

A Crisis in Archetypes: How Framing U. S. Elections as Heroes versus Villains Promotes Two-Valued Orientation, Encourages Corruption, And Erodes Public Trust

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Abstract

The deeply embedded lexicon of archetypes within the subconscious provides human beings with frames for interpreting their experiences and attaching meaning to incidents. When journalists evoke these potent symbols to advance ideology, they promote propaganda at the expense of revealing the truth. Since democracy depends upon an informed, rational electorate, the decline of a press devoted to unearthing the truth and serving the public threatens civic well-being in the United States. Traditionally, reporters and editors serve as watchdogs devoted to holding power brokers accountable. When they play circus mutts eager to entertain or herd dogs trained to prevent the multitude from straying into individual thinking, the public loses its objective window on the world. The grand public conversation degenerates into a grapevine of invective, gossip, and slander.

Introduction

If my skull had hinges and it popped open, a peep inside would reveal boys running in all directions. My father drew this conclusion when I was fifteen during a discussion of whether we should purchase season tickets for the Braves baseball games in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He doubted my motives for supporting America's favorite pastime because just the year before it had taken a forklift, a quart of rocky-road ice cream, and enough root beer to fill the stadium to motivate me to attend a Braves game with my family. Many years later, I discovered that a multitude of players--at least figuratively--dash across the stage of everyone's cranium. These phantoms enter and exit from the subconscious, individuals draw upon an inherited library of images to attach meaning to experiences and build a personal museum dedicated to archiving the adventures of self in the cosmos.

C.G. Jung explains that embedded patterns, which unite human beings across time wherever they live, provide the cues for understanding the world.¹ Jung concludes that these archetypes defy recognition, except in dreams. However, many scholars have studied archetypes, especially

¹ Carl G. Jung et al, *Man and His Symbols* (New York: Dell [Laurel], 1968) 58. He explains: "These manifestations are what I call the archetypes. They are without known origin; and they reproduce themselves in any time and in any part of the world--even where transmission by direct descent or "cross fertilization" through migration must be ruled out." Also see: C.G. Jung, *Four Archetypes: Mother, Rebirth, Spirit, Trickster*, translated [from the German] by R.F.C. Hull (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992).

in mythology, literature, and history. Sir James G. Frazer published twelve volumes of *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion* in 1890 to compare faith stories as literature.² His work revealed common global patterns that inspired other scholars, like Joseph Campbell. When I analyzed the texts of formula fictions as well as success tracts and newspapers from seven time zones, I discovered that an American success archetype recurred regardless of the genre even in nonfiction. Like all prototypes, this psychic marker connected the present to the bedrock of traditional lore that continues to bear the weight of society.

Of course, most writers did not intentionally invoke the theme of “passing through the eye of the needle.” This biblical image predicts that a rich person is as likely to enter heaven as a camel is to push through the tiny aperture of a sewing tool or an incredibly small gate in Jerusalem.³ Either way, the analogy sends a potent message. Typically, this injunction was woven into modifications of Cinderella, including the Cinderfellows Horatio Alger created.⁴ This motif was repeated not only in tearjerker potboilers and autobiographies, but also in obituaries and front-page news.⁵ The distinctly American-plot element might be the lesson that those who rose above middle-class bliss faced moral ruin.

² Sir James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion*, (London: Macmillan, 1890). More recent editions contain two volumes in one book under the title, *The Golden Bough: The Roots and Folklore*, (New York: Avenel, 1981).

³ J.D. Douglas and Merrill C. Tenney, “Animals,” *The New International Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1987) 50. They explain that the “ship of the desert” commanded respect so much that over sixty passages in scripture mention dromedary (single hump) or Bactrian camels (double hump). With its long legs, the dromedary was perfect for personal use and speedy delivery of messages. However, the slower, more compact beast of burden performed admirably in long trade treks. The reference in Matthew 19:24 to the rich man being as likely to get into heaven as a camel to pass through the eye of the needle may not have been a literal analogy. According to this dictionary, the eye of the needle refers to “the small gate permitting travelers to enter a city after the main gates have been closed. In order to get through the gateway, the camel had to kneel, be relieved of its load, and then be urged through the gateway on its knees. As camels are likely to complain when being unloaded as when loaded, the illustration would have reminded hearers of the late traveler’s exasperation on occasion.”

⁴ Carol Nackeroff’s biography, *The Fictional Republic: Horatio Alger and the American Political Discourse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) offers insights into the context of his times in pondering why that children’s author remains interesting today.

⁵ Paulette D. Kilmer, *The Fear of Sinking: The American Success Formula in the Gilded Age* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), especially “Chapter 8: Fantastic Reality and Realistic Fantasy,” 147-157.

Perhaps, one of the most pervasive symbols in American culture is “the good citizen,” a variation on the loyal sidekick archetype, who seldom leads but enables the great to fulfill their destiny. In this case, voters patiently and persistently stay informed via newspapers and discussions; accordingly, they enable elected officials to govern wisely since they must answer to the people. By tracing the concept across time, Michael Schudson deduced that the informed citizen morphed first into a reformer/participant and then into a monitor.⁶ Activists and monitors do not emphasize knowing current events. Nevertheless, to perform each of these roles, individuals need to understand the political, social, and economic landscape.

Garry Wills focused on American attitudes toward the federal government and concluded that since the Revolutionary Era, folks have distrusted government, fearing rule by monarchs. The idea of government as *A Necessary Evil* (the title of Wills’ book) has become a part of unspoken beliefs as deeply embedded in the national mindset as ancient archetypes. Perhaps, government plays the role of the witch, a character that can be either evil or pure. L. Frank Baum wrote *The Wizard of Oz* as a populist fable about the advantages of silver over gold currency. In it, the two witches (who vie for power over Dorothy) actually embody one entity: the government, which contains the potential for both awesome altruism and wisdom as well as the capacity for cruelty and corruption.⁷ Dorothy represents the people; her entourage includes the Tin Man (technology); the Scarecrow (agriculture), and the Cowardly Lion (the decision-makers who accept bribes.) Certainly, if this were a different essay, I would connect each of them to fairy tales and mythology.

⁶ Michael Schudson, *The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998).

⁷ Baum, L. Frank, *Wizard of Oz*, orig. *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, ed. William R. Leach (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1991). Also see Kilmer, Fear of Sinking, 72-73; Henry Littlefield, “The Wizard of Oz: Parable of Populism,” *American Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (1964) 47-58; and R. Hal Williams, *Years of Decision: American Politics in the 1890s* (New York: Wiley, 1978) 105.

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Instead, let's consider Wills' conclusion about unrealistic expectations from government that arise from our storehouse of imagery in which patriots joust with tyrants to preserve individual freedoms. He points out that although the tension between concern for rights and need for government regulation surfaces in every generation, "paranoia can turn these truths [the perpetual conflict between legislative efficiency and accountability to the people] into the belief that government is in itself a necessary evil, inevitable in its denial of freedom, to be attacked on all accounts and at all times."⁸ As watchdogs, reporters provide unbiased accounts of government actions, squelch rumors, and generate interest in civic matters.

Journalists strive to be objective and learn professional skills that help them keep their biases out of articles. They must be guided by their conscience to serve the public. No doubt, the internal library of archetypes in their brains will connect the momentary news with the timeless body of associations crucial for human beings to understand the world and their place in it. These symbols will inadvertently appear in stories and remain invisible unless someone analyzes the text. Jack Lule recently declared that journalists transcend merely telling stories. They inadvertently play a mythological role in society.⁹ Like Lule, Mircea Eliade, Campbell, Carol S. Pearson, Roland Barthes, and others who have contemplated myth, I do not define it as malarkey but rather as holy narratives people believe so completely that they make them come true.¹⁰ These stories inform the soul and stir the heart to greatness not attainable through dispassionate study. Unfortunately, not all interpretations of myths inspire altruistic actions or serve the public. For example, the Nazi or the white-supremacists' appropriation of classical stories to

⁸ Garry Wills, *A Necessary Evil: A History of American Distrust of Government* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999).

⁹ Jack Lule, *Daily News, Eternal Stories: The Mythological Role of Journalism* (New York: Guilford Press, 2001).

