mass publicity. In short, a public continued in the English language as an y and pious hope, the public as a feature and factor disappeared.

ands for a form of politics in which, in Jefferson's ould all be participants in the government of our al equality, in its most primitive mode — to borrow lines from Bruce Smith — simply means the and heard, or to have a public life.<sup>9</sup> When the life dominated by a few public figures or political rest of the population, denied the opportunity to rd, takes refuge and solace in private life and es. The passions for public life only grow and ople can speak and act as citizens, and have some others see, hear and remember what they say. bject of politics remains the desire to restore what eville called the "little republics within the frame public," and to create a palpable public to which belong.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup>eg. *The Captive Public: How Mass Opinion Promotes State Power* (New s, 1986).  
<sup>8</sup>ics and Remembrance (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985)

#### BETWEEN TRADITIONAL PRESS AND MODERN JOURNALISM

The transition from the original understanding of the press, the public and politics to journalism in the modern era was long and twisted. Throughout the nineteenth century, the public sphere divided into regional and class-based conflicting factions, organized around political parties and a partisan press. Journalism became an organ of such parties or ideologically aligned with political parties. Journalism began to express and reflect a bifurcated public sphere, as individuals joined politics through parties and the press.<sup>11</sup> Participation in the public sphere occurred more through parties, press, demonstrations and street parades, and less through public discourse. As the franchise was extended, legal participation rose to unprecedented and never-to-be repeated levels: Voter turnout averaged 77 percent in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. But popular politics, as Michael McGerr put it, "involved more than suffrage rights and record turnouts,"<sup>12</sup> that is, elections required visible support, mobilized through popular journalism and political parties. Thus, the transformation to a separation between politics and the public had begun.

#### THE MODERN ERA OF JOURNALISM

The modern era of journalism stretched from the 1890s to the 1970s. It began with the birth of national magazines, the development of mass urban newspapers, the creation of primitive forms of electronic communication and the domination of news dissemination by the wire services.

Truly national media and a national audience in the United States were eventually supplemented by motion pictures, produced in Hollywood and distributed nationwide, and by radio in the 1920s. These media created a "great audience," a new collectivity in which people were destined to live out a major part of their lives. The media cut across the structural divisions in soci-

<sup>11</sup> Participation was, strictly speaking, extralegal for the majority until the franchise was gradually extended to include all men, women and African-Americans.

<sup>12</sup> Michael E. McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) p. 5.

ir audience irrespective of race, ethnicity, occupational class. This was the first national and first — open to all. Modern communications media als in nations as large as the United States to be st time, directly to the “imaginary community of hout the mediating influence of regional and tions.”<sup>13</sup>

eriod culminated in the network era of televi- nire nation seemed to be assembled in front of rical networks — CBS, ABC and NBC — especially days of politics, such as those surrounding the nation or the quadrennial political conventions.<sup>14</sup> own to be counted as citizens of a 24-hour-a-day

itional media represented a centripetal force in on. Such media greatly enhanced the ability to ases of territory by reducing signal time and ct lines of access among national centers — such ashington and Hollywood — and dispersed au- duced a remarkable potential for the centraliza- d authority.

*ie Movement and its Impact on Journalism*

m the 1890s onward saw the creation of a variety ural movements that were reactions against and the formation of a national society through a of communications. Movements and groups ivism, populism, nativism, the know-nothings, e, temperance, the Grange and ethnic or racial all attempts to master, tame and direct the cur- hange. These movements expressed a restless entities and developed new forms of social and l as political parties, trade associations, profes-

sional groups and ethnic associations. They were organized by the new media, defined by the media, commented upon by the media and formed within the media. At a minimum, these movements were organized as a response to new conditions of social life brought about in part by the new media.

