



PROPAGANDA

REVIEW

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Number 2

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Measuring the American Mind

Nina Eliasoph

Jewish Souls Arab Bones

James Zogby

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Propaganda Activism

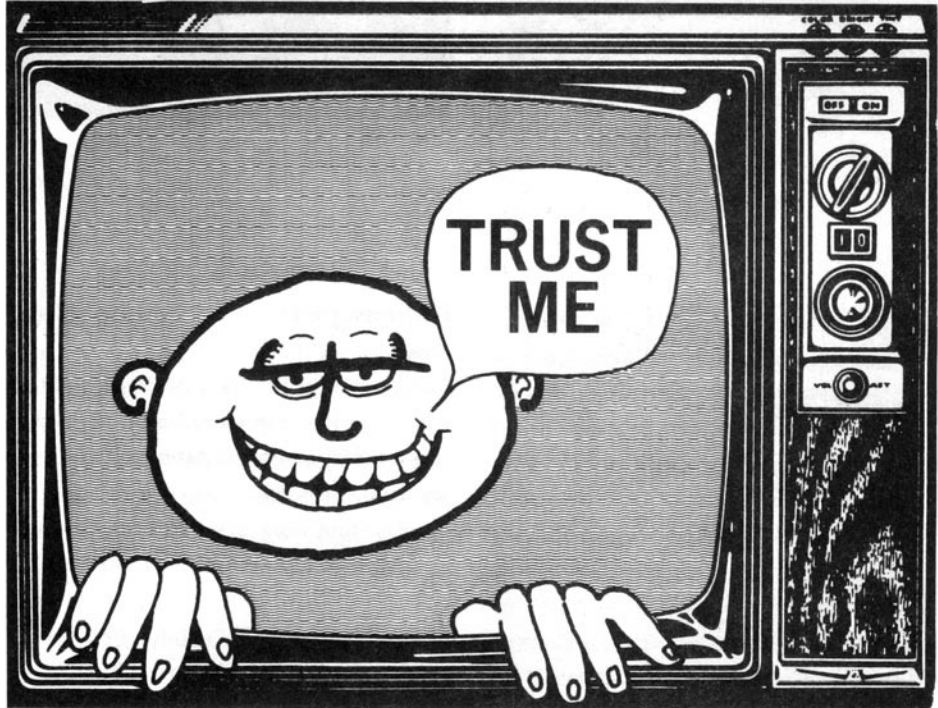
MARCY DARNOVSKY

In *Propaganda Review* Number 1, we moved away from narrow definitions of propaganda toward a concept of a social pervasive “propaganda environment.” Lots of questions about the propaganda environment are unresolved, lots of exploring remains to be done. But our aim broader than to document an intellectual journey, however exciting it may be. We care about propaganda because it gets in the way not just of our efforts to understand the world, but of our every attempt to change it.

We hope that *Propaganda Review* will be useful both in developing a sophisticated analysis of the propaganda environment and as a source of ideas for challenging it. Together with the growing number of groups working on these matters, we’re looking for effective modes of dissent.

In this society, the legitimacy of power requires the “consent of the governed.” Among the consequences: political and cultural institutions devote tremendous resources to manufacturing that consent; public relations experts and image makers determine how we vote, what we buy and think and feel, how we dress and live. By molding perceptions and behavior so thoroughly, propaganda has helped create a world in which it can fend off efforts to change that world.

This conundrum challenges even the best well-intentioned and sophisticated efforts at social change. Whatever the focus of those efforts, one of the crucial tasks to persuade others—lots of others—to a point of view. That means using posters, pollsters, mass media, direct mail, public relations. And why not? Why should those who



Courtesy of the NCTE Committee on Public Doublespeak

dissent from the established order deprive themselves of the modern means of persuasion? The question is whether these techniques of mass communication can be divorced from the shallowness and manipulateness of propaganda, and whether one takes on the characteristics of one’s opponents by adopting their methods.

The labyrinthine pervasiveness of the propaganda problem makes it difficult and frustrating to come up with political strategies to fight it. Fortunately, a few models for action are at hand. Groups like Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), Media Alliance (PR’s own parent

organization), and others (including on you’ll read about in our regular Resource section) are carefully documenting and challenging political bias in the news media.

It’s possible to imagine this work inspiring a full-blown activism that takes on the whole propaganda environment addressing issues of form as well as content, and strong and radical enough to make use of a full range of protest tactics including direct action. In future issues we’ll expand and explore this sketchy description of propaganda activism. We invite you to contribute your thoughts.

Thanks, Please, We’re Sorry

The response to *Propaganda Review* has been gratifying. A large batch of letters from readers were very nearly unanimous in their enthusiasm. Subscription returns are also arriving at a good clip—please, please, keep them coming, tell your friends, notify your bookstore and librarian. And we’ve received lots of other support, both material and moral, without which we could not have come this far.

Along with our delight and gratitude, however, we must offer an apology for the delay in getting this issue to you. We ask that you understand the nature of the project: an undertaking carried out almost entirely by volunteers, a labor of love. We’re aiming for a regular quarterly publication schedule, but unfortunately we promise that immediately. Of course, subscriptions are based on the number of issues you receive—four of them to be precise—rather than on calendar time.

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Controversy Astir

Thank you for the copy of Propaganda Review. It is first-rate, and badly needed in this country, where it promises to stir up some controversy.

Nabeel Abraham
Dearborn, MI

Study Groups

Your publication arrived today. Good material. Critical task. Thank you.

Will you grant permission to copy material to share with a study group of clergy I work with?

Bob Williams
Clarinda, IA

Editor's note: We'd be thrilled. Our policy is that material from Propaganda Review may be copied for educational or not-for-profit purposes providing the source (including subscription information) is clearly indicated. We can also arrange bulk rates for these purposes. And we'd love to hear about what happens in your study group-or in any other projects dealing with propaganda, media, or popular culture.

Waiting

At last there is a light at the end of the Orwellian/Reagan tunnel. I have been waiting for you for a good ten years.

Ruth Perk
Carbondale, IL

More Waiting

Thank you for this publication, which should have started years ago. You say, "We've

entered the age of propaganda." Not true. We've utilized propaganda for decades, through commercials to sell products and through politics. When I was a student at the University of Washington in Seattle in the 1950s, we had a course in propaganda in the Sociology Department. Thank you for illuminating this "environment."

Candace Kilchenman
Berkeley, CA

Lighten Up

I was very impressed with the first issue of Propaganda Review, particularly Marcy Darnovsky's mix of situationist philosophy and mainstream media ankle-biting. May I suggest you take on a slightly more light-hearted tone a la Processed World in order to avoid taking yourselves too seriously. I think the fun graphics of the premiere issue were a big positive step in that direction.

Loring Wirbel
San Carlos, CA

Me Worry?

"Marketing Reagan" was a revelation. In American history, periods or episodes of revolutionary potential are followed by mobilizations of reactionary ideological resources, especially the ability to manipulate popular sentiment with the communication structures at hand. Thus Jacksonian democracy is followed by the Whig triumph of 1840 (the "Log Cabin and Hard Cider" campaign of "Tippecanoe and Tyler too"); the Populist revolt by the adroit manipulations of Mark Hanna in

1896; the post-World War I capitalist crisis with the Harding “return to normalcy.”

Weak, malleable presidential regimes backed by state-of-the-art political propaganda superstructures are the common characteristic.

While there is a particularly frightening aspect to Wirthlin’s technological refinements, they will prove no more effective than past efforts to halt the long-term movements of historical progress.

Robert S. Dombroski
Northstreet, MI

Of Singing Ads

I had the opportunity to read the first issue of your magazine and I, a college student on a budget, decided I must subscribe! I am very impressed with the focus and quality of the articles. Just a few days after I read in Propaganda Review that microchips creating singing ads were to be enclosed in advertisements, I was at a friend’s home when the mail was delivered. In their very Jewish home, canned Christmas music was mysteriously heard throughout the house. The afternoon became a hysterical hunt to discover the source of the electronic carols.

Eventually The New Yorker was discovered to be the culprit. When opened, the Absolut Vodka ad beeped music. My friend’s family and I were entertained by the gimmick, but it caused us to wonder about the extent of financial burden incurred by Absolut Vodka. We hoped you could solve that mystery for us. We would appreciate it greatly.

Jessica Greene Cabin
John, MD

Limits Of Debate

I think that one of the most interesting angles on free speech is to explore the limits on acceptable speech as they actually operate. I’ll give you an example of what I mean from my own high school experience, when I was on the debate team.

In 1959, while Congress was considering the Landrum-Griffin Bill to impose government standards on the internal operations of trade unions, the matter for dispute among Michigan debating teams was “Resolved: That Congress should enact legislation regulating the internal operations of trade unions.”

Every debating team is supposed to be able to argue either side of the question. The team develops elaborate arguments and prepares detailed facts to support the line of reasoning for each side. Before the debate, sides are assigned by lot; the teams are judged by their skill at argumentation. As the season progresses, all the arguments become known and somewhat tired.