¹⁰ In *Aspects du Mythe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), Mircea Eliade suggests that the sacred empowers humans to live a meaningful life guided by altruistic values. Joseph Campbell wrote extensively about myth. These are two of my favorites: *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, second ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968) and *Myths to Live By*, fore. Johnson E. Fairchild (New York: Viking Press, 1972). Carol S. Pearson writes about discovering the personal connections with sacred archetypes in *Awakening the Heroes Within: Twelve Archetypes to Help Us Find Ourselves and Transform Our World* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991). In *Mythologies* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1957), Roland Barthes investigates mass-cultural phenomena (like wrestling), as intricate systems of symbols that reflect ancient lore.

promote genocide embody warnings of how clever totalitarians, including Joseph Stalin and Pol Pot, the leader of Cambodian communist guerrillas, have enlisted mythology to perpetuate evil.¹¹

Myths exist within humans always, but frequently lie dormant until they are given life by cultural association. The universal nature of this innate classification system of narratives moves people to seek justice, to abhor cruelty, to admire sacrifice for others, and to long for a sense of belonging to something bigger than themselves--a family, a religion, a country. Cultural experience determines how zealots as well as populations in different societies interpret core concepts, like justice, cruelty, sacrifice, and belonging. This essay focuses on the role of mythology, in the United States, as a body of sacred texts that unite folks in the common struggle to negotiate meaning from their lives in a complex and often intimidating environment. The twisting of mythos for political and financial gain has resulted in three crises:

- * Many citizens have lost interest in democracy because U.S. government officials have granted control of media to corporations without protecting citizen access to information and guaranteeing public discussion forums.

- * Consequently, elections have devolved into cartoon matches between “good” and “bad” candidates who live in “red” and “blue” states.

- * Ultimately, the people stop trusting the government, and the media strays from its ethical compass.

George Washington Sitting in a Cherry Tree?

As Mark Lloyd notes in *Prologue to a Farce: Communication and Democracy in America*, the government establishes policies that determine citizen access to the media.¹² Therein, the

¹¹ Joseph Stalin purged the Communist Party, the military, and killed anybody he viewed as an enemy. In the reign of terror, between 1936 and 1938, firing squads executed millions, and hundreds of thousands were forcibly removed to the Gulag where most died from starvation, overwork, and disease. Between 1975 and 1979, the Khmer Rouge, Pol Pot’s communist guerrillas, murdered two million Cambodians--roughly one-third of the population. In 1991, the United Nations sent a peacekeeping force to help the survivors reclaim their country and disarm ten million land mines--one for each Cambodian.

symbiotic relationship of democracy and the media causes them to prosper or decline together. The glut of trivia on television, in books, magazines, newspapers, and on the Internet inescapably contributes to the decline of civic participation in politics. Decision makers allow international corporations to define media users as consumers, not citizens. Certainly, consumers may prefer reruns of MASH or Green Acres to watching the evening news. This indulgence in silliness generates huge audiences for advertisers. Viewers enjoy commercials featuring gabby trees, wisecracking crows, and other amusing but unreal elements to sell products. On the other hand, people expect the news to be accurate. Walter Lippmann warned in *Public Opinion* that journalists, like everyone else, often perceive what pleases them rather than reality:¹³

We insist, because of our superior hindsight, that the world as they [people] needed to know it, and the world as they did know it, were often two quite contradictory things. We can see, too, that while they governed and fought, traded and reformed in the world as they imagined it to be, they produced results, or failed to produce any, in the world as it was. They started for the Indies and found America. They diagnosed evil and hanged old women. They thought they could grow rich by always selling and never buying. A caliph, obeying what he conceived to be the Will of Allah, burned the library at Alexandria.

When the TV, radio, and newspapers repeat the same stories, Lippmann's "window on the world" shrinks profoundly.¹⁴ Quite possibly, this limited view increases the risk that reporters will fail to stray from the herd long enough to depict events as they actually transpire.¹⁵

¹² Mark Lloyd, *Prologue to a Farce: Communication and Democracy in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2006).

¹³ Walter Lippmann, "Chapter I: The World Outside And The Pictures In Our Heads," *Public Opinion* (New York: Free Press, 1997, orig. Harcourt Brace, 1922) 1. See: <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/Lippman/contents.html> by the University of Virginia American Studies Program 2002-2003. Digitized and first spell-checked August 2003. Tagged in HTML November 2003. Copy-edited and overall design and construction: Alan Howard, November 2003. This version is available from American studies at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, Virginia. Free for non-commercial use provided that this header is included in its entirety with any copy distributed.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ *The New York Times*, on the "Health Page," pointed out between "March 31-April 6; "Herd Journalism" resulted in similar headlines about "Mad Cows and Englishmen" in *The New Yorker*, *The Detroit News*, *The Economist*, *The Washington Post*, *The Baltimore Sun*, *The Washington Times*, and the *San Francisco Examiner*. Available online at <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?sec=health&res=9A0CE1D71339F934A35757C0A960958260> Timothy Crouse described "pack" journalism in *Boys on the Bus*, fore. Hunter S. Thompson (New York: Random House, Trade Paperbacks, 1973, [2003 printing]). In *Attention Deficit Democracy* (New York: Palgrave [Macmillan], 2006), James Bovard points out that the Washington Press Corp's affection for leaders shields the politicians from criticism that would strengthen democracy. In *What Liberal Media? The Truth about Bias and the News* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), Eric Alterman painstakingly documents the false notion that the media express a liberal bias. He notes that conservatives own many TV and radio stations,

Furthermore, the lack of serious programming about local issues as well as national problems encourages citizens to drop out of a process that routinely skews policies to favor commercial entities at the expense of public well-being.¹⁶

Newspapers have always played a crucial role in showing Americans the world and framing reality for them.¹⁷ In fact, during the Revolutionary War, pamphlets and news articles united the Patriots in their cause to seek independence from the British Crown. The Tories were viewed as scoundrels and traitors. In a letter to her husband, John Adams, Abigail joked that he was always the first in line to be hanged. The colonists knew the conflict would end in bloodshed either on the battlefield or at the gallows. Although white women, blacks, and Native Americans were left out of the power equation, nevertheless, in times of crisis, they contributed too.

The Founding Fathers defined honor as a gentleman's commitment to serving the public because the underlings could not take care of themselves. Colonial leaders believed that society was stratified in layers with the wealthy, educated gentry at the top over the lower classes of barely literate artisans, farmers, and tradesmen. Paul K. Longmore explains in *The Invention of*

magazines, and newspapers. Alterman concludes that people should not scrutinize individual journalists for bias but rather notice the agenda of the entire news industry to disseminate conservative views and push politics ever farther to the right.

¹⁶ Lloyd, *Prologue to a Farce*, especially "The End of History," 223-236.

¹⁷ Many scholars have expanded upon Eving Goffman's concept, which he explained in *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974). For example, in *Mass Mediated Disease: A Case Study of Three Flu Pandemics and Public Health Policy* (Lanhan, MD: Rowman and Littlefield [Lexington Books], 2006) on page 1. Dr. Debra Blakely describes framing as the process relating experiences to an overall theme and, thus, understanding experiences. Also see: Gaye Tuchman, *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1978); Janice Hume, "The 'Forgotten' 1918 Epidemic and Press Portrayal of Public Anxiety," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 77:4 (2000): 898-915; Z. Pan and G. Kosicki, "Framing Analysis: An Approach to Discourse," *Political Communication* 10 (1993): 55-75; William G. Jacoby, "Issue Framing and Public Opinion on Government Spending," *American Journal of Political Science*, 44:4 (October 2000): 750-767; R. Lance Holbert et al, "The West Wing and Depictions of the American Presidency: Expanding the Domains of Framing in Political Communication," *Communication Quarterly*, 53:4 (October 2005): 505-522; Frank Esser and Paul D'Angelo, "Framing the Press and the Publicity Process: A Content Analysis of Meta-Coverage in Campaign 2000 Network News," *American Behavioral Scientist*, 46:5 (January 2003): 617-641; Dianne G. Bystrom, Terry A. Robertson, and Mary Christine Banwart, "Framing the Fight: An Analysis of Media Coverage of Female and Male Candidates in Primary Races for Governor and U.S. Senate in 2000," *American Behavioral Scientist*, 44:12 (August 2001): 1999-2013; Terry Robertson, "A Perfect Storm: A Case Study Analysis of the Defeat of Tom Daschle by John Thune in the 2004 South Dakota Senate Race," *American Behavioral Science*, 49:2 (October 2005): 326-342; and Howard Lavine with Thomas Gschwend, "Issues, Party, and Character: The Moderating Role of Ideological Thinking on Candidate Evaluation," *British Journal of Political Science*, 37:1 (January 2007): 139-163.