From the standpoint of journalism, the most important social movement was progressivism, which both redefined the past and projected a new democratic future. It contained economic, political and cultural elements which were closely connected. First, it was an attack on the plutocracy — concentrated economic power and the national social class that increasingly had a strangle hold over wealth and industry. The economic dimension of the progressive movement, however, also included the struggle by the middle-class professionals — such as doctors, lawyers, journalists and social workers — to become a national class and find a place in the national occupational structure and the national system of class influence and power. Thus, the professionals of the progressive movement were in many ways a less powerful imitation — a shadow movement — of the national class of plutocrats who ran and controlled industrial America.

Journalists were among these new progressive professionals. They formed national groups and lobbied to professionalize their standing through higher education. They sponsored histories of their profession and a new reading of the First Amendment in which the speech and press clauses became their possession. In effect, journalists became a new cultural elite with codes of ethical conduct justifying their new-found status in the nascent middle class professional world. They tried to figure out new ways of reporting on and commenting about this new world — a new professional ideology — which justified their place in the new order of things.

Second, progressivism was a movement of political reform at the national level and an attempt by the middle class and their intellectual allies to reclaim the cities from the political bosses and the urban machines. In many cases, the movement was an attempt to uproot the political influence of working-class groups who had seized city politics from local commercial and cultural elites during the great migrations before and after the Civil War. Progressivism was devoted to so-called good government by the

13. *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso Books, 1983).  
14. Ithiel Katz, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992).

15. The gap of time between the moment a message is sent and when it is received is a function of distance.

as Michael McGerr pointed out.<sup>16</sup> They were hit-and-run artists who exposed corruption or urged the passage of pro-consumer legislation, but they did not have the shape and persistence to constitute a tradition of journalism.<sup>17</sup> What muckraking did was promote a tradition of journalism that took as its task the unmasking of power. It strove to serve as watchdog, not only on the state, but also on interest groups.

Muckraking gave rise to propaganda analysis: the unmasking of attempts by both public and private interest groups to control and manipulate the press. It also demonstrated that democracy was no longer competition between political parties bearing explicit programs and ideologies. It had become a competition among interest and pressure groups that used the state, political parties and the press to control the distribution of economic rewards and social privileges. Moreover, the struggle among interest groups turned language into so-called public relations — an instrument in a struggle for advantage rather than a vehicle of the truth.

#### *The Fourth Estate*

In the twentieth century, new traditions of journalism and particular conceptions of the relationship between media and democracy formed themselves in mutual relief. The press, in effect, broke away from politics and became the so-called Fourth Estate. It established itself, at least in principle, as independent of all institutions, including the state, political parties and interest groups. It became the independent voter writ large; its only loyalty was to an abstract truth and an abstract public interest.

This is the origin of the concept of *objectivity* in journalism, as Michael Schudson has shown.<sup>18</sup> Objectivity was a defensive measure, an attempt to secure by quasi-scientific means a method for recording the world, independent of the political and social forces that were shaping it. In this rendition, democratic media were representatives of the people because the people were no longer

16. McGerr, p. 134.

17. An example of pro-consumer legislation is the Pure Food and Drug Act. See *ibid.*, p. 134.

18. Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News* (New York: Basic Books, 1978) chapter 4. This argument has also benefited from the unpublished work of Patrick McGarry.

ated the chain of Better Government Association finds in major U.S. cities.

usually allies of this movement for better they were committed to certain traditionally of honesty and uprightiness. Yet they also machines because city political bosses govard and patronage system and did not need public opinion. Reform movements, in content upon the publicity that only the press could rously courted and flattered the new journal-e aligned with the progressive movement by deology, although primarily through beliefs and the role of the press in the modernizing

rism was a cultural movement that sought to life, patterns of child rearing, modes of family personal conduct. This cultural dimension the movement as the economic and political in culture became part of the outlook of the book up residence in the new national media, discourse of the nation.

of progressivism were joined to one common re merely local and contingent, to seek the and to prefer the national over the provincial. of communication — magazines, books and e the arena where the progressive program struggle for its legitimation occurred.

t of the progressive movement on journalism ckraking in the first decade of the twentieth he muckraking journalists directed their at- utocracy and the business class in an attempt n. Muckraking arose within magazines rather or the former had no affiliation with politics, en political party. While they owed something ctics of newspapers, muckraking magazines, vspapers, did not dwell long on any one topic,

political parties or the state. The media became the face of a public that could not see and hear for itself — information that the public could not amass on its own. Journalists went where the public could not go, away from the veil of appearances that masked the and privilege. The press seized the First Amendment right in the name of a public that could no longer be defined by itself.