It happened that year that my team advanced to the regional competition for Southeast Michigan. Before the event, we were struggling to come up with inventive material that would take our opposition by surprise. Although my personal opinion on the issue was negative, I came up with an affirmative line of thought no one had yet put forth: “Yes, there should be additional regulation of labor, but only as part of a national program to regulate all aspects of the economy, including investment. Labor and management both should be subject to some democratic control.”

Our debate coach approved the approach and we set about finding all kinds of information about government

regulation of business and labor to support our points. When we got to the Regional, we were fortunate to draw the affirmative side. We totally wiped the floor with the opposition. They had never heard such an argument and had nothing coherent to say in response, whereas we were poised and had a well-rehearsed arsenal of material.

We won hands down, in all opinion except that of the judges. The judges gave the debate to the other side, explaining that our line of argument was socialistic and un-American and therefore outside the acceptable limits of debate in this country. It was as though we had never spoken; we lost by default.

Well. Imagine my surprise. I was furious, and deeply impressed by the power of authority simply to define you out of the debate when things get hot. Of course, this is a characteristic of all societies, and in many ways the United States presents a rather loose rein on the people compared with other countries—but a rein, nonetheless, and often decisively applied.

I am glad to see that PR is around to recount and analyze the actual operations of free speech in the United States. I hope that you will be able to look into the various mechanisms that foster self-censorship, such a major problem for our media. This is another element of the dynamics that arise because of the limits on overt control and repression, as Chomsky points out.

Michael Zweig
Peconic, NY

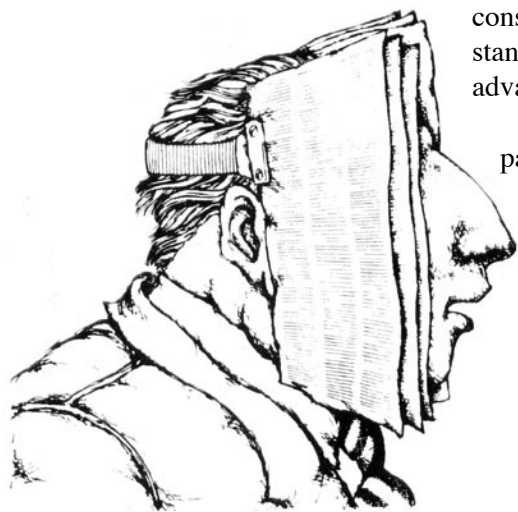
Life Imitates Bad Art

Top Gun's warnographic portrait of a pilot's exploits wasn't altogether realistic, so Congress is remodeling the Air Force.

Though some Congress members quibbled at the \$74 million cost, last December's vote went in favor of supplying pilots with tough leather jackets just like the one star Tom Cruise wore in the hit movie. Unlike the Navy pilot that Cruise portrayed, Air Force pilots have had to sWish around in wimpy synthetic jackets since the late forties And as Air Force Chief of Staff General Larry Welch in formed Congress, that's one reason both spirit and re-enlistment rates have been dropping these days.

And you thought It had something to do With the kinds of wars our country gets into Silly, the problem isn't wars, just wardrobes

--Nina Eliasoph



Yet Another Reason To Support Soviet Jewry

US policy makers claim to support the right of Soviet Jews to emigrate out of their devotion to unassailable principles of human rights; critics of the government have charged that paeans to human rights are incidental to the desire to embarrass the Soviet Union. Now, a recently revealed memo suggests yet another reason why both the Carter and Reagan Administrations have seen fit to keep Soviet Jewry in the spotlight, while other victims of repression go unmentioned.

The memo, sent by Robert Wallach (of Wed tech and Iraqi pipeline fame) to Attorney General Edwin Meese, was quoted in the *New York Times* on February 23, 1988. It notes the "need to provide Israel with an increasing flow of Ashkenazy Jews [from the Soviet Union] to help baJance the influx of Sephardic Oriental Jews who have a natural affinity and affiliation with the [more conservative] Likud Party. From the standpoint of American interests, the advantage is evident."

US support for the more palatable, only slightly more liberal Labor Party over the hardline likud fits its goals

of maintaining the Middle East status quo while cooling out more radical opposition

No one in the US press seems to have picked up on this juicy tidbit. But keep it in mind next time you hear an American president waxing eloquent about the human rights of Soviet Jews.

--Frederic Stout

The Secret Team Cites Propaganda Review

Propaganda RevIew has piqued some interest in dark and devious places The maga zine has been noted, we have learned, by the "Secret Team"-the CIA/ contra drug smuggling network being investigated by the Chris tic Institute.

Our honorable mention comes on the list of exhibits that attorneys for the Secret Team turned over to the Christic Institute as part of the discovery process that precedes the pending trial. No one has a clue about how Richard Secord, John Singlaub, Adolfo Calero, et. al. might use *Propaganda Review* to defend themsel yes from charges of drug running, weapons smuggling, and an assassination attempt.

Hey, just spell our name right.

--Marcy Darnovsky

Send us your propaganda favorites: examples of distortion, manipulation, disinformation, and deceptioll in headlines, ads, or news stories. Rant and rave if you wish ... but remember, this is the short-and-sweet section.

Election Coverage as Propaganda

JAY ROSEN

**The message that a
presidential campaign
grips the nation for ten
months at a time cannot
be true if half the country
skips the election.**

Throughout the spring, summer, and fall, political reporters will be writing stories about the presidential campaign. That is what political reporters do in an election year. But why do they do this? The answer is not as obvious as it seems.

For most of the American press, politics means “what’s happening in government,” especially the federal government. But government, according to the press, is mostly about the struggle to stay in power. So what government amounts to is preparing for the next election.

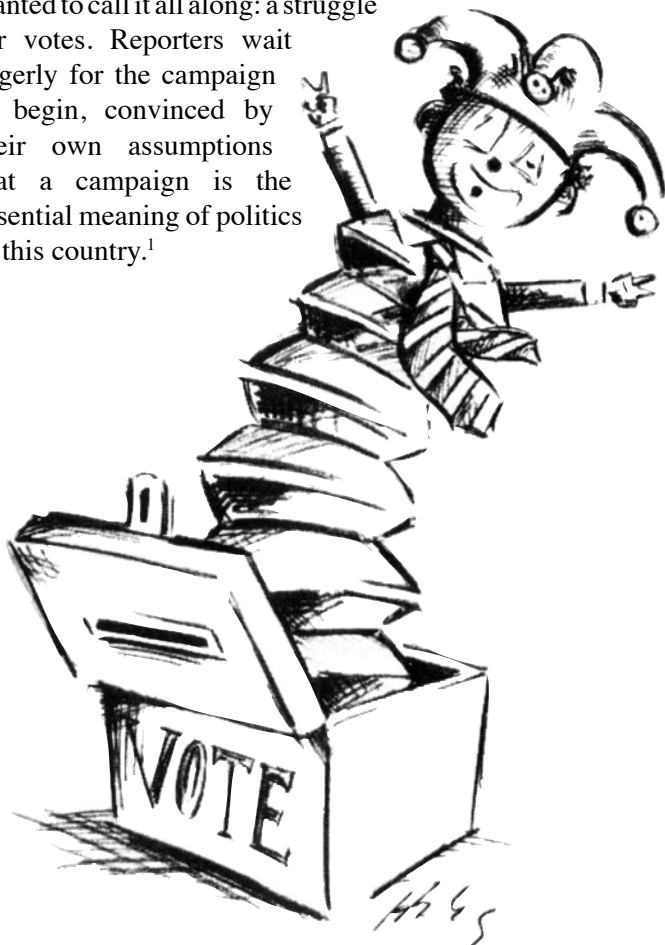
Allow me to explain. Obviously there are political arenas other than government, and reporters are dimly aware of them.

The nuclear freeze campaign, for example, was a broad and popular movement that gathered strength outside the

ordinary structures of power. From the beginning it was an important local story, but the national press took note only when the freeze threatened to become a factor in the mid-term elections. As Judith Miller of the New York Times remarked in 1983, "The freeze was not taken seriously as a movement until it came to Washington."

When something "comes to Washington," it makes politicians take notice, and when politicians take notice the press assumes that the reasons are opportunistic. It is part of the professional armor of the press to believe that politicians believe whatever will get them elected. This is one way reporters attempt to offset their helpless dependence on government officials, who provide the quotes and leaks the press needs to do "serious reporting."

If politicians only do what gets them elected, then politics can only be about the next election. When the next election actually comes, it comes as something of a relief for the press. Politics starts to call itself what the press wanted to call it all along: a struggle for votes. Reporters wait eagerly for the campaign to begin, convinced by their own assumptions that a campaign is the essential meaning of politics in this country.¹



The Non-voting Majority

To define politics as government and government as a perpetual campaign is itself a political act, for which the press is never accountable. One of the effects of the syllogism is to exclude from the journalist's view of politics that portion of the country that does not participate in elections. In the United States, this is a huge number of people, more than in any

Western democracy other than Switzerland.

In the sheer overkill

the press creates, one

senses a desperate

attempt to affirm

public interest in the

election ritual.