George Washington that these elitists defined self-worth in terms of their efficacy as guardians of the community. “The most important component [was] his reputation among other honorable gentlemen.”¹⁸ Washington thrived in this competitive environment and sought to impress his peers with his integrity and patriotism. He aspired to greatness before the Declaration of Independence and eagerly answered the call to shepherd the American troops, knowing this stepping-stone would open the corridors of power.

Almost automatically, the colonists transferred their devotion from King George III to General Washington. Until, the monarch sent an army of Red Coats and Prussians to crush the rebellion, the Patriots had expected King George III to recognize their petitions and grant them equal representation. At that point, the Americans stopped blaming the aristocrat’s ministers for the Stamp Act and other repressive measures, denouncing him as a tyrant. By January of 1776, the common folks were naming infants after George Washington and his wife, Martha. Public buildings and ships also took his moniker. Wherever the Virginia planter or his spouse went, processions of well-wishers escorted them into town.¹⁹ Children sang, “God save great Washington! God damn the king!” With help from the press, the slogan swept through the colonies. A ballad, “War and Washington,” inspired the catch phrase. The song declared Washington godlike and predicted British defeat.²⁰

Great heaven! Is this the nation whose thundering arms were hurled,
Through Europe, Afric [sic], India? Whose navy ruled a world?
The luster of your former deeds, whole ages of renown,
Lost in a moment, or transferred to us and Washington!

People, especially those with the least money or status, embraced Washington as their hero from the moment he took command of the Continental Army. “Soon as his appointment as

¹⁸ Paul K. Longmore, *The Invention of George Washington* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999) 2.

¹⁹ Ibid. 197. “Also, a custom started that fall and summer that became almost a mania. In, Boston, Dorchester, and Andover, Massachusetts, in Williamsburg, Virginia, and in New Castle, Delaware, leading families baptized male offspring with the name George Washington.”

²⁰ Ibid. 201. The ditty contains many stanzas. “A British officer held prisoner of war griped of, ‘the American soldiers’ guarding him, ‘who vociferate their songs so loud that the whole house rings with War and Washington, a favourite [sic] ballad.’”

commander-in-chief...observers began to describe him in the exalted terms they would use for the rest of his career.”²¹ The first president of the United States, George Washington, despite the efforts of recent debunkers, remains an archetypal figure of steadfast honesty and courage. Over time, legends exaggerate virtues and erase sins. For example, the fanciful story about Washington’s confession of chopping down a cherry tree rather than lying to his father provided a fable that helped folks remember the point--honesty is the best policy. Today, most scorn that tale, preferring instead to pass on trivia: Washington relied upon wood, elk, or lead teeth to eat his lunch and resembled a pear physically.²² Too often, the Founding Father’s success through sticking to the truth is forgotten along with his warning about political parties. Washington feared that the seeds of disharmony would fracture the union if public passions shifted from common goals and interests to personalities, resulting in the rise of charismatic despots and the decline of liberty.²³

Ironically, the Patriot Act makes Washington’s words sound prophetic today as the FBI monitors Americans’ reading habits.²⁴ A later section of this article analyzes the ongoing loss of freedom and solidarity that is inevitable when voters select candidates based on character and

²¹ Longmore found the quotation about Washington’s early and enduring popularity in Curtiss P. Nettles, “The Washington Theme in American History,” *Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings*, 68 (1952) 175 as well as in Douglas Southall Freeman, *George Washington* (New York: Scribners, 1948-57), volume three, xii-xiii.

²² Actually, George Washington owned several sets of false teeth, but none of them were made from wood despite the widespread claim. In fact, he preferred plates composed of elk and deer teeth, not his lead dentures. This information is repeated a lot in web and biographical sources.

²³ George Washington, “Farewell Address,” 19 September 1796, is available online. The Avalon Project at Yale can be reached at www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/washington.htm. Among the many curses in a party system that could destroy the union, Washington noted the corruptible side of human nature: “Sooner or later the chief of some prevailing faction more able or more fortunate than his competitors turns this disposition to the purposes of his own elevation, on the ruins of Public Liberty. The speech appears on pages 137 to 155 in Don Higginbotham, *George Washington: Uniting a Nation* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002). On pages 7 and 8, Higginbotham said that from the time Washington was appointed Commander in Chief of the Continental Army, if not before, he considered himself an American and devoted his energies to uniting the Colonies into one strong republic.

²⁴ Bob Egelko, “FBI Checking Americans’ Reading Habits: Bookstores, Libraries Can’t Do Much to Fend Off Search Warrants,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 23 June 2002, A-5; found online 2 May 2007 at sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2002/06/23/MN75593.DTL

Brock, *The Republican Noise Machine: Right Wing Media and How It Corrupts Democracy*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2004) 3.

two-valued orientation rather than record or policies. The worship of personalities--either celebrities or CEO's--emphasizes the power of big bucks and provides rationalization for puffing up corporations. Briefly tracing the evolution of deregulation reveals how the abdication of public forums to business magnates has drained both democracy and the mass media of meaningful content.

More Technology, Less Salient Communication

Inventions literally have changed the way people see the world. For example, the telegraph magically, so it seemed, collapsed geography and space.²⁵ In May of 1844, via the telegraph, in seconds, messages traveled distances that formerly required hours, days, even months for delivery. Suddenly, transportation no longer set the timetable for communication. Not surprisingly, many editors as well as ministers believed the telegraph would usher in an era of peace and eliminate poverty. The offspring of Samuel Morse's invention: the telephone, wireless, radio, television, satellite, cable, and the Internet all sparked similar expectations. Unfortunately, unless people respect and listen to each other, increased capacity to exchange views will not launch a Utopian age of universal sharing and caring. In *The Machine in the Garden*, Leo Marx ponders the impossibility of equally embracing nature and the technology that destroys the landscape.²⁶ Thomas Jefferson's pastoral ideal of a nation of farmers and yeomen kept pure by living close to the earth could not prevail over the economic need to produce enough goods to avoid costly trade agreements with other nations. The distinguished doctor and scientist, Benjamin Rush, argued that the establishment of manufacturing would provide a strong

²⁵ James W. Carey explains how the telegraph separated sending messages from transportation systems. See "Chapter 20: Time, Space and the Telegraph" in *Communication in History: Technology, Culture and Society* by David Crowley and Paul Heyer (New York: Longman, 1995). On pages 3 through 6 of *Media and the American Mind From Morse to McLuhan* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), Daniel J. Czitrom describes how the telegraph awed and frightened people; intellectuals declared these "lightning lines" the embodiment of American genius.

²⁶ Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, orig. 1967).

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economic foundation for the new country.²⁷ Thomas Paine, who wrote *Common Sense*, declared that the Revolutionary War had established an essential national technology.²⁸

It was like one hand clapping--a contradiction in terms. Simultaneously, the National Road, canals, railroads, the telegraph, and later radio and television united the nation but, like all inventions, also generated problems: crime, land speculation, alienation, and social fragmentation. The quest for profit as well as fascination with clever gizmos blinded people to potential drawbacks. Hence, the belief in progress and science as the keys to a golden future in which the New Land was destined to prosper began before the confederation of colonies had become a strong federal union of states.

James Madison, the Father of the Constitution, who opposed the addendum at first, changed his mind and then supported the Bill of Rights. Reformers often invoke the First Amendment when defending freedom of expression. However, Article 1, Section 7, of the Constitution formed the foundation of American communication, especially in the Early Republic. It empowered Congress to create a national post office and roads to facilitate delivery of the mail. The Post Office Act of 1792 strengthened this provision and established government policy toward communication. Washington, Madison, and Jefferson approved of giving newspapers special privileges because the press provided a channel for informing the public about the actions of their leaders. Although subscriptions were expensive, even very poor people gained access through shared papers or from listening to them being read at church, in the grocery store, or in the tavern. Unlike today, people enjoyed getting the news from as many papers as possible, and

²⁷ John F. Kasson, *Civilizing the Machine: Technology and Republican Values in America, 1776-1900* (New York: Penguin, 1986) 9-10. Benjamin Rush expected women and children to provide two-thirds of the workforce for factories.