Journalism was no longer a profession, but a new role as representative of the public was created. In a world ruled by interests and regulated by politics, journalism faded into a spectator. Journalism was diminished to a mere commodity. In theory, at least, news was progressed from the truth. News was a blip on the social warning system that something was happening. However, because the exclusive domain of science. It was a product of the conversation or debate of the investigations by journalists. Journalists merely translated the language of experts — scientists in their offices — into a publicly accessible language. By transmitting the judgments of experts, decisions made by that class — not those made by public representatives.

Journalists, as transmitters, performed one function: publicity. News kept the experts honest, not the truth, but by turning on the hot light of publicity. As Walter Lippmann, who had more faith in the news or an informed public, put it:

The effect of publicity is that by revealing man's face to himself, if people have to declare, publicly, what they want, they won't be able to be altogether dishonest. Publicly avowed is no terror to demoralized by publicity.<sup>19</sup>

19. James Lane, eds., *The Essential Lippmann* (New York: Random House, 1963), pp. 26-7.

### Disengagement from Politics

While independent journalism legitimized democratic politics of publicity and experts, it also confirmed the psychological incompetence of most people to participate in it. A political system of "democracy without citizens" evolved.<sup>20</sup> A valuable role for the mass media was preserved, but the role of political parties and citizens diminished. First, independent print journalism weakened political parties, and then television decimated them. It reduced them to devices for fundraising for advertising and turned politics toward the cult of personality. Citizens, denied a public arena, became either consumers of or escapist from politics. Political journalism became, in Joan Didion's apt phrase, a game of "insider baseball."<sup>21</sup> The conversation of the culture moved outside the public realm and into private spaces. Increasingly, journalism became devoted to the sanctity of the fact and so-called objectivity, but invaded every domain of privacy with the hot light of publicity.

A journalism developed that was an early warning system, but one that kept the public in a constant state of agitation or boredom. It became a journalism that reported a continuing stream of expert opinion, but because there was no agreement among experts, it was more like talk-show gossip and petty manipulation than bearing witness to the truth. It was a journalism of fact without regard to understanding, through which the public was immobilized, demobilized and was merely a ratifier of judgments delivered from on high. It was, above all, a journalism that justified itself in the public's name, but in which the public played no role, except as an audience: a receptacle to be informed by experts and an excuse for the practice of publicity.

The media and democracy were increasingly reduced to a game and a dialectic of appearance and demystification, which tied the state, interest groups and the press together in a symbiotic relationship against the fragmented remains of the public. The game was played because each had something the other side

20. Robert Entman, *Democracy Without Citizens* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

21. Joan Didion, *After Henry* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992) pp. 47-86.

est groups and sources had newsworthy political he indispensable raw material needed to construct nalists could provide publicity slanted favorably or Elites sought to exchange a minimal amount of maging information for as much positively slanted uld be obtained. Journalists sought to extract infor- ries that would bring acclaim or acceptance from leagues.

however, watched this game as an increasingly ynical spectator: The public learned to distrust all whether mounted by elites or journalists, and to re as a mere instrument of interest and obfuscation. Journalism could no longer link up political im- litical action; it could produce publicity, scandal t it could not produce politics.

second half of the twentieth century, the average s no longer interested in politics. Indeed, the title r's book, *Why Americans Hate Politics*, expresses a nation from public life than is revealed by the low that have marked the entire modern period.<sup>22</sup> The icipation is partially evidenced by active disen- political parties — and the rise of the indepen- ore often, the independent non-voter.