In the 1986 mid-term elections, for example, only 37 percent eligible voters turned out to vote. In presidential contests, turnout has been steadily declining, from 63 percent of those eligible 1960 to 53 percent in 1984. The 1988 election is likely see a majority decline to vote.²

The primaries and caucuses that draw so much attention from the press interest even fewer voters. The high point for attendance at the Iowa caucus was 1980, when fewer than ten percent of eligible voters showed up. And Iowa continues to attract reporters by the hundreds and candidates at an earlier and earlier date. This year CBS News rented 100 cars to move its correspondents and crews around the state.

The excessive attention paid to blips like Iowa--and to the campaign as a whole--can be interpreted as a form of propaganda, in which the press puts out the message that a presidential election is a vital event gripping the nation for ten months at a time. Obviously this message cannot be true if half the country skips the election. Reporters and editors do not exactly believe their own propaganda, but they behave as if they do because contrary proposition is too unsettling. That half the population doesn't care enough to vote

suggests that the election fails to impress people as a forum for grievances, or that, as spectacle, it is simply too boring. Both possibilities threaten the press. To understand why, we must inquire into the odd relationship between journalists and their professed client--"the public."

It was once said of Robert Moses, the legendary builder of highways and destroyer of neighborhoods in New York, that he loved the public but not the people. Something similar might be said of the American press. It is in love with the idea of a democratic public--a body of citizens who follow the issues, form opinions and express their will by voting--but it feels threatened by the actual people the public includes. As Herbert Cans found in his study *Deciding What's News*, journalists fear "that many viewers and readers are not particularly interested in the news they now receive, preferring gossip about celebrities to important activities of important actors."

Public Knowledge, Private Ignorance



Further straining relations between the press and its client is widespread ignorance of problems in the news. The discovery that most people know very little about public issues is now more than 40 years old. It is something

News organizations

ask for opinions on

issue people know

nothing about.

political scientists take for granted, but it has never worked its way into the assumptions of the press. We know that it hasn't because polls by news organizations routinely ask for opinions on issues people know about. ³ people know nothing about.

To take a typical example: a March 1986 ABC News poll asked which side the US backs in Nicaragua. Half the respondents did not know that the US backs the rebels, a troubling fact considering the amount of news coverage the issue had received since Reagan began his support for the contras. Still, the poll went on to ask a series of questions about US policy in Nicaragua. It asked if people approved or disapproved of Reagan's handling of the situation and if the US was headed for another Vietnam. These questions were asked of both groups--those who knew which side the US supports and those who didn't. According to ABC News, then, it is not necessary for someone to know what the President's policy is in order to agree with it. (See "Measuring the American Mind," page 10.)

In this case and in many others, the press would rather fabricate public opinion than confront the lack of knowledge about an issue in the news. To seriously contemplate public ignorance would make it impossible to believe in the health

**The emptiness along the
campaign trail shows
reporters the folly of their
own approach to politics. But
somehow they can't stop.**

of American democracy, or in the effectiveness of the media in informing the public. Last May, CBS and the New York Times sponsored a poll to find out what people think of the Constitution. Included were two “stray knowledge” questions (out of about 50 items). The results: 56 percent don’t know that the three branches are by law equal in power, and 55 percent don’t know that Congress has the power to declare war. So it is not only that Americans lack an acquaintance with current events; they do not understand how their political system works—not surprising when half of them choose not to participate in it.

For the professional journalist, these facts raise a troubling question: what to do when you discover that your client, “the public,” in whose name you claim all of your rights, does not know enough or care enough to make intelligent use of the political news you are pledged to provide. There are two directions the journalist can take. One is to find out what people do know and do care about, and why. The answers may then become the starting points for a revamped approach to political reporting, where the first priority is not to “get the news” or “cover the campaign,” but to explain what politics means to the average person, including the majority who know little about the issues or do not intend to vote. The other choice is to put real people aside and aim your reports at an imagined body: a “public” that you assume is already interested in politics.

In the first strategy, you start with politics as it actually exists in most citizens’ lives. In the second, you start with politics as it would exist in an ideal citizen’s life. In the first case a public is something you want to achieve; in the

second, the public is something you assume.

The American press chooses the second route. It assumes a public interested in politics despite the lack of evidence that one exists. Why? Because there is more power and prestige in “covering politics” than in reporting about the de-politicizing of half the population. But more important, de-politicalization is too threatening to the rhetoric of American democracy, including the rhetoric of the press about “the public’s right to know.” In other words, the press has a professional and ideological interest in confirming the image of a public interested and involved in the issues. It has an equal investment in denying the evidence of ignorance and apathy. These are the two propaganda functions of election coverage.

The Election Follies

The packs of reporters trailing the candidates around, the shameless hyping of the early primaries, the polls that routinely exclude non-voters (even when they form a majority), the meager attention given to turnout figures as compared with votes cast, the sheer overkill the press creates with its teams of correspondents—one senses in all of this a desperate attempt to affirm public interest in the election ritual.

Two ironies result. First, the excessive coverage probably weakens whatever popular interest exists in the campaign. One tires of the candidates months before the opportunity comes to vote: from there, Carson and Letterman take over. Second, the press recognizes that its own fascination with the campaign is all out of proportion to the numbers of people who participate. In New Hampshire and Iowa, for example, journalists repeatedly witness scenes where a candidate, his staff, and the reporters and camera crews total two dozen or more people, while the neighborhood coffee shop can only muster five or six citizen-customers. There is something absurd about such a scene and journalists sense it, but the absurdity is self-imposed.

The candidates wouldn’t be in these places if the press didn’t come along; they wouldn’t care about Iowa and New Hampshire if the press wasn’t going to over-interpret the results.

The emptiness that reporters encounter along the trail of the campaign shows them the folly of their own approach

to politics. But somehow they can't stop. Half-convinced that they are merely "covering" an event they in fact create, they keep following the candidates around, growing more and more cynical in the process. This cynicism finds its outlet in a genre of election coverage that has nothing to do with issues, but simply documents the lengths to which candidates will go for votes.

Every four years, reporters and critics denounce the "horse race" approach to the campaign. And every four years, the press goes out and reports on the campaign as a horse race. Every four years, columnists write about the absurdity of the "expectations" game, and every four years somebody's campaign gets a boost from the press by doing "better than expected."

In a forthcoming book, *Why Americans Don't Vote*, political scientists Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward try to explain the long-term decline in voter turnout. They conclude, first, that non-voters are poorer, less well-educated, and more likely to be minorities than those who do vote. They go on to argue that a "national party system that over time adapted to the limited and skewed electorate" has reinforced the barriers to voting by "ignoring the people who are beyond them."

Like the political parties, the press has adapted to a "limited and skewed electorate" by equating it with the public, a definition that leaves out at least half the nation. Again, this is a political act for which the press has never been made to answer. The real issue in the 1988 campaign is not the press prying into the personal lives of the candidates,

but its failure to pry into the lives of the many people the candidates will never reach. •

Jay Rosen is an assistant professor of journalism at New York University and an associate of the Center for War, Peace, and the News Media. He contributed "That's Entertainment" to Propaganda Review 1.

1 On the press and the freeze see David M. Rubin and Ann Marie Cunningham, eds. *War, Peace and the News Media* (New York University, 1983) pp. 184-185, 194-195. On the dangers of the press defining politics as the struggle to get elected, see James W. Carey, "The Dark Continent of American Journalism" in Robert Karl Manoff and Michael Schudson, eds. *Reading the News* (New York: Pantheon, 1987), pp. 187-189.

2 For comparisons to other countries, see Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Why Americans Don't Vote* (New York: Pantheon, forthcoming).

3 On press polls that ignore public ignorance, see Jay Rosen, "Public Knowledge/Private Ignorance," *Deadline* January-February 1987, pp. 1-4. On the lack of knowledge of issues in the news, see Michael Robinson and Maura Clancey, "Teflon Politics," *Public Opinion* April/May 1984, pp. 14-18.

Grouchy Voters Anonymous

It never ceases to amaze how the mainstream media explains away the widespread alienation and political nonparticipation of the American people in the waning years of what Henry Luce liked to call the "American century."

According to a poll in the February 5-7, 1988 edition of USA Today, 50 percent of Americans "don't like the way we pick the president" and only 25 percent feel that "voters have the most influence." On a cheerier note, the poll indicated that 93 percent of Americans "will participate" in the coming election" despite the discontent." That's something of a whopper, of course,

since--as the report noted--actual voter turnout usually averages around 55 percent."