²⁸ Ibid. 13-14. Thomas Paine was a lifelong student of engineering and conferred with Benjamin Franklin on inventions. "These are the times that try men's souls." This most famous quotation appeared in the first of sixteen installments of *The Crisis*, which Paine wrote to rally the Continental Army. George Washington had it read to his soldiers at Valley Forge. Paine wrote the 50-page pamphlet, *Common Sense*, in 1776 to explain to the Colonists why they should split from King George III and create a republic governed by a written constitution. His writing was very popular during the Revolutionary War; but after he emigrated to England and then to France, his later work put him in prison and nearly got him executed. When he returned to the United States, his friends abandoned him, and his role as the eloquent voice of the Revolution was forgotten. He died penniless.

so the papers paid for by political parties did not necessarily deprive them of multiple points of view.

Besides granting preferential treatment to newspapers, the Post Office Act also forbade government agents from opening letters to monitor their contents and gave Congress control over determining the routes. Circulation of letters, pamphlets, and magazines as well as newspapers provided a conduit for expressing and learning about social issues and government actions. Madison declared that public opinion embodied the “real sovereign in every free government.”²⁹ In this spirit, the edict encouraged editors to exchange copies of their newspapers with each other at no cost. Therein, hopefully, despite where folks lived, they would participate in the grand public conversation about grassroots and national issues. Sharing stories concerning tragedies, celebrations, and political developments, as well as essays, poems and humorous fare instilled within scattered souls a sense of belonging to one nation rather than thirteen separate colonies.

Establishing a viable government required enabling the citizenry to serve as well-informed participants in the political process. Visionaries expected the telegraph to introduce new possibilities for trade, government, and journalism, thus, binding the nation together into a spider web of progress. Lloyd concludes that when Congress let private parties develop the “lightning wires,” policy shifted from increasing public awareness of politics to supporting capitalists. The U.S. Post Office served everyone regardless of social rank equally. Furthermore, government sponsorship kept costs low enough so that everybody could afford to mail letters. “[Samuel] Morse believed God had put him on earth to improve communication between distant people and nations.”³⁰ His messianic claims alienated pragmatic Senators so greatly that he waited five years before finally receiving federal assistance to develop a line between Baltimore and

²⁹ Lloyd, *Prologue to a Farce*, 30.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 40.

Washington, D. C. to test his invention. The first message he sent, “What hath God wrought?” reflected the aura of wonder and fear that surrounded the telegraph. Instead of reserving this remarkable capture of lightning for the public, the decision-makers permitted industry to control it, except for military applications. Regardless, the government offered private investors huge subsidies in the form of land grants and, later, did not break up the monopoly that dominated telegraphy, a vital system of national communication. This “pattern favoring what Madison calls the mercantile faction...supports a vibrant commercial market but weakens a democracy.”³¹

Faith in capitalism to altruistically protect the people’s right to exchange information and their venues for joining into the grand public conversation was unrealistic. It ignored the human flaw of greed. Accordingly, Alexis de Tocqueville observed during a visit to the United States in the early 1830’s that Americans worried lest their neighbors might get ahead materially and, consequently, constantly feared sinking, no matter how much they already owned.³² It wasn’t surprising then that left unregulated, the telegraph industry fell short of Morse’s dream that his “lightning lines” would create a “global village.” Sadly, instead of a shared resource that all classes could afford to use, the telegraph grew into another industrial bully that beat up its competitors whenever possible.³³ “Though a common carrier, [the telegraph] was not a truly public means of communication.”³⁴

The telegraph launched dozens of monopolies. One, the Associated Press, profoundly affected newspapers. Certainly, the band of AP reporters, who sent dispatches over the wire from remote as well as urban places, provided an essential service. Unfortunately, to keep prices high, AP franchises were offered to just one gazette in a circulation zone. This practice eroded

³¹ Ibid. 41.

³² Alexis de Tocqueville, “Chapter XIX: “What Causes Almost All Americans to Follow Industrial Callings,” *Democracy in America*, trans. George Lawrence, ed. J.P. Mayer (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1969) 264.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind*, 29.

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freedom of the press and contributed to the development of chain ownership of dailies. The citizen's right to read thorough and accurate news was not a factor in this strictly business equation. Likewise, by 1876, the Western Union telegraph trust and the Bell Telephone monopoly had marginalized small operators or driven them out of business.

Herbert Spencer's survival of the fittest theories provided the cloak of science as a justification for laissez faire. This doctrine declared that government must let the marketplace determine the fate of rivals. Demigods, like Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller, declared that survival of the fittest in business would send profits trickling down to the poor. Ironically, although they claimed to champion competition, Lloyd explains that the captains of industry maintained iron-fisted control of the government to wipe out threats from would-be challengers.³⁵ For example, through trusts, the bigwigs of industries, like steel, railroads, iron, sugar beets, and telephone, often absorbed their competition into subsidiary holding companies.

It was no wonder that reformers crusaded for the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890. However, since big business funded the candidates who won seats in state legislatures where the U.S. Senators were selected, the law was like a toothless lion. "Industrialists watched happily as the Sherman Antitrust Act was used primarily to block strikes and other union activities."³⁶

At the turn of the nineteenth century, a cadre of investigative reporters wrote in-depth chronicles about the misdeeds of the trusts. Ida M. Tarbell interviewed Rockefeller extensively for her expose that eventually forced him to break up the Standard Oil trust.³⁷ These Progressive

³⁵ Lloyd, *Prologue to a Farce*, 71.

³⁶ Ibid. Ironically, the mercantile sector subverted regulations intended to restore a balance between competing factions. Lloyd explains they could achieve this dubious goal by framing situations in the media to shift blame away from themselves. Industrialists especially relished targeting opponents.

³⁷ Ida M. Tarbell, *The History of the Standard Oil Company*, illustrated with portraits, pictures and diagrams (Gloucester, Mass.: P. Smith, 1937). It has been reprinted many times and is also available online at <http://www.history.rochester.edu/fuels/tarbell/MAIN.HTM>. See: *The History of The Standard Oil Company* by Ida M. Tarbell (New York: McClure, Phillips and Co. Copyright, 1904). It was converted to electronic format by Nalinda Sapukotana at the University of Rochester as a student project in a class about the history of energy; filed on 26 June 1996. The Pelletier Library of Allegheny College in Meadville, Pennsylvania, maintains the Tarbell archive with Jane Westenfeld in charge of the collection.

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Era crusaders lead the cry for change that resulted in legislation, including the Pure Food and Drug Act (1906). The public grew tired of the relentless demands for justice. President Theodore Roosevelt, who agreed with many of the journalists' points, accused them of lapsing into irresponsible and sensational reporting. This raid on the irresponsible in behalf of the public ended when Crowell Publishing Company bought *McClure's Magazine* in 1921. President Roosevelt belittled these civic journalists by comparing them to the muckraker in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, who preferred stirring up filth to gazing at celestial wonders. The label, muckraker, stuck. Roosevelt's condemnation reflects the blindly optimistic, simplistic notion that corporate excesses only surface if one chooses to roil in the mud rather than enjoy the glories of progress.

Although today most regard "muckraker" as a title of honor, Lloyd doubts that many journalists escape "seduction by the powerful" since conglomerates own newspapers, which must make a profit to stay in business.³⁸ Like a rigid mold, the early history of U.S. communication policy shaped radio, wireless, television, cable, satellite, and Internet communication. Each time, the government provided crucial support for development but then abandoned the invention to entrepreneurs, who successfully lobbied for biased legislation that emphasized the bottom line rather than democracy. Lloyd documents this advancement of progress thoroughly, illustrating how weak decisions have left Americans without a voice and without access to public forums for civic engagement.

It is beyond the scope of this article to mention every step along this path that has led to commercial domination of the media. Instead, I will focus on mistakes that have reverberated through the marketplace of ideas catastrophically. For instance, the demise of the Fairness

Tarbell graduated from Allegheny College in 1880. Her motto was: "Imagination is the only key to the future. Without it none exists—with it all things are possible."

³⁸ Lloyd, *Prologue to a Farce*, 87.