ence for the public's disengagement from politics ing of a long-term decline in political participa- by voting, especially in presidential elections. tion continued to fall throughout the period of national society with temporary blips and recov- ain periods, such as the Great Depression and /ar. Yet the trend line was clear, and bureaucratic erse it were ineffective, such as extending the ; voter-registration restrictions or democratizing election process through primaries. The overall involvement was even sharper than revealed by l measures of voting in presidential elections,

<sup>22</sup> *Why Americans Hate Politics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991).

because it did not include the even more precipitous declines in primary, local and off-year congressional elections.<sup>23</sup>

Above all — as poll after poll showed — the public increas- ingly distrusted journalists and viewed them as a hindrance to, rather than an avenue toward, politics and reform.<sup>24</sup> The watch- dog press — the adversary press — was exposed to even more skepticism during the period of its greatest success, namely dur- ing the Vietnam War and Watergate.<sup>25</sup> While the press dismissed the rising tide of criticism during these episodes as merely reac- tionary politics, the problem went deeper. In the public's eyes, the media had become the adversary of all institutions, including the public itself. As the press sought greater constitutional power, greater independence from the state and the removal of all restric- tions on its activities and news-gathering rights, it pushed the legal case that it was a special institution with unique rights. These special rights were independent of the First-Amendment rights and different from — and often opposed to — the rights of ordinary people.

Ultimately, the public became an observer of the press rather than "participator[s] in the government of [its] affairs" and the dialogue of democracy.<sup>26</sup> The situation became one in which it was the media that needed to be protected, rather than the citizens' abilities to participate in politics. The individual was seen as remote and helpless compared to the two major protagon- ists — the government and the media.

Despite the criticisms of modern journalism, however, the U.S. press has also been a bulwark of liberty in our time, and so far there have been no examples of a better arrangement. Many notions of the press have served U.S. citizens well through some

<sup>23</sup> *Congressional Quarterly*, "Presidential Elections Since 1789," 5th ed. (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1991); Richard M. Scammon and Alice V. McGillivray, *American Voter 18* (Washington, DC: Election Research Center, 1989).

<sup>24</sup> D. Charles Whitney, "Americans' Experience with the News Media: A Fifty-Year Review," *The Media and the People* (New York: Freedom Forum Media Studies Center at Columbia University, 1985).

<sup>25</sup> David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York: Penguin Books, 1983); Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward, *All the President's Men* (New York: Warner Books, 1976).

<sup>26</sup> Smith, p. 252.

history: the press as watchdog; the independent representative of the public; the unmasker of interest and press that shines the hot glare of publicity into all of the republic; the seeker of expert knowledge; filter of opinion; and the private citizens' informant. They are not perfect or without fault, but they have formed the understanding of a democratic press era. However, as the twentieth century progressed, the press of modern journalism became increasingly debilitating, especially when it began to be assaulted

#### ING THE POSTMODERN ERA

opened with the image of a dismayed television entering the evaporation of the only journalism he *modern journalism*. Actually, John Chancellor was the early 1970s, the entire pattern of communication structure of the media and modern journalism —

ologies in particular were both the symptoms and the change: satellites and computers, the console which reconfigured the map of communications and ships. Satellite broadcasting eliminated distance as a communication. Computer technology not only parameters of numerical calculation, but through a widely diffused large-scale capacity for information, storage and retrieval. The radiant arc of a cometellite 22,300 miles above the earth synchronized sformed the globe into one homogeneous space. n of this technology, the conquest of time and space f the nineteenth-century romantics — has now in a ized. Moreover, the aggressive transformation of audiences — which in the late nineteenth century imaginary community of the nation" — is now a