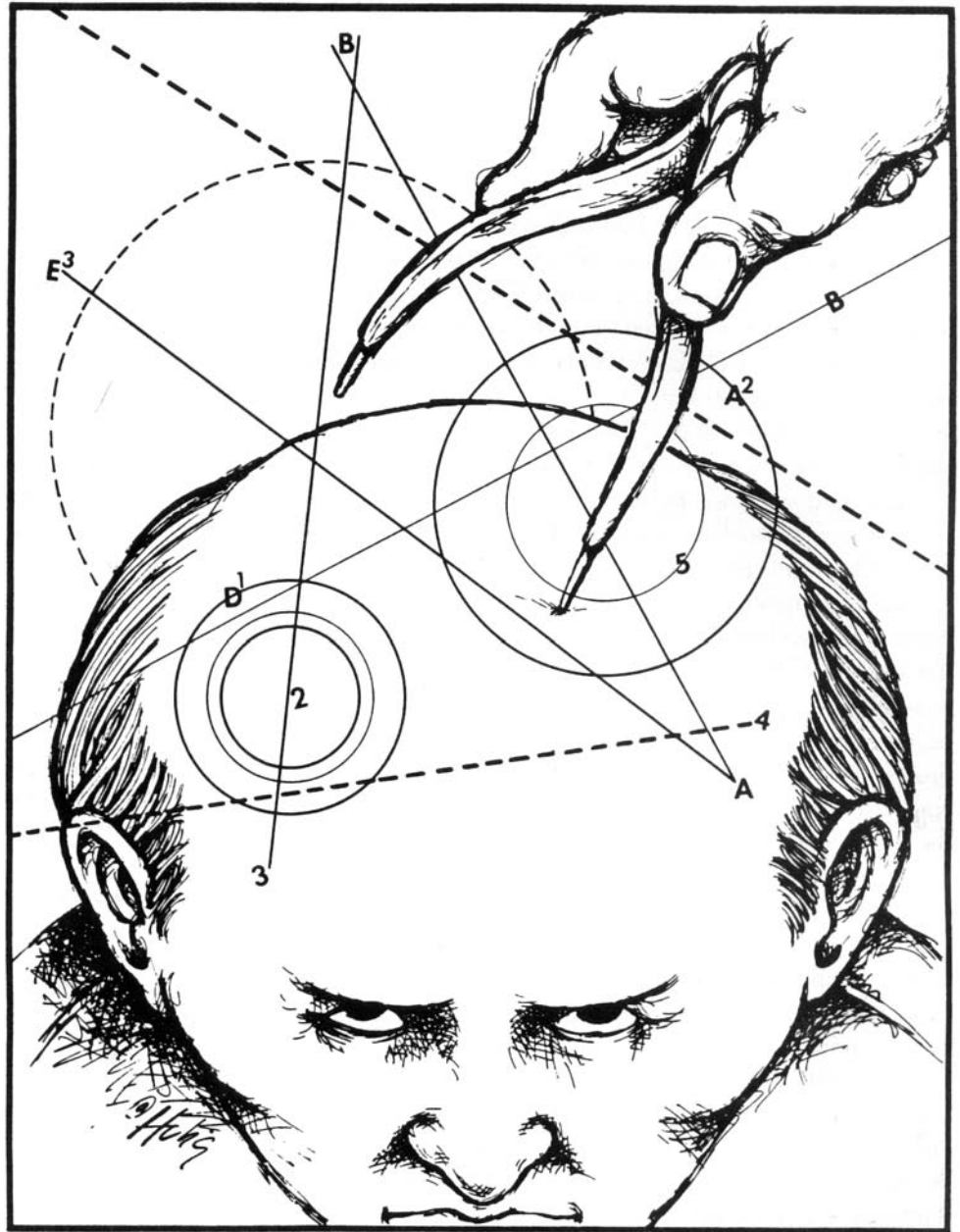
Whatever one thinks of polls in general, these results merely quantify what we have known all along: that there is a profound alienation among the American electorate about the utility and legitimacy of voting, particularly at the presidential level.

So here is confirmation, however contrived, of a situation that should instill something close to real despair about the future of democratic institutions in United States. And how does USA Today headline the story? "Grouchy Voters Knock System."

-Frederic Stout

Measuring the American Mind

NINA
ELIASOPH



The regular and thorough polling of public opinion has become a central part of the American political process. Corporations use polls to test their products and their images. Presidential candidates (and presidents-see "Marketing Reagan:" Propaganda Review #1) rely on them to check their standing, polish their pitches, and demonstrate their popularity. Activists of all stripes haul them out when the numbers support their cause.

But polls are far from a neutral device for sampling the pulse of the nation. They are fraught with unresolved (sometimes unresolvable) technical problems. Sometimes they are subject to manipulation. (See sidebar on page 14.) Most insidious of all, they are shot through with questionable

assumptions about how people think about politics and how they come to form opinions; about what can be learned about political opinions from the cold hard numbers that polls generate; and about the meaning of democracy in a mass society.

Support for Wallonians and Other Technical Problems

Even by the standards of the pollsters themselves, the results of public opinion polls are often inaccurate and distorted. Though this information never makes it to the headlines, academic survey research journals are filled with studies of

what are considered “technical” difficulties. Pollsters know all about these problems, but they are too wedded to their technique to acknowledge its limits. Here are some of the frequently cited technical problems of polling.

The average pollster's

most cherished

fantasy: a direct link

from each citizen-

consumer's brain into

the Central Survey

Data Processing Unit.

enterprise,” and mentioning instead “public protection,” the response was very different.

The same year, nearly two-thirds agreed that “consumer interests are so important that requirements cannot be too high,” and a clear majority the year before said that “the federal government should be doing more” to regulate business to protect the public. It’s easy to imagine a politician hiring a pollster to make a particular agenda appear more popular, just by using the right combination of catch words.

- Any survey researcher knows that putting a set of questions in a different order can drastically influence results (though none seem to know why that is the case, or which wording elicits the more “accurate” reading of opinion). Do Americans support nationalized health care? When asked at the beginning of a survey, a majority say yes. When asked

- A slight change in the wording of a question can lead to mammoth differences in results. People often respond more keenly to nuances of expression than to the basic political issues behind a question.

For example, a 1980 study found three-fifths of Americans agreeing that “the government has gone too far in regulating business and interfering with the free enterprise system.” But when the question was rephrased, leaving out the patriotic catch words “free

at the end, the majority reject it. Why the difference? Who knows.

- Then there is the question of “non-response.” Less educated people, poor people, women, non-whites, and those with a “low sense of political efficacy and involvement” are more likely to give answers like “don’t know” and “undecided.”

- Many people are unwilling to participate in surveys. In the General Social Survey of 1980, for example, 25 percent of those asked to fill out a questionnaire refused. Specialists have made dozens of attempts to ascertain which groups are most likely to opt out of polls, but so far these studies all come up with different ideas of just who just says no.

- Respondents tend to agree with whatever the interviewer says. For example, one study found about fifteen percent of respondents agreeing both that “Jews are more willing than others to use shady practices to get what they want” and that “Jews are just as honest as other businessmen.” Worse yet, this tendency to be agreeable is much greater among what the surveyors call “lower status groups.” The pollsters envision themselves as neutral recorders of objective facts, but it seems that respondents see them as representatives of scientific authority. Plucked out of their social contexts, people become unsure of their footing, and often make up answers they think the pollsters want to hear.

- By focusing on highly specific questions without asking how the responses fit into an overall world view, polls often lead to inaccurate assumptions about a respondent’s political position or coherence. Sociologist Craig Reinerman illustrates this point by comparing a man’s verbal description of his views to his responses to a questionnaire. In the survey, the man said that the government should not fund job safety programs. “As a bit of aggregate survey data, his response could be interpreted as a conservative, anti-state answer,” remarks Reinerman. But when the man told Reinerman that the corporations themselves should be in charge of maintaining a safe workplace, his survey response takes on an entirely different political hue.

- People give very different responses to questions of general philosophy and to questions that illustrate those same philosophical ideas. In one study, respondents were much more eager to say that “everyone has an equal chance to get ahead in this society” than they were to agree that “a rich boy and a poor boy have an equal chance of going to

Polls assume

respondents

college.” Another example: at the same time that a majority claimed to favor the general principle of unregulated “free enterprise,” hefty majorities also favored all sorts of specific regulations of business.

Some types of surveys focus on the very immediate questions of the week; others prod the public with much more general, philosophical questions. So while some pollster are asking, “Do you like Ritz crackers or Saltines?” and “Do you approve of candidate A or B?” others are requesting responses to questions like this one from a typical “attitude study:”

“Agree or disagree: people like me don’t have any say about what the government does.”

The first type of poll plies respondents about issues they may have never considered or don’t know anything about. The attitude studies are vague and hard to interpret. Social scientists have no way of telling which type of survey yields more “accurate” responses, but they do know that the two often contradict each other.

- And finally, what is probably the most overwhelming problem polls confront: public ignorance. At least five studies have showed many people quite willing to express opinions on fictitious events, people, and policies; the Wallonians, the Metallic Metals Act, the Public Affairs Act, and so on. Quizzed on the MX missile, 91 percent said they knew “very little” or “only something” about the missile systems; only seven percent claimed to know “a lot”. Yet most were willing to voice an opinion.

The pollsters, for their part, plow ahead as if this distressing ignorance doesn’t matter. And newspaper accounts of polls often leave out the “don’t knows” and “undecideds” altogether.