Doctrine of 1949, which tried to create a level playing field during election campaigns, signaled an alarming shift in priorities from educating voters to catering to corporate giants. Naturally, the Fairness Act cannot be understood outside its regulatory context. The Radio Act of 1927 was supposed to license stations to serve “the public interest, convenience, and necessity.”³⁹ Unfortunately, the Radio Commission assumed that noncommercial ventures devoted to education or labor amounted to propaganda and considered stations with advertisers independent, despite the obvious need to please sponsors. In the 1930s, famous radio newsman H. V. Kaltenborn observed that broadcasts were never uncensored: “In point of fact, radio has been extremely timid about permitting the broadcast of anything that contravenes the established order. Its influence has gone toward stabilization rather than change.”⁴⁰

The Federal Communication Act of 1934 replaced the Radio Act, which had to be renewed annually, with a permanent commission appointed to oversee broadcasting. Perhaps, its most public-spirited move was creating the 1949 Fairness Doctrine, which required broadcasters to offer candidates equal airtime. This ruling reflected democratic thinking. The National Broadcasters Association incorporated most of it into their code of ethics. “But the Fairness Doctrine, like earlier attempts at regulation, would not correct the fundamental error of leaving the responsibility of informing a democratic citizenry in the hands of commerce.”⁴¹ Edward R. Murrow’s *See It Now* program would set an ugly precedent--sponsor cancellation to avoid controversy. Decades later, as part of President Ronald Reagan’s deregulation strategy, Mark Fowler spearheaded the replacement of the long procedure for renewing station licenses with a postcard approach and gutted the Fairness Doctrine, which had required broadcasters to present a balanced view of controversial subjects by allowing all contenders an equal opportunity to speak.

³⁹ Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind*,” 80. The details in this paragraph were found on pages 81 and 82.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 81.

⁴¹ Lloyd, *Prologue to a Farce*, 138.

They claimed the rise of cable had solved the problem of limited airwaves. Nevertheless, they did not safeguard public-access channels or community ownership of cable services, which would have given local people an electronic public square for discussing political issues and participating in democracy.

The Reagan Administration packed the Supreme Court with conservatives who reversed the public-service obligations that President John F. Kennedy had asked the FCC to pursue in 1966. For instance, when public ascertainment rules that enabled citizens to testify at license-renewal hearings were abolished, parents lost a forum for complaining about violence, sex, or brainwashing in toy commercials aimed at children. “Perhaps, the most damaging cultural impact of the Reagan 1980s was a turn away from the common understanding that government is the solution to problems we cannot resolve as individuals.”⁴²

By the time President George W. Bush took office, a few media giants dominated the arena. His pro-business administration’s FCC ignored petitions from hundreds of thousands of citizens who did not want to lose diversity in local news and in 2003 reversed over three decades of stipulations that prohibited anyone from owning more than one newspaper in a town.⁴³ The two Democrats voted “no,” but the three Republicans outnumbered them. Moreover, the new standards permitted one company to possess a newspaper and television station in the same community, to purchase more than one TV station in the same town, and to buy more stations around the country. The results have been chilling:⁴⁴

In the absence of a local newspaper, a local radio news program, a local television station that covers local government, a local cable operation with the resources to actually cover local events, the vast majority of Americans live in communities where they have no popular information about either their local or state representatives.

⁴² Ibid. 216.

⁴³ Ibid. 238.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 239

Give Me the “Right” Facts--Two-Valued Orientation

Like a volcano that could explode at any moment, the mistrust of government and the media has seethed in U.S. society since the Colonial Era. To protect the citizenry from the whims of charismatic kings, the Founders invented a system of checks and balances that distributed power equally among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the federal government. Therein, no single faction could seize control. Law based on rational discourse and precedence, not loyalty or wealth, embodied the philosophical foundation for the Constitution. The press reported on the actions of public servants as well as on issues and events from many different perspectives.

Historically, news--the heartbeat of democracy-- circulates impartial reports of daily events, holds public officials accountable, and keeps the body politic alive. Today, ideologues trample that tradition of serving the public through telling the truth, even when reality is ugly enough to challenge prevailing assumptions of U.S. cultural superiority or national infallibility. Clever corporate behemoths and conservative extremists equate “news” with settling grudges and shaping citizens’ thoughts. Instead of focusing on leaders’ behavior and service in the public arena, these red-herring hawkers pry into personal lives, manufacture scandals, and shift the focus of discussion away from policy on to character.⁴⁵ Openly biased news outlets, like the Fox network and MSNBC, reduce the news to clashes between good and evil in which only one faction behaves heroically.

Al Gore, David Brock, and Thomas Frank have recently published books exploring the bizarre union of politics, media, and religion. Each underscores the incongruity of the Fox network’s claim to present fair and balanced coverage while distorting information to reflect the

⁴⁵ Jack Hitt analyzes Hilliary Clinton’s changes of self-image and the public response to her that usually involves emotion more than rational thought in “Harpy, Hero, Heretic Hillary: Why She Stokes Our Deepest Fears and Darkest Hatreds,” *Mother Jones*, 32:1 (Jan/Feb 2007) found online 4 May 2007 at www.motherjones.com/news/feature/2007/01/harpy_hero_heretic_hillary.html

far right's agenda. Every day, Fox's executives send morning memos as well as phone editors and staff members to specify the preferred position for news accounts. Instead of basing the story on information from sources, Fox reporters must concoct narratives that fit conservative perspective, taking care to present the Bush Administration in the most positive light possible. Pundits engage in name-calling and bullying tactics to discredit Democrats, professors, environmentalists, activists, reformers, and authors whose work fails to fit into Fox's narrow imprint of American values.

Fox's emphasis on creed rather than veracity violates standard definitions of news as opinion-free, accurate accounts. "The purpose of journalism is to provide people with the information that they need to be free and self-governing."⁴⁶ In *The Assault on Reason*, Al Gore concluded that an open marketplace of ideas cannot exist if voices are deliberately muzzled or distorted.⁴⁷ David Brock describes his experiences as a spin doctor for the far right in *The Republican Noise Machine*. He left the Republican Party in the late 1990s and wrote a memoir exposing the relentless covert campaign to discredit the Clintons that Fox and other extremist media ventures orchestrated. He explains:⁴⁸

I know there is a Republican Noise Machine because I was once part of it. From the *Washington Times*, to a stint as a "research fellow" at the Heritage Foundation (the Right's premier think tank), to a position as an "investigative writer" at the muckraking magazine *The American Spectator*, and as the author of a best-selling right-wing book, I forwarded the right-wing agenda not as open political operative or advocate but under the guise of journalism and punditry, fueled by huge sums of money from right-wing billionaires, foundations, and self-interested corporations.

⁴⁶ The Missouri Group [Brian S. Brooks, George Kennedy, Daryl R. Moen, and Don Ranly], *News Reporting and Writing* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2005) 7.

⁴⁷ Al Gore, *The Assault on Reason* (New York: Penguin, 2005) 5.

⁴⁸ Brock, *The Republican Noise Machine: Right Wing Media and How It Corrupts Democracy*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2004) 3.

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Brock points out that “lies, smears, and vicious caricatures” aimed at the Clintons in the right-wing media seeped into the mainstream news outlets, despite traditional practices, like objectivity. Passing on accusations without thoroughly investigating them ignores the reporters’ first obligation, telling the truth, and their first loyalty, serving the public.⁴⁹ Obviously, when journalists bleat with the herd whatever everyone else is saying, they break the professional editorial duty of developing enough discipline to meticulously verify details. For example, to this day, many Americans believe that Gore claimed to have invented the Internet. Actually, he said, “During my service in the United States Congress, I took the initiative in creating the Internet.”⁵⁰ He was referring to his tireless and often solo efforts to convince his colleagues to fund research into making the government network a civic conduit. Even Newt Gingrich verified Gore’s role in developing the computer resource for citizens; nevertheless, the tide of misinformation swelled into a malicious lie that damaged the senator’s credibility during his run for the presidency in 2000. Although before the election, Gore’s peers respected his integrity, a Republican Party press release accused him of lying.

“The right-wing media broadcast this attack and similar attacks relentlessly, in effect giving the GOP countless hours of free political advertising every day for months leading up to the election.”⁵¹ Then, one of the most trusted newspapers in the land, *The Wall Street Journal*, which in truth serves the corporate world--not the public--issued an editorial accusing Gore of being a liar. Soon other conservative venues, like the *New York Post* (owned by Rupert Murdoch), *The National Review*, and *The Washington Times* as well as columnist George F. Will repeated the slander and added that Gore must be delusional. Sadly, *The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe*, and ABC’s *This Week* accepted the charges without examining them and without

⁴⁹ The Missouri Group, *News Reporting and Writing*, 7-8. They list impartiality and independence as crucial traits of journalism.