While cable and satellite have enlarged the scale and scope of communications, they also — paradoxically — have narrowed it. Cable television has radically expanded channel capacity, the variety of services available and the capacity to segment the audience; wedded to satellites, cable was able to penetrate 60 percent of U.S. homes by the 1990s. Multichannel systems, however, have fragmented the audience into narrow niches based on taste, hobbies, avocations, race and ethnicity.<sup>28</sup>

The combination of cable television and video cassette recorders, direct satellite broadcasting and interactive teletext splintered the "great audience" assembled by newspapers and television. Having reached their peaks of profitability and influence in the 1970s, newspapers and network television have receded as economic and political forces. Analysts continue to search for the meaning of these changes. They have attempted to express it through metaphors such as "the global village" and "spaceship earth."

#### CONCLUSION

These complex and interrelated changes in the world of journalism and democracy erupted — to John Chancellor's dismay — in the new technology and politics of the 1992 election. What Chancellor missed, however, was the hopeful side of that election. Many of the phenomena that he found most troubling — call-in radio, public debates with public questioners, and spontaneous grass roots nominating movements — represented attempts by a fragmented and dispersed public, which had not completely lost and forgotten the image of a truly public life, to use the new technology and new media, designed purely for commercial purposes, to its own advantage.

The public is attempting to reform itself, outside the journalistic establishment, and to reassert both a public interest and public participation in the sphere of national politics. Rather than resisting these attempts or attempting to manage and orchestrate them,

28. Cable systems with 150 channels are already in operation and systems of 500 channels are being tested.

ould assist the public's attempt to reassert a role in public has inherited a journalism of the expert and the journalism of information, fact, objectivity and public—a scientific conception of journalism: It assumes an be informed and educated by the journalist and the eir different ways, the methods of the journalist and the uarantee the truth and sanction the vocabulary of a record, a conversation and as an exercise in poetry politics.

hing to remember about journalism is that it derives in the French word *jour*, meaning day, and is, there- ook — a collective and public diary that records oc- the day. The importance of journalism is less that it ; news and information, and more that it is one of the uments through which the culture is preserved and i, therefore, available to be reconsulted. This notion mas Jefferson's basic justification for freedom of the wspaper produced — compared to human memory ot — a virtually indestructible record of the signifi- n community life. The United States must return, in to this journalism of record.

urnalism ought to be conceived less on the model of and more on the model of conversation. Journalists art of the conversation of U.S. culture; a partner with ; public — no more and no less. This is a humble role n, but in fact what we need is a humble journalism. nann was right: Journalism cannot tell the truth, ne can tell the truth. All journalism can do is preside hin the public conversation: to stimulate and orga- t moving and leave a record so that other conversa- ry, art, science, religion — might have something off d. The public will continue to reawaken when it is a conversational partner and encouraged to join the an sit passively as a spectator before a discussion 'journalists and experts.

urnalism ought to be perceived not as an outgrowth t more as an extension of poetry, the humanities and ianism. What would journalism look like if it were poetry, if that metaphor were realized, rather than

the metaphor of objectivity and science? It would generate, in fact, a new moral vocabulary that might dissolve some current dilemmas.

In an earlier era, science could serve as the exemplification of our culture, and the scientist could be our hero. The sciences did enormous and important work in securing the foundations of liberal democracy. It is not surprising that journalism took science as its model and tried, in however degenerate a form, to imitate it. But that age is over.

Today the most important parts of U.S. culture are in the arts and humanities and in political utopianism. The public should not shrink from this new metaphor. Social life is after all the succession of great metaphors. The metaphor that has governed the understanding of journalism in this century has run into trouble. Neither journalism nor public life will move forward until the public actually rethinks and reinterprets what journalism is: not the science or information of culture, but its poetry and conversation. There will still be plenty of room left for investigations, for the Fourth Estate as a check upon tyrannical power. But there is good news for the First Amendment, journalists and the public. The re-creation of public life, as dangerous and difficult as it will be in an age of advanced technology, will bring the United States closer to the inspiring vision of journalism that has been the objective of democratic politics since the colonial era.