The Deeper Problems

Polls are based on the idea that the most realistic, most democratic way to find out what the public thinks is to determine each individual’s private opinion and then to add these up to get one this society” than they were to agree that “a rich boy and a poor boy have an equal chance of going to

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college.” Another example: at the same time that a majority claimed to favor the general principle of unregulated “free enterprise,” hefty majorities also favored all sorts of specific regulations of business.

The most cherished fantasy of the average pollster might well be a direct current from each citizen-consumer’s brain straight into some Central Survey Data Processing Unit. Or as one sociologist enthusiastically penned in 1948, when the usefulness of polling was still a matter for debate and not seen as a natural fact, “Sooner

or later the opinion poll is going to be used by government as a day-to-day public opinion audit. As such it will be a means of holding pressure groups in check and forcing them to put their alleged popular support in evidence.”

The problem with polls comes when they turn into what the sociologist imagined—a substitute for political organization and participation. We come to rely on mechanical audits of solitary opinions instead of the face-to-face debate and education that we sometimes call democracy. Discussion, debate, disagreement: public life is hard work, not just a matter of filling out a form, not something with which every society naturally comes equipped.

“Hey, I have my opinions. Nobody tells me what to think,” we like to say. Polls reinforce the notion, popular in the US, that every individual’s ideas should be the spontaneous offspring of the soul. But no observer can grasp all the world’s problems alone, especially when the time comes to have opinions on complicated international issues or tangled fiscal theories. That’s why people in other countries work in political parties that engage members in serious political debate, and whose research on complex issues members trust. Americans, always alert to the dangers of “following the party line,” swing to the opposite extreme and act as if the highest virtue is a clear, empty mind, un tarnished by debate, independent of organizations.

Polls can’t make up for the cavernous lack of political discussion and participation in this country, but they can create the illusion that the lack doesn’t matter, that as long as scientists use the latest, most efficient polling techniques, democracy is safe. And that’s the danger. Because no

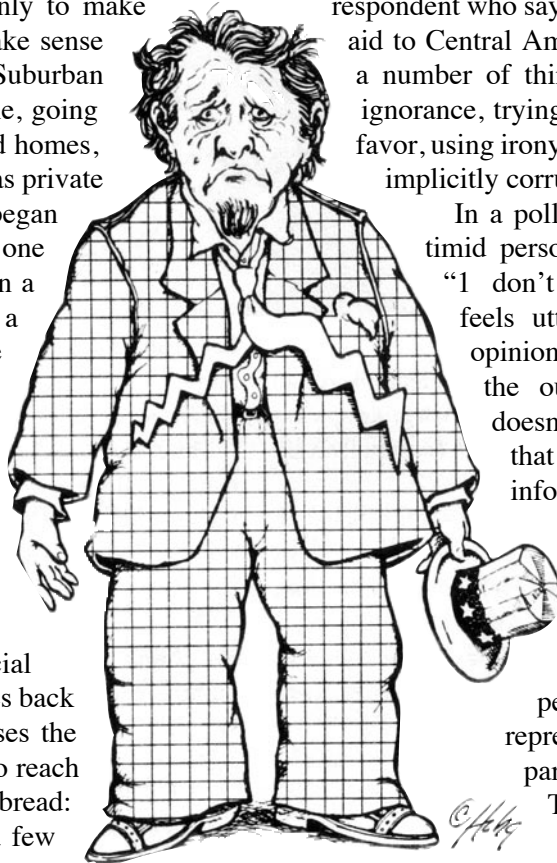
amount of smooth technical know-how can substitute for the difficult labor of real discussion.

Tools for Thought

Public political discussion would help cultivate new ways of approaching problems, help groups develop the tools for thinking and talking about politics. Approaches and ways of talking are hard to measure though, so polls automatically provide the tools for thinking about politics, assuming that respondents could have fabricated the poll questions and answers themselves. They assume those respondents recognise the larger political issues behind the specific poll questions.

But that assumption puts the question backwards. If people have the tools for thinking about politics, they have already accomplished a lot. Ways of talking are the tools that people use not only to make their opinions public, but also to make sense of their own unnamed feelings. Suburban housewives in the fifties, for example, going crazy in their carpeted and vacuumed homes, could understand their feelings only as private woes. When writers and theorists began naming the problem as a feminist one and a political one, they gave women a tool for thinking about themselves as a group, gave the situation a new shape in their hearts.

If ways of speaking are tools, survey researchers never even open up most of the tool kits. Instead, they hand respondents tools from the standardized kit and watch as the tinker, trying to apply unfamiliar hammers to nails they might not care anything about. Then the social scientist typically tries to read motives back in, to reconstruct the mental processes the respondent "must have" undergone to reach the answer. It's like making enriched bread: take all the nutrients out, then put a few



others-not the original ones- back in.

It's not that polls tell people what to answer, but that they tell them what to ask and how to ask it. Debating the questions included in the polls, or how the questions are phrased, usually doesn't occur to anyone. Thus politicians can, and do, use polls surreptitiously to set the agenda, to announce what kinds of thinking are in order.

Doing Things with Words

Another problem with polls is the way they drain and flatten meaning. They have no way to record the sloppy, the exuberant, the ironic, the resigned, or the bawdy.

People make words "do" things that have little connection to their dictionary definitions: saying "It's a nice day," can mean "I'm being friendly and saying hello," or it can mean "Stop moping around the house." So, for example, a respondent who says she "doesn't know anything" about aid to Central America can be trying to communicate a number of things. A cynic might exaggerate her ignorance, trying to make it seem like a point in her favor, using irony to demonstrate her distance from the implicitly corrupt and useless world of politics.

In a poll, the cynic would look just like the timid person whose apologetic way of saying "I don't know" makes it clear that she feels utterly unqualified to voice political opinions. Both would look the same as the outraged respondent who says she doesn't know because she's convinced that the government is hiding essential information.

Bypassing the Organized Public

Politicians used to find out what people thought by consulting labor representatives, grassroots leaders, or party bosses. Now they consult polls. The old ways were not necessarily

Polls are good for

finding out what

people think

they should say

to pollsters.

the last and best word in democracy. But neither is the warped sociology that lauds polls because they go “directly” to the public.

Since we do not typically define “public” in any they should say meaningful way (except to say that everyone is in it) and since polls claim to to pollsters. show “everyone’s” opinions (not just those of the “special interests”), they appear to be the more democratic measure of the public will. But they assume that unorganized individuals’ opinions are effective, passionate, powerful, and informed; that groups and organizations are irrelevant to the picture.

What Polls are Good For

All this is not to say that polls are completely bad or useless. Often they’re good for making predictions about elections, since elections are themselves very much like polls, operating

in the same format and presenting the same limited options. Polls are also good for measuring how many people know a specific piece of information: how to avoid AIDS, what the contras want, who the president is. And polls are good for finding out what people think they should say to pollsters.

The problem arises when we lap up the social theory that polls present—a vision of society as a random pile of individuals with opinions growing spontaneously in their brains. The peril of polls comes when they are taken as an adequate substitute for public debate, when we think we can solve social problems—especially public ignorance and lack of participation—with the wave of a survey scientist’s wand.

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Nina Eliasoph is a radio producer and a graduate student in sociology at the University of California, Berkeley, where she specializes in the analysis of political culture in the United States.

Rigging the Results

Subtle political assumptions and “technical” problems plague all polls. Some are also directly manipulative. Here is a grotesque example of a question from a 1985 CBS/New York Times poll on aid to the contras:

“President Reagan says the United States should help the people in Nicaragua who are trying to overthrow the pro-Soviet government there. Other people say that even if our country does not like the government in Nicaragua, we should not help overthrow it. Do you think we should help the people trying to overthrow the government in Nicaragua, or should we not help them?”

This question violates many of the basic tenets of survey research. First, do not load a question with authorities on only one side. (In this case, many major religious organizations could have been named as having strong positions opposite the President’s.) Second, do not include in the question “information” that is contested, or potentially part of the answer.

Third, do not ask ambiguous questions. This one is a double entendre: depending on where one takes a breath, it can either mean, “Should we help the people of Nicaragua (who are trying to overthrow the government)?” or, “Should we help the-people-in-Nicaragua-who-are-trying-to-overthrow-the-government?”

The problem of shoddy or manipulative poll questions is compounded by the fact that journalists often publicize poll data without even knowing the specific questions that were asked. Wire services, which often distribute poll data, rarely include such information.

--N.E.