⁵⁰ Brock, *The Republican Noise Machine*, 5.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

exposing Bush's exaggerations about his performance as governor of Texas. Not surprisingly, many voters perceived Gore as dishonest and untrustworthy while thinking Bush more truthful.

⁵²

The transfusions of right-wing propaganda into the mainstream via pack journalism sometimes originates with radio talk hosts, lead by Rush Limbaugh, who claims to "redefine the media," creating an echo that resounds through the rest of the press within a day. He does not call himself a newsman, but his political commentary often incorporates news items. In one breath he denounces *The New York Times* and *Washington Post* but in the next quotes from them. His enormous popularity proves that he does appeal to the disgruntled. However, Limbaugh openly supports the far right. Unlike professional journalists, he neither remains independent from sources nor strives to impartially monitor the powerful.⁵³ In truth, he panders to the meanest inclinations and basest prejudices of his audience. "Limbaugh's broadcast was a daily demonstration of what his listeners wanted to hear--or, to put it another way, what they found missing in the regular media: relentless attacks on liberals and liberalism, sexism bordering on misogyny, overt or subtle racism, and gay bashing."⁵⁴

Limbaugh's bombastic rhetoric complements the goal of media outlets, like Fox, which promote a particular political faction that converts elections into morality plays with heroes (Bush, ultraconservative Republicans) and villains (Gore, any liberals). This two-valued orientation undermines open-minded discussion necessary for voting rationally. S.I. Hayakawa warned that the most fundamental compulsion in humans is to divide the world into two categories: us or them, survival or extinction, hot or cold, full or hungry. This simplification denies that other alternatives exist. In his book, *Language in Thought and Action*, Hayakawa

⁵² The Missouri Group, *News Reporting and Writing*, 7.

⁵³ Brock, *The Republican Noise Machine*, 265.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

explained: “Much popular political thought, like the plots of television westerns, views the world as divided into ‘good guys’ and ‘bad guys’--those who believe in ‘one-hundred-per-cent Americanism’ as opposed to those who harbor ‘un-American bias.’”⁵⁵ President George W. Bush invoked similar phrasing to justify shifting attention away from Afghanistan and Osama bin Laden toward Saddam Hussein:⁵⁶

He offered Americans a way to cut through the complexities of foreign policy by sorting every nation in the world into two simple categories: “You’re either with us or against us.” He described Iraq as part of “the axis of evil” and offered forged evidence that Hussein was seeking to develop atomic bombs.

Very few if any editors or commentators challenged Bush’s declaration that the United States must crusade “to rid the world of evil.”⁵⁷ Consumers prefer complicated issues boiled down into quick dramas featuring “‘us’ against forces that would do us in.”⁵⁸ Not surprisingly, bestsellers about the mass media cast it as a ne’er-do-well, despite the poor choices consumers make that contribute to shortcomings in news as well as entertainment. Naturally, this dualistic way of seeing things constitutes an archetypal plot Americans unconsciously share: “Bad” stuff happens because outsiders or alien forces intend to destroy the United States. On the other hand, “good” occurs solely through the efforts of individuals.⁵⁹ Lee Thayer points out that “our whole social fabric is infused with this philosophy.”⁶⁰ Even commercials present mini-dramas pitting the protagonist against physical opponents (dirt, bacteria, and calories) or psychological foes (loneliness, despair, or loss of face).

⁵⁵ S.I. Hayakawa and Alan R. Hayakawa, *Language in Thought and Action*, fifth ed., intro. Robert MacNeil (New York: Harcourt, [First Harvest Edition] 1990) 113. Also see: William A. Glaser, “The Semantics of the Cold War,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 20:4 (Winter 1956-57): 691-716, and Peter Kerkhof, “Commentaries: Applying the Unimodel to Political Persuasion,” *Psychological Inquiry*, 10:3 (1999): 137-140.

⁵⁶ Gore, *The Assault on Reason*, 54.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 56.

⁵⁸ Lee Thayer, ed., *Ethics, Morality, and the Media: Reflections on American Culture* (New York: Hastings House, 1980). The content of this paragraph originates in Thayer’s comments on “Our Cultural Penchant for the Dramatic,” 10-12.

⁵⁹ Thayer, *Ethics, Morality, and the Media*, 11-12.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 11.

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Television naturally embraces archetypes and histrionics that capture people's imagination. The shift away from the diverse marketplace of ideas toward a tightly engineered minstrel show masquerading as news threatens the existence of democracy.⁶¹ Although people have viewed every innovation in communication as a portal to hell bound to corrupt children, erode public decency, brainwash users, and unleash unscrupulous commercial forces, the present crisis is different. The message, not the medium, has alarmed many citizens because "news" no longer ideally means impartial coverage. Certainly, Gaye Tuchman and others have argued that it is impossible for journalists to be objective. Nevertheless, it is feasible for them to admit their biases and invoke professional practices to keep their work balanced and fair. Ironically, Fox has made "balanced and fair" its slogan but trashed those tenets of journalism by selecting and grooming items to fit political guidelines. Mainstream reporters strive to accurately present the facts.

Fox sometimes lies to viewers.⁶² Matt Gross, a former editor at Foxnews.com observed: "The facts of a story just didn't matter at all."⁶³ Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) found that Fox created shows, like *Tongue-Tied* and the *Political Grapevine*, to showcase conservative ideology with the depiction of Democrats as scoundrels and Republicans as either victims or heroes.⁶⁴ On the other hand, Bill O'Reilly, one of Fox's star pundits, insists that Fox

⁶¹ Jay Black, "Hardening of the Articles: An Ethicist Looks at Propaganda in Today's News," Ethics Institute Keynote Address, the Knight Program in the Ethics of Journalism, 9 March 2001, at Washington and Lee University at http://journalism.wlu.edu/knight/Institute/black.html#_ftn1

⁶² Brock, *The Republican Noise Machine*, 313. He refers to Al Franken's book, *Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them: A Fair and Balanced Look at the Right* (On page 316, Brock notes, "'Opinion' was a way of winning equal billing for often false, offensive, and absurd viewpoints that had trouble gaining legitimacy in straight-news formats." He warns on the next page, "Around the clock, FOX news offered opinion, not news."

⁶³ Ibid. 320.

⁶⁴ Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) was started in 1986 by Jeff Cohan. He explains on the web site, <http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=105> why he thinks FAIR is necessary: "Independent, aggressive, and critical media are essential to an informed democracy. But mainstream media are increasingly cozy with the economic and political powers they should be watchdogging. Mergers in the news industry have accelerated, further limiting the spectrum of viewpoints that have access to mass media. With U.S. media outlets overwhelmingly owned by for-profit conglomerates and supported by corporate advertisers, independent journalism is compromised. Ultimately, FAIR believes that structural reform is needed to break up the

provides a forum for voices the rest of the media ignores. CNN and *The Washington Post* not only regularly interview folks opposed to abortion but also personalities from FOX. “Fox news is anything but fair and balanced when it comes to political guests.”⁶⁵ FAIR counted fifty Republican among the fifty-six partisans Brit Hume talked with on his daily show, *Special Report*. In the same time span, however, Wolf Blitzer’s CNN program, *The Situation Room*, featured thirty-eight Republicans and twenty-nine Democrats.⁶⁶

Often instead of or before FOX, CNN, PBS, and the traditional broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, NBC); my students have listed late-night and standup comedy routines as well as *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart as trustworthy newscasts. In an interview on CNN’s *Crossfire*, Jon Stewart pointed out that people should recognize the difference between entertainment and news.⁶⁷ To win over viewers, the evening news as well as other TV shows, sometimes blend news with amusement.⁶⁸ “It really matters,” Gore explains. “The subjugation of news by entertainment seriously harms our democracy: It leads to dysfunctional journalism that fails to inform the people. And when the people are not informed, they cannot hold government accountable when it is incompetent, corrupt, or both.”⁶⁹

Years ago, Neil Postman predicted that Americans would amuse themselves to death by turning on television instead of reading, interacting with others, and participating in democracy.

⁷⁰ He noted that lasting solutions to social and spiritual problems emerge through invoking

dominant media conglomerates, establish independent public broadcasting, and promote strong, nonprofit alternative sources of information.”

⁶⁵ Gore, *The Assault on Reason*, 324.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Lisa DeMoraes, “Jon Stewart, Again in the Crossfire,” *The Washington Post* (19 October 2004), C07 also online at www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A43775-2004Oct18.htm l.

