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May 4, 2004

Take-Home Test

## **Part I – Fraud in Reporting**

The problem of fraud showing up in reporting has become a major issue in the past few years. Even in the biggest of the national newspapers, the *USA Today*, the seeds of fraud have made their way into the press and into the homes of millions of Americans nationwide. The issue has grown in such a way that the newspaper editors alone cannot possibly intercept all of the fabrications in the articles being produced. To correct this problem, newspaper conglomerates are going to have to relax their policies as a profit seeker and tightening their policies as an objective reporter. With such adjustments, the newspapers could focus more capital on the editorial process of their paper by hiring more staff members to do fact checking before major articles are produced and fact checking in general articles to ensure all of the employed journalists are keeping to their professional standards while having an increased incentive to do so.

An article in the April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2004 edition of the *New York Times* by Jacques Steinberg entitled “Top editor of *USA Today* resigns after fraud case” points out one of the many cases in these past few months where nationally acclaimed newspapers have fallen under fire of journalistic fraud. With the increased pressure of developing the next great story to further personal careers and rake in more money for the paper one is writing for, we are seeing an increase in fraudulent cases in Pulitzer Prize nominees. Jack Kelley is one of those journalists. The *Times* article identifies three of the known eight major articles in the past ten years which

have been found to be fabricated; his face-to-face encounters with a suicide bomber, a hunt for Osama bin Laden, and the drowning of six Cuban refugees.

The attack on fraudulent reporting is not only falling on the shoulders of the journalists alone, but the editors of the papers as well. Karen Jurgensen recently resigned from the *USA Today* in the light of the Jack Kelley stories. Jurgensen resigned and cited that her failure to intercept the fabrications made by Jack Kelley was behind the decision. If all papers, including the *USA Today* and the *New York Times* need to focus more of their earnings on improving the quality of the work being printed by hiring more staff members to check the articles for fraudulent data and misinformation.

The prospects of reform are actually looking up at this point in time. As more and more journalists and editors are stepping down from their positions, the more ethically focused the remaining employees will be. With more critical eyes on the papers, editors and journalists will be forced to exclude the fraudulent articles. And with critical eyes on papers, especially those who have been made aware of such misinformation, the more likely the major players will be willing to spend more money to ensure the reader base is not lost.

As with most businesses, the drive to increase profits will stand in the way of eliminating the fraudulent articles that sell papers. The battle between good and evil, or in this case, truth and fiction, will continue to rage on regardless of the changes made in the hierarchy in the editorial system. The only thing that ensures a change is coming is the newspapers ultimate goal of making money. If a paper is seen in a bad light, they will not sell papers. The step to correct what is the centuries old problem of fraudulent reporting will not come in one miraculous moment but over many years of trial and error in which cases of fraud will come to light, and the persons conducting said fraud are removed from the process of reporting the news.

## **Part II – FCC Regulations**

In recent light of the Janet Jackson Super Bowl Half-Time fiasco, FCC chairman Michael Powell has decided to push forward an increase regulation of obscenity and indecency on top of his movement for an increase in deregulation of media ownership. An increase in the regulation of obscenity and indecency on radio, television, cable, and the internet would be an attempt to make the rules controlling the four media one and the same. This would entitle a fine increase in the radio and broadcast television media while creating the same type of rules on cable television and the internet. The deregulation of media ownership would allow even fewer multi-media conglomerates to control more of the media in a given broadcast market.

The Federal Communications Commission, under the Republican control of Michael Powell, had, within the past year, voted along party lines in a 3-2 vote in favor of deregulation of media ownership. The argument over ownership comes from the invention of cable television. Multi-media conglomerates argue that cable television, satellite broadcasts, and the internet have created a situation that the old model of ownership no longer applies to. The major push by Michael Powell and the Republicans in the FCC is to bump the national broadcast cap to 45 percent, up from 35 percent, so that a single multi-media conglomerate could feasibly reach out to just about one-half of all homes in America. With the ban still in place for any of the big four (ABC, NBC, CBS, and Fox) to buy out one another, the push for deregulation is to bring a better set of rules for the fast-growing media industry to cope with the advent of internet and satellite industries.

The necessary action of providing licenses to radio and television broadcasters to prevent competitive signals from distorting one another comes with the downside of allowing the commission who gives out the licenses to be able to impose some limits on the programming

allowed to be broadcasted over the signals. Michael Powell wants to increase the fines one can receive for “indecent” and “obscene” materials. The federal government has regulations in place where there is to be *no* obscene material broadcast whatsoever and limits indecent material to the times between 10pm and 6am, where little children are less likely to be watching or listening to the broadcast medium. The FCC wants to implement fining of obscenities to every incident, not every show. If these rules were passed on to cable television, shows like the Sopranos would rack up around *twenty* fines per episode, as opposed to the current standard which would be *one* fine for the entire episode.