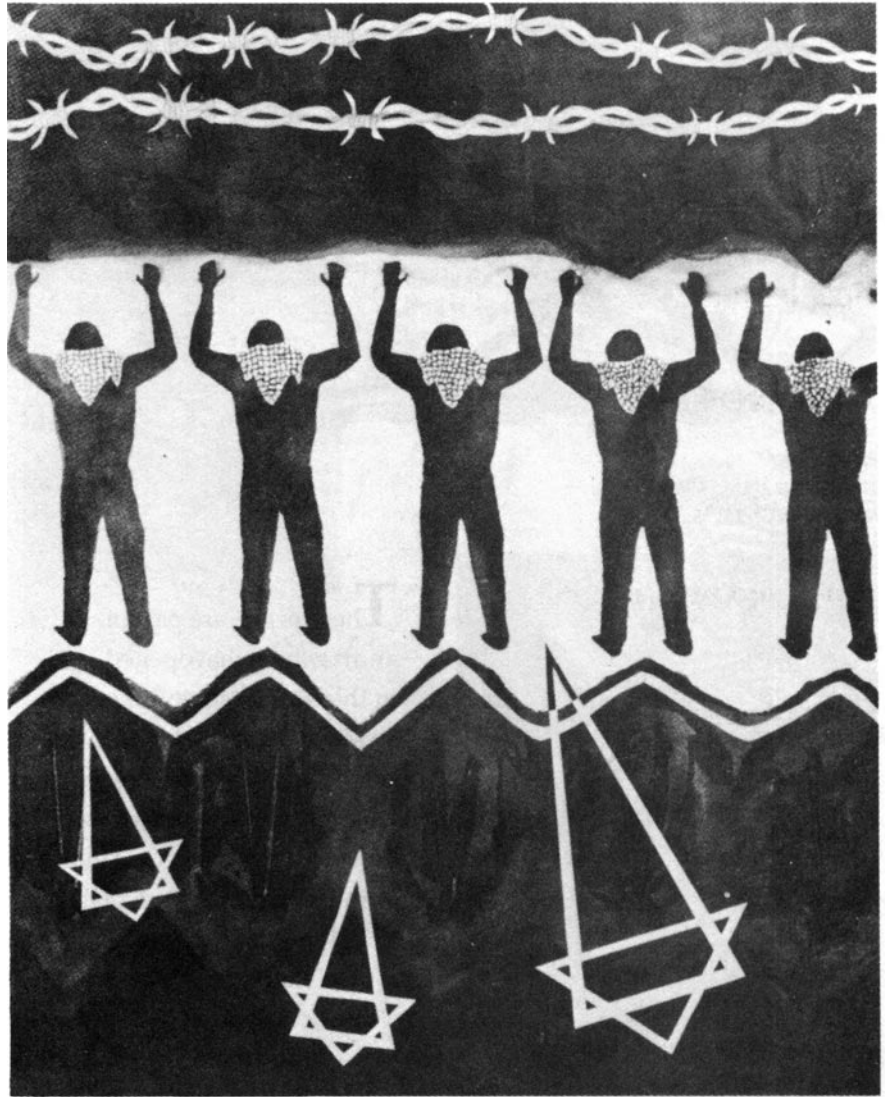
Jewish Souls Arab Bones

JAMES ZOGBY

American media coverage of the Middle East is saturated with bias against Arabs. This shared bias is a problem of culture, of deep culture; a problem of the structure of thought in the minds of most Americans including the American journalists who report on the Middle East.

Most reporters, like you and me, saw the

continued on page 18



Taysir Barakat
Born in Jabalia Camp, 1954
Lives in Ramallah

US Media Twists PLO Role

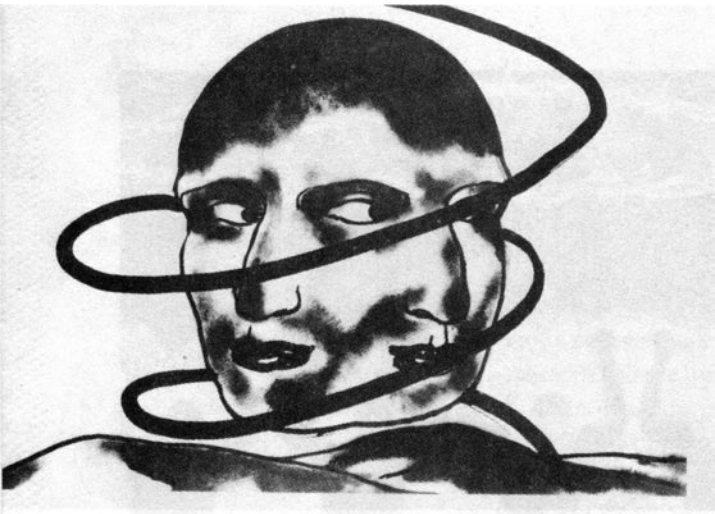
While the Palestinian uprising has brought marked improvement in US media coverage of Israeli-Palestinian conflicts, it would be a mistake to believe that its underlying bias has dissipated. To grasp the intractability of that pro-Israeli bias, one need only read the lead editorial in the March 2 New York Times: “The PLO is still a terrorist organization. While it has made noises over the years about accepting UN resolutions that call for accepting a Jewish state of Israel, the PLO has never stated unequivocally its willingness to coexist with Israel.”

According to the Times, then, while Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza enters its third decade, the onus rests with

the PLO. So committed are its editors to their anti-PLO position that they discount statements made by mainstream Palestinian nationalists since the mid-1970s of their willingness to recognize Israel under a two-state settlement with mutual security guarantees. The Times dismisses PLO attempts to forge a two-state solution as “noise.”

In this regard, the Times leads the media pack. Evidence that the PLO is willing to negotiate a settlement has been studiously ignored by most of the mainstream press. One notable exception is Anthony Lewis, who in a remarkable New York Times column on March 13 quoted Yassir Arafat stressing his willingness to accept the UN resolutions that call for mutual recognition.

This is not to say that the press has refrained from criticizing



'Abed' Abdi
Born in Haifa, 1942
Lives in Haifa



Gabi Klezmer
Born in Jerusalem, 1950
Lives in Jerusalem



These prints are part of an art exhibit that opened in the Gaza Strip in June 1987, six months before the beginning of the Palestinian uprising in Israel's occupied territories. The exhibit, itself an act of defiance, was conceived as a commemoration of twenty years of occupation. Both Palestinian and Israeli artists contributed to it.

Here is part of a statement from the artists taken from a catalog prepared for the exhibit:

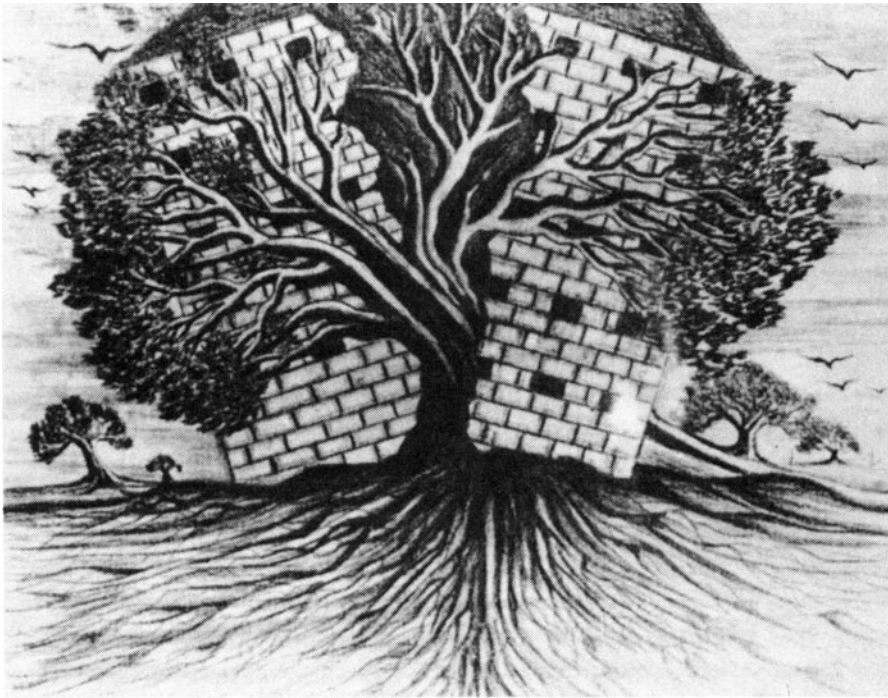
"The occupation has by its very nature led to the violation of the freedom of expression and the right of the public to know; the closure of universities and newspapers, information centres and galleries is but one aspect of the