⁶⁸ W. Lance Bennett, “Beyond Pseudoevents: Election News as Reality TV,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 22, pp. 171-177 also online at www.tandf.co.uk

⁶⁹ Gore, *The Assault on Reason*, 17.

⁷⁰ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Viking, 1985). His three books explore the folly of expecting inventions to solve moral dilemmas. The media critic died on 5 October 2003. His

human values, not applying technology. In fact, some inventions may harm consumers. For instance, Robert D. Putnam warns that television may contribute to the breakdown of community life because instead of playing on teams, sports enthusiasts are staying home to watch professional athletes.⁷¹ He notes that social capital or one's connections with others has declined drastically since the turn of the century. Participation in bowling leagues, grassroots politics, school organizations, and nearly all other civic ventures that require spending time at meetings no longer appeals to a tuned-in populace who often find companionship on the Internet or staying home with the family to watch TV.

“It is not newspaper readership, but interest in the news per se that is declining generationally...In recent years, the falloff in the audience for network news has been even faster than the decline in newspaper readers,” Putnam concluded.⁷² Most people spend far more time watching television than in socializing with others; even spouses devote three to four times more attention to their favorite programs than to conversing with each other. Since many families own more than one set, members frequently view shows alone. “At least half of all Americans

eloquent appeals to reason won him admirers across generations. In a PBS online forum posted on 17 January 1996, he commented: “Undoubtedly, the new technology can never substitute for human values. The dilemma is not new, however. Do we use our knowledge of nuclear fission to make a bomb, or for power to heat our houses, or for medicine to heal people? Knowledge, i.e. technology, without a moral underpinning becomes chaos, just as democracy without ethical values is chaos. Vaclav Havel wrote a magnificent essay along these lines published last year in *First Things*. Why do we think technology is above morality in the first place? The real question is, how should I conduct my life?--rather than-- what tools should I use?”

⁷¹ Robert D. Putnam, “1995 Annual Meeting Highlights, The 1995 Ithiel de Sola Pool Lecture, “Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America,” *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 28:4 (Dec., 1995), pp. 664-683; Gary Alan Fine, Tim Hallett, and Michael Sauder, “Myths and Meanings of Bowling Alone,” *Current*, 373, (June 1995), p. 47-49; and Richard Stengal and Ann Blackman, “Bowling Together,” *Time*, 148:5 (22 July 1996) at www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,984889,00.htm

⁷² Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, “Chapter 12: Technology and Mass Media,” (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000) 219-220. Also see: Scott L. McLean, David A. Schultz, and Manfred B. Steger, eds., *Social Capital: Critical Perspectives on Community and “Bowling Alone”* (New York: New York University Press, 2002); Henry Milner, *Civic Literacy: How Informed Citizens Make Democracy Work* (Hanover, N.H.: The University Press of New England, 2002); Scott L. McLean, David A. Schultz, and Manfred B. Steger, *Social Capital: Critical Perspectives on “Bowling Alone”* (New York: New York University Press, 2002); and Robert D. Putnam and Lewis M. Feldstein, *Better Together: Restoring the American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003).

usually watch by themselves, one study suggests, while according to another, one-third of all television viewing is done entirely alone.”⁷³

The average American watches four and a half hours of television every day. The BBC reported in 2005 that typical Americans spend more time watching TV than sleeping and a third of them use more than one form of electronic media at once, especially computers and Blackberries to go online.⁷⁴ Indeed, The National Endowment for the Arts has concluded that fewer than half of American adults read one novel, short story, or play a year unless filling a requirement for work or school.⁷⁵

Gore suggests that the shift from print to electronic media has left citizens vulnerable to fear campaigns and argues convincingly that the Bush Administration helped Republicans win the 2002 election by galvanizing anxiety around the War in Iraq and the threat from terrorists.⁷⁶ Understanding the threat of extremists does not justify exaggerating the danger with phony documents and false arguments. Such tactics convince people that nuclear strikes on their cities are imminent, sparking panic and irrational actions that eclipse democracy. Fears should be discussed logically, honestly, and responsibly. Certainly, Bush’s image of an “evil axis” triggers

⁷³ Ibid. 224. He cited these sources: Paul William Kingston and Stephen L. Nock, “Time Together Among Dual Earner Couples,” *American Sociological Review* 52 (June 1987): 391-400; Cliff Zucken, *Generation X and the News* (Radio and Television News Directors Foundation, 1977); Diane Crispell, “TV Soloist,” *American Demographics*, May 1997, 32; Robert Kubey and Mihaley Csikszentmihalyi, *Television and the Quality of Life: How Television Shapes Everyday Experience* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1990); *Kids & Media: The New Millennium* (Menlo Park, CA: Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 1999) 13.

⁷⁴ Peter Feuilherade, “TVs and PCs ‘Take Over U.S. Homes,’” BBC News, 7 October 2005 found on 1 June 2007 at news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/technology/431831.stm

⁷⁵ Dan Barry, “A Requiem for Reading in a Smoldering Pyre of Books,” National Desk, “THIS LAND,” *The New York Times* (4 June 2007) sec. 1:col. 1, 28. In the article, with the Kansas City, Missouri, dateline, the owners of a used bookstore staged a protest against the decline in reading by attempting to burn several cartoons of the fifty thousand books in their inventory, hoping to kindle interest in literature. Their fizzled bonfire drew attention to their problem of avalanches of books coming into the store and few being purchased. Within a day, they had received five thousand e-mails, including a request from a soldier serving in Iraq.

⁷⁶ Gore, *The Assault on Reason*, 42.

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archetypes of the *Star Wars* cinema variety in which the noble space knights defeat nefarious forces, including satanic figures.⁷⁷

The blurring of religion with policy could create a state religion, eliminating freedom for individuals to choose if and how they wish to worship. Gore denounces claims of any U.S. government official to rule by divine right as blasphemy.⁷⁸ The power to govern, in America, comes from the people who participate in deliberative processes. Decision makers rule through the consent of the citizenry and must abide by the rule of law. “As John Adams first wrote in Massachusetts, we are ‘a government of laws, not of men.’...We may be endowed with individual rights by our Creator, but we act to protect those rights and govern our nation with the instrument of reason.”⁷⁹

Bogus piety emphasizing revenge and evil over forgiveness and compassion appeals to the conspiracy archetype of “us against them” in which brave heroes battle cowardly but potent enemies. The bifurcated assumption allows no middle ground, empathy, or compromise because the “bad guys” do nothing but wrong and whatever the “good guys” do is “right.” Naturally, laws crumble under the weight of irrationality. The president calmly declares abuses privacy) essential to homeland security. Most of the media support him. Congress passes the Patriot Act, which undermines the Bill of Rights by authorizing the government to spy on any citizen at any time through monitoring (like the torture of prisoners in Cuba and other places, the rejection of the Geneva Convention, and denial of phone calls, Internet messages, and library visits. But the

⁷⁷ Online, 1,670,000 hits relate to “Star Wars and Myth,” including “Move Over, Odysseus, Here Comes Luke Skywalker,” by *St. Petersburg Times* film critic, Steve Persall at www.folkstory.com/articles/petersburg.html, which is Jonathan Young’s web site. Young describes himself as a “psychologist and storyteller, who assisted Joseph Campbell at seminars and served as founding curator of the *Joseph Campbell Archives and Library*. Dr. Young now gives presentations internationally on the mythic imagination.” The History Channel produced a two-hour documentary to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the motion pictures. The Smithsonian Traveling Exhibition features pieces from the 1999 museum showcase and will continue the U.S. tour through 2008. The Smithsonian exhibit closed on 31 January 1999. Virtual tour: www.nasm.si.edu/exhibitions/StarWars/start.htm Mary Henderson wrote the companion book for the exhibit, *Star Wars: The Magic of Myth* (New York: Bantam Books, 1997). *Star Wars* novels exist for young readers as well as adults.

⁷⁸ Gore, *The Assault on Reason*, 50-51.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

hate frenzy cannot masquerade indefinitely as a crusade for justice, especially beyond U.S. borders. Denying combatants and visitors accused of espionage human rights, eavesdropping, and holding American citizens without due process erodes global respect for our nation. The eclipse of the law also chips away at the ethical basis of our way of life.

Conclusions: News or Parade of Archetypes in a Morality Play?