With the election year in place, Michael Powell and the Republican controlled FCC are attempting to win over the big businesses and conservative parents vote. I have trouble believing that anyone could get *that* mad at seeing part of a breast on television for a split second. Regardless of the underlying reasons for the movement of the FCC to deregulate ownership and regulate obscenities, the movement is taking place. The winners in this form of FCC control are clearly Big Business and Extreme Conservatives.

### **Part III a. – Jan Leighley’s Models of Media**

As Jan Leighley points out in her book, *Mass Media and Politics: A Social Science Perspective*, all but one of the five models of the mass media seem to fail when taken into the political spectrum. The reporter of objective fact model, when viewing Congress, doesn’t seem to apply. If anything is reported, the news generally doesn’t surface until the final votes are tallied, leaving the educated public powerless to inform politicians of the choices they wish them to make. It seems as if every decision any President makes is criticized by someone in the media, the neutral adversary model fails. Newscasts are seemingly nothing more than a variety hour when it comes to actual news events being broadcast, which rejects the public advocate model of the mass media. If the Government was using the media to push its message across in the propagandist model, they need to hire a new ad agency. The message coming across through the media more often than not de-legitimizes what the government is doing. Scores of reports over budgetary issues and personal political behavior dismiss the propagandist model. Finally, the only model of the mass media that actually explains what the media is doing in the political realm is that of the profit seeker. The media is a business, and it is run like a business. The most attention in the news is drawn towards crime and dirty politics, the events that bring people in front of their televisions and picking up papers. The profit seeker is clearly the only model that fully explains what the media tycoons are doing in the world of politics.

### **Part III b. – Jan Leighley’s Models of Media**

The changing political coverage of content and direction in the varying media outlets can be explained through an examination of Leighley’s models of the mass media and studying the ways those models relate to the differing media forms. Media is a business, and the underlying goal of a business is to make money to stay in business, yet the three major forms of media; radio, television, and newspapers, all have a different political focus. Most news radio broadcasts are conservative based while news television programs are mostly liberal based and newspapers remain mostly neutral. The type of audience also changes wildly through the three media outlets, therefore the implementation of business practice must change in the outlets, and here is where Leighley’s model stated the same, can appear to be completely different when applied to the varying forms of media.

While most conservative point to newspapers as being liberally biased, the facts speak differently. Of the newspapers identified as being liberal, the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, studies have shown that those papers are in fact, relatively neutral in their coverage. Leighley’s public advocate model works well for the newspaper industry. Since the beginning of our country, people have used newspapers to inform the public on what the government is doing, acting as a check on the people running the country. Even today, newspapers are seen as the main way to get political information. The newspaper industry is kept alive by people buying their product, and to keep people buying their product they must deliver what their readers want, the full story. Newspaper reporters are reporters of objective fact, they report the news as it happens to inform the public of what is going on in the country. The public then uses its knowledge of political issues to make choices in their political life: who to vote for or endorse and what stance to take on political issues. People rely on newspapers to inform them of the

workings of the government and to fulfill their request the business provides the public with the information they need to be informed citizens.

Talk radio has a limited audience and therefore the structure of the coverage and direction of political happenings is different. Radio has a conservative bias to fulfill the request of its listeners, Republicans. Talk radio listeners want to hear about the good things conservatives are doing, so the reporters of objective facts model is thrown out the window along with the neutral advocate model in favor of Leighley's propagandist model of reporting. The talk radio host spend there time advancing the position of Republican leaders in Congress and the White House not to sway the middle of the road folk, but to keep its listener base up. These shows rarely affect the way its listeners will vote or take a stance on an issue. Conservatives hearing a conservative message to inflate their own political ego and maintain the profits of the radio business through advertising linked to conservatives is explained through Leighley's profit seeker and propagandist models.

There is a third group of people who rely on television broadcasts to get their political news, so the political system on television is set up on a completely different model. Most television newscasts, with the exception of Fox News, have been labeled as being liberally biased, along with all of the newsmagazine programs. Since news programs run on television, competing with all of the new soap-like sitcoms, networks have been forced to step up the appearance of the newscasts on the networks. The focus on television is more on scandal than substance making Leighley's profit seeker model best fit the television industry. However, with the rise in the newsmagazine programs, the public advocate model also fits the industry fairly well. These programs bring to light the wrong doings of the government in an effort to alert the voters of the misdeeds on capital hill. Not all television agendas focus on the scandal side of

government. In times of crisis, such as wars and national emergencies, the newscasts follow the propagandist model and attempt to sway the opinion of the people in favor of the government.

Jan Leighley's models of mass media are accepted and rejected in various situations across all of the forms of media. The differences in the media outlets and the type of audience the outlets have to function for changes the implementation of Leighley's models, but the basic principles underlying the models remains unchanged across all formats. Whether liberal or conservative biased or neutral, the media forms get the political message across and information to the citizens of this country.