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Hassan Khater

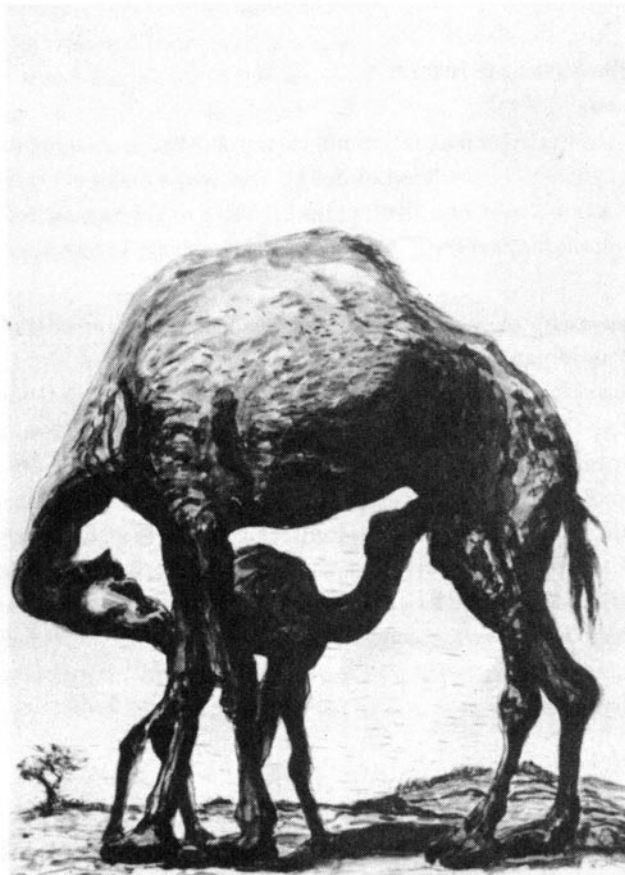


Raed al-Zagal
Born in Jerusalem, 1971
Lives in Jerusalem



Hatem Ghanem

Avishai Eyal
Born in 1945
Lives in Ramat Hasharon

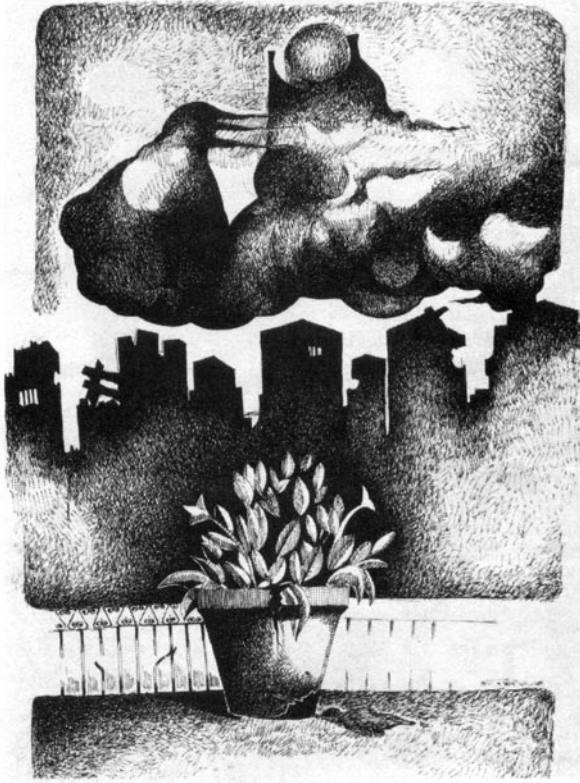


Zidan Nueizi
Born in Gaza, 1957
Lives in Gaza



DOWN WITH THE OCCUPATION

occupation. It has generalized an arbitrary form of censorship on literary works, art, theatre and culture in general. The return of the territories will make it possible to achieve a just peace ... and we, Palestinian and Israeli artists, will be able to exchange information, knowledge, and experience unhindered so as to enhance the creative work in which we are engaged. For all the above reasons we decided to publish this collection of prints under the title: DOWN WITH THE OCCUPATION."



'Imad Abed al-Wahab
Born in Gaza, 1950
Lives in Damascus

film Exodus as children. Although I'm an Arab American, when I saw that film I rooted for the "good guys," the ones who-like the cowboys-were clearing the frontier, driving the barbarians back, looking only for peace and dignity. Confronting these heroes were little dark people who only knew how to kill and maim, and who needed to be cleared from the "frontier," as if they were animals or trees in a forest.

Essentially, this is the message that Americans have received during the past six decades of the non-debate over the Middle East. According to the one and only side in this debate, Israelis are the only human beings in the region.

Israeli tactics in the territories. The widespread use of beatings, deportation, and imprisonment; the killings of demonstrators and bystanders; and the use of gas without regard for its health consequences have been widely reported and criticized. Palestinian suffering, with graphic descriptions of poverty, squalor, and isolation, has found its way onto the pages of the mainstream media (for an example, see the January 4 Newsweek). The nightly reports of ABC News correspondent Dean Reynolds have been excellent, showing the Palestinian side of the tragedy.

Occasionally, Palestinians have even been permitted to speak for themselves. Professor Edward Said, a member of the Palestinian National Council, appeared on This Week With David

Consider the words of British Lord Balfour, whose infamous declaration promised Palestine to the Zionist movement. When reminded of the existence in Palestine of Arabs, Lord Balfour responded, "We do not propose to go through the form of consulting the inhabitants as to their wishes. Zionism is of far greater importance to us than the desires and prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who inhabit Palestine."

In the current conflict in the West Bank and Gaza, this perspective informs us that Israelis are complex human beings, people like you and me, with feelings, emotions, hopes and fears. They exist in the public mind, as they should, as individuals who have suffered and who continue to suffer. Israelis, we have come to believe, are people who long to be secure, to live in peace and prosperity. What stands in their way is the Palestinian "problem" -a kind of objectified, non-specific obstacle to their aspirations.

The conflict is not presented as one between Israeli people and Palestinian people, or between Jewish people and Arab people. It's Israeli humanity confronting the Palestinian problem. Palestinians are depicted as terrorists (objects of contempt) or as refugees (objects of pity). When bombed by Israeli jets they become "targets" occupying "strongholds."

The Bombing of Fakhani

One story will make the point clearer. In 1981 Israel bombed the Fakhani neighborhood of Beirut. This was a major event in the Middle East. Israel justified the bombing of Fakhani as "rooting out the heart of the PLO monster in Lebanon."

Brinkley. And ABC's Nightline, in its week-long extravaganza live from Israel (April 25-29), provided a three-hour "town hall meeting," in which Palestinians, sharing the stage with Israelis, spoke of the years of domination they've suffered and demanded that Israel grant them basic human rights and recognize the PLO. Unfortunately, with Palestinian voices finally reaching so wide a US audience, Ted Koppel was moved to reassure his viewers that Nightline wasn't giving up its pro-Israeli stance by reciting a litany of Palestinian acts of violence. He didn't mention major Israeli violence-not even Sabra and Shatila.

The linchpin of US media bias-the refusal to recognize the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian peoplehas

As a result of just one day's bombing, 383 Lebanese and Palestinians were killed. Many died afterwards of wounds in the hospitals. The Palestinians responded by lobbing shells across the border into Israeli settlements, killing one Israeli and wounding five others.

For our purposes, what's important about the Fakhani bombing is the American television coverage of it. My office did a study of all three networks, a study later replicated by TV Guide. The results of both studies showed that on the night of the bombing, there were about eleven minutes of footage from Israel, and about one minute from Lebanon.

But what really struck me about the network coverage that night and the next was its terrible distortion of what is called "human interest." The coverage from Israel was vivid and deeply moving. Ambulances screamed through the night. Wounded Israelis were carried out on stretchers as police ordered crying onlookers to make way. A reporter interviewed the mother of one of those who had been hurt. It was a tragic scene: the people in this settlement had been attacked, and were concerned for their lives.

The next night same film was used all over. The same ambulance, same mother, the same

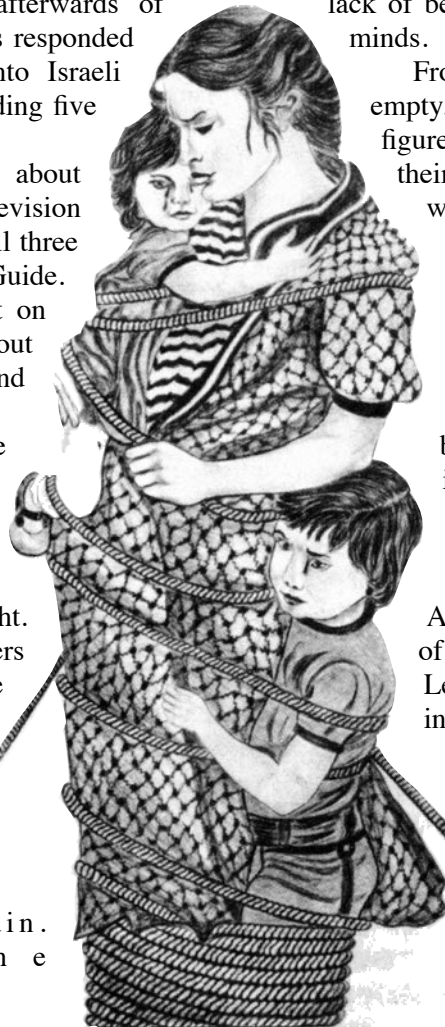
everything. They'd used the same story twice-either for lack of better footage, or to emblazon it into our minds.

From Beirut, we saw only rubble-a desolate, empty, destroyed street. To be sure, casualty figures were announced. The reporters told their stories well, but without victims, and without the families of victims.

Several weeks later, I spoke with a network camera operator and asked about the empty streets. His response was something like this: "When we got there that night, on the scene, it was chaos. There were people everywhere, and bodies everywhere. It was a horrible thing, it was just traumatic. So we waited until the next day when the dust had cleared and we could get the buildings and see the massive destruction." And so, while Americans were given to see the anguish of Israel's six casualties, the hundreds of Lebanese and Palestinian victims remained invisible.