Generally, archetypes enrich our lives by empowering us to see ourselves as the protagonists in the epic of our lives. The prototypes connect us to our ancestors and provide a guiding light through the darkest nights of uncertainty and despair. However, when gossip and wishful thinking replace the grand public conversation that determines our laws and policies through rational deliberation, democracy stumbles. When news becomes views, people lose their compass for negotiating reality via their internal library of archetypes. In a world without facts, prejudices triumph. Moreover, citizens lose their power to hold elected officials accountable.

Consider the designation of the United States of American as a collection of red and blue states. The colors reflect which party won the electoral college of votes. It is not based on the popular vote, which was close. Yet, since the 2000 election, the “us” and “them” archetype has taken a new, ugly dimension that divides Americans into just two exclusive categories based on where they live. At the 1992 Republican National Convention, Chairman Newt Gingrich proclaimed, “We are America. Those other people are not.” To make certain no one in the television audience misunderstood his charge, he described the Democrats as “the enemy of normal Americans.”⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won The Heart of America* (New York: Holt, 2005) 13. Gingrich's comments originated here. However, writing for *The Washington Post*, John Schwartz pointed out that Gore might deserve credit. Here is part of the story: “David J. Farber, a professor of computer science at the University of Pennsylvania and one of the early players in the Internet, said that along with the importance of his legislative initiatives, Gore popularized the emerging medium worldwide. Gore aligned himself with high tech long before every lawmaker boasted of his or her personal Web site. He helped popularize the term ‘information superhighway,’ drawing on the symbolism of his father's hand in creating the interstate-highway system. Vinton G. Cerf, a senior vice president at MCI Worldcom and the person most often called ‘the father of the Internet’ for his part in designing the network's common computer language, said in an e-mail interview yesterday, ‘I

As the votes were tallied on election eve in 2000, the networks colored the Republican victories red and the Democrat triumphs blue. The map revealed huge patches of red and coastal spots of blue. It did not reflect the fact that in all states supporters voted heavily for each candidate. Instead, the pundits saw a sharply divided country.

In *What's the Matter with Kansas? How the Conservatives Won the Heart of America*, Thomas Frank investigated the backlash against the civil rights movement, affirmative action, and the women's movement that had polarized the republic enough to generate a map with Republican dominance in usually Democratic strongholds.⁸¹ He found the unifying factor was a conspiracy theory blaming all problems on the liberal media, Eastern snobs, and pointy-headed intellectuals. "The leaders of the backlash may talk Christ but they walk corporate."⁸² Their following believes that the narrative of the wealthy as victims and the displacement of the white male trickles down to them. They long for a past that never existed. They seek a future that will not happen because the coalition of stakeholders draws its unity from stereotypes, racism, homophobia, and misogyny. The result is chaos.⁸³

Here is a movement whose response to the inexorable degradation of working-class life is to lash out angrily at labor unions and liberal workplace-safety programs; whose solution to the rise of ignorance in America is to pull the rug out from under public education.

think it is very fair to say that the Internet would not be where it is in the United States without the strong support given to it and related research areas by the vice president in his current role and in his earlier role as senator." See: John Schwartz, "Gore Deserves Internet Credit, Some Say," *The Washington Post*, 21 March 1999, p. A4. Also at www.google.com/search?q=Newt+Gingrich+Internet+Gore&hl=en&client=safari&rls=en&start=10&sa=N

⁸¹ Michael Fuhlhage, "Here's the Matter with Kansas: General Semantics, Thomas Frank, and Contemporary Midwest Politics," *General Semantics Bulletin*, 73 (2006) pp. 26-31.

⁸² Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas?* 6.

⁸³ *Ibid.* 7.

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These people from America's Heartland take comfort in the two-valued fable of two Americas too deeply divided to heal through unification. Recent *New York Times* articles have repeated the idea of two Americas--one red and one blue. The red states contain formerly Democratic blocks in the South and Midwest. Of course, the pundits ignored any blue states in these regions because they did not fit into the color code. The blue states hugged the old aristocratic lands along the East Coast and the hedonistic communities along the West Coast. In this mythology, "the plain people, the grassroots Americans..." who embodied "humility, guilelessness, and, above all, stout yeomen righteousness" watched Nascar, listened to country music, and voted for George W. Bush. On the other hand, the Democrats were elitists, sophisticated, wealthy, and materialistic."⁸⁴ Worst of all, they drank lattes, drove Volvos, and ate sushi!⁸⁵ Bush did not win the popular vote, but that did not stop the buzz machine from perpetuating the "Tale of Two Americas." The conservative pundits who lived in blue states had the audacity to pretend to confess to the sins of the liberals around them. However, James Wolcott, political analyst for *Vanity*, noted holes in the color scheme:⁸⁶

If the blue states are sinkholes of decay, as the right-wing pundits insist, how come red states lead the nation in violent crime, divorce, illegitimacy, and incarceration among other evils? To a bus-riding innocent on Manhattan's stroller-filled Upper West Side, it looks like a case of hypocrisy meets stupidity.

When propaganda, like the red and blue state baloney, replaces logical analysis of events, democracy suffers. Name-calling replaces intelligent conversation, and hate, rather than respect,

⁸⁴ Ibid. 16-17.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ James Wolcott, "Politics: Red State Babylon," *Vanity Fair* (November 2006) available online at www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2006/11/wolcott200611?currentPage=4 Also see: Marc Kaufman, "Plan B Battles Embroil States: Proposals Mirror Red-Blue State Divide," *Washington Post*, 27 February 2006, A01; Chuck Raasch, "'Red States,' 'Blue States' Return," *USA Today* (2007) copyright 2007 USA TODAY, a division of Gannett Co., Inc. Available online at www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/columnist/raasch/2004-04-15-raasch_x.htm?POE=click-refer; Cate Malek, "Red/Blue Polarization," *Beyond Intractability*, ed. Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess, July 2005, Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado, online at http://www.beyondintractability.org/case_studies/Red_Blue.jsp; and Justin Cord Hayes wrote a humorous book with flip up pages, *Blue State/Red State* (Avon, MA: Adams Media, 2006).

drives the public conversation.⁸⁷ In a perversion of sacred shared narratives, candidates ascend to mythic levels.⁸⁸ “No president has worked harder than George W. Bush to tell his story as a spectacle, much of it, fictional, to rivet his constituents while casting himself in an unfailingly heroic light.”⁸⁹ The red and blue state distinctions reinforce the reduction of politics into a fairy tale as well as reflect Rush Limbaugh’s tirade against those who dare to think outside the far-right box. “I think liberalism is a scourge. It destroys the human spirit. It destroys economies. It destroys prosperity. It assigns sameness to everybody.”⁹⁰

Nevertheless, Limbaugh and others--who replace facts with misinformation and relish insulting enemies rather than upholding the rights of others--are most likely to destroy the human spirit, economies, and prosperity, as well as enforce conformity. The ultimate irony of the far-right conservative media is its destiny to practice the tactics it deems unsuitable in the targets of its invective. By manipulating archetypes and reducing political complexities into a morality play, pundits and propagandists masquerading as journalists puff up with self-righteousness, wrap up in the American flag, bear false witness, and worship corporate idols. Ergo, the hostility between red and blue factions erodes trust and makes meaningful exchanges of ideas unlikely if not impossible. Talk-radio shouting matches do not enable participants to listen to each other and, thus, implement meaningful changes forged from common ground and new insights. An informed electorate who participates in discussions of public affairs has written the traditional

⁸⁷ Brock, *The Republican Noise Machine*, 339. He said that guests on the O’Reilly Factor have been called “insane,” “idiot,” “geek,” “dopey,” and “stupid.” Bill O’Reilly also has referred to “pointy-headed professors,” “wet backs” (Mexicans illegally crossing the border), and “demonizers and witch hunters.” (See page 340).

⁸⁸ Jonathan Chait, “Character Flaw: Republicans Go Weak-Kneed for Tough Guys,” *The New Republic*, 7 May 2007, 236:15, p. 5; Arnie! Arnie!” *Economist*, 10 November 2003, 369:8345, pp. 29-30; and Daron Shaw, Mark J. McKenzie, and Jeffrey Underwood, “Strategic Voting in the California Recall Election,” *American Politics Research*, 32:2 (March 2005): 216-245.

⁸⁹ Frank Rich, “Decision 2004: Fear Fatigue Vs. Sheer Fatigue,” *The New York Times*, 31 October 2004, sec. 2, p.1.

⁹⁰ Brock, *The Republican Noise Machine*, 265.

story of American democracy; however, unless citizens respect each other, the plot will segue into totalitarianism.

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