On the Media's Scales

For those who think that the current situation in the West Bank and Gaza has tipped the scales, I remind you ber of



again.
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held firm. Thus, when "moderate" Palestinians failed to show up for a meeting with Secretary of State George Shultz, this was taken as evidence that they had been intimidated by the PLO. The notion that the moderates might have preferred that Shultz meet with the PLO simply was not considered.

The unfavorable impressions made by coverage of Israeli soldiers in the territories has incurred the wrath of Israel's supporters, who have tried to dilute its power by concocting the issue of image manipulation by the Palestinians. The Israeli government, in fact, claims that the Western press has been duped by the PLO. Too often, US journalists play along; Ted Koppel has characterized the recent shift in media and public perceptions

as a "huge propaganda victory" by the Palestinians.

Given the depth of basic misconceptions and prejudice about Palestinians, and the power of pro-Israeli lobbyists in the US, complacency about the new improved version of media coverage would be overstated and premature.

-Dennis Perrin

Dennis Perrin is a regular contributor to Extra!, the newsletter of Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting, and writes a media column for Downtown, a New York Weekly.

Palestinians are being killed, the media gives us only the body count. We don't know their names. There have been no human interest stories about their parents. We have not come to feel the individual crisis of each and everyone of the 140 Palestinians killed. Imagine, if you will, Jews being subjected to the same prolonged pogrom and resistance—imagine the coverage.

The media's treatment of the death of a young Israeli girl shot by her own guard is an example. The point here is not the fact that the first media reports wrongly blamed her death on Palestinian villagers, but that her name, age, and sex were prominent in the coverage. Neither the names nor the ages nor the sexes of the two Palestinians killed in the village of Beita that day were to be found anywhere. Tirzah Porat's name is remembered, those of the Palestinians are not.

Earlier, in the midst of the uprising, an Israeli bombing of south Lebanon left 29 people, half of them children, dead. In the Washington Post, this rated a small column buried in the depths of the paper. The Palestinians remain objects—objects of pity, objects of contempt, but objects nonetheless. Lebanon is viewed as a kind of vacant lot—the place where Israeli humanity confronts the Palestinian problem. It also is inhabited by some other troublemakers. We don't know who they are or what their problems are, but thank God we don't have anything to do with it anymore.

Some of the coverage of the uprising in the West Bank and Gaza does represent a significant departure from the mold, but the media's self-correcting device is now taking effect. Consider the number of articles about what the breaking of hands is doing to the souls of those young Israeli soldiers who are subjected to this kind of brutality—they are subjected to the

brutality, not the fingers of the hands whose bones they're breaking. There is far more concern for the souls of the Jews than for the bodies of the Arabs. •

James Zogby is director of the Arab-American Institute and cofounder of the Palestine Human Rights Campaign. This article is adapted from a talk he gave at a conference on the media and US foreign policy on January 31, 1988, in Los Angeles. The conference was sponsored by Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting, KPFF Radio, and Midnight Express Bookstore.



David Reeb
Born 1952
Lives in Tel Aviv

Yes, Virginia, There are Black Lists

I have the dubious distinction of being on the black list of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). This list, called Vehicles and Voices: Pro-Arab Propaganda in America, is a form of intimidation. And it works. Others read it, and some act on what it says.

In American politics, the ADL carries a certain moral authority. It was the ADL, after all, that fought anti-Semitism for decades, and that at one time had a noble record in the struggle against racism. So when a representative of the ADL calls a radio station or a university at which an Arab American or a pro-Palestinian activist has been asked to

speak, what happens far too often is that the prospective guest is notified two or three days before the event that it's been postponed, or that the invitation has been withdrawn. Sometimes the bearer of these tidings will come out and say that there's too much pressure. The typical refrain runs, "We can't have you on, but maybe you could suggest someone else." Or, "We'll have you on, but we need someone else for balance."

The ADL has also tried to taint and smear politicians who have associated with or received campaign contributions from those who appear on their list. This is a classic form of McCarthyism.

-J.Z.

Piscataway Stalemate

Sixties Myths Derail Student Radicals

BARBARA HABER

Mythology is powerful. We use it to crystallize meaning from our experience, to evoke connection with our past, and to inspire the faith and grandeur needed for long-shot enterprises—such as changing the world. Radical politics without myth is unimaginable. Yet myth is double-edged: it can muddy the waters as well as illuminate. Applied to historical events, it tends to reduce complexity and obscure contradiction. Often myth serves to gratify desire or alleviate anxiety at the expense of accuracy, concreteness, and analysis.

Myths about the New Left and the counterculture of the sixties abound, swelling and contorting because so many people still care what happened then and hope for or fear a sequel in the making. For many, the notion of a new New Left conjures images of the Thing from Another World, inexorably defrosting while its future victims sleep; or Christine the Killer Car with uncanny power to reconstitute itself after it's (or she's) been smashed, squashed, and pulverized.

For others, a resurgence of the youthful radicalism of the sixties represents a hoped-for resurrection: the phoenix rising from the ashes, the chance to participate (vicariously or actually) in history-making, the dream of doing it over and getting it right. So far-reaching and profound is their mythic impact even today that the movements of the sixties, with their sweeping indictments of state and culture, remain a baseline against which attempts at organizing are inescapably measured—as much by those doing the organizing as by those observing and reporting.

A New New Left?

■
A case in point: the February 1988 National Student Convention at Rutgers University in Piscataway, New Jersey. When 670 mostly white radicals and progressives answered the call of the Rutgers host committee to create a “multi-issue, multi-racial national student organization,” the mythology of the “old New

**So far-reaching and profound is
the mythic impact of the sixties
that it remains the baseline
against which most attempts
at organizing are measured.**

■

Left” hung palpably in the air, its aims, achievements, and failures forming the frame within which both students and reporters viewed the event.

Long before the convention itself, a bit of collaborative mythologizing had set the stage. Friendly journalism (most notably Maria Margaronis’ eloquent piece in *The Nation* on December 19, 1987) proclaimed the formation of a “New New Left on Campus.” Brochures and fundraising letters put out by the Rutgers host committee boasted a tantalizing potpourri of sixties names, including such diverse figures as Barry Commoner, Allen Ginsberg, Barbara Ehrenreich, Amira and Amina Baraka, Mark Rudd, Letty Cottin Pogrebin, Al Haber, Dave Dellinger, and Abbie Hoffman. (There were others as well, some less known, including me.)

The array of signa- tors did more than announce continuity with the sixties. It implied fulfillment of many activists’ most cherished dream—the healing of racial, gender, and ideological rifts that tore the New Left apart and kept it fragmented for more than two decades. Calling for a “unified student left” under the aegis of “participatory democracy,” preconvention rhetoric raised the hope that the old New Left’s most sacred (and disputed) concept could provide an umbrella broad enough to shelter a vast assortment of radical souls.

Image, Media, Myth

The Rutgers committee’s invocation of the New Left image was both honest and instrumental. The new generation of campus radicals incorporates many elements of early, middle, and late New Left analyses, ideals, fetishes, and quirks (with a large dollop of updated counterculture for good measure). Billing its goal as creation of a new New

Left was an accurate (though simplistic) shorthand for reaching across the isolating vastness of US society, as well as an effective means of securing media attention, student enthusiasm, and funds.

The Rutgers organizers themselves, as well as their literature, rang true as harbingers of at least one version of a revived New Left. In their language, spirit, approach to ideology and structure—even in their mannerisms and speech inflection—they are eerily and movingly reminiscent of early SDS’ers.

Remarkably steeped in New Left literature, advised by sixties media stars Abbie Hoffman and Mark Rudd, and in some instances the children of sixties activists, the young Rutgers organizers brought to their convention planning a

sharp awareness of the power of media imagery to make and break movements, not only by conveying (or failing to convey) information, but also by amplifying acts and personalities into emotionally resonant myth. By billing their event as the “first attempt to form a national student organization since Port Huron” (SDS’s 1962 founding conference), the Rutgers students hit a nerve in many who yearn for global vision and large-scale organization

to link issues and constituencies, thereby overcoming the fractured localism and single-issue focus that has limited the left over the past decade or more.

As sympathetic journalists broadcast their call, expectations rose, and Rutgers in February seemed to promise a major thaw in the Big Chill. Unfortunately, questions about whose vision, what issues, which constituencies, and how they would be linked remained unresolved as the convention drew near. With their media savvy and sixties imagery, the convention organizers were extraordinarily effective in convincing students and journalists of the momentousness



of their event. In their well-meant zeal to awaken their peers and build bridges, they put out an invitation so inclusive and so seductive in its promise of historic rebirth that they inadvertently set the scene for a re-enactment, not of the early SDS-like formation they may have sought, but of the bitter and destructive power struggles of the late New Left.

Great Expectations

The homogenized mythic (rather than concrete and historical) image of the sixties that the organizers projected, coupled with their adroit utilization of the media, contributed to several catastrophic results. First, it attracted far more participants than could be logistically accommodated. Second, it brought together masses of diverse students without preparing them for the task at hand. Third, it convinced every sectarian remnant of the sixties era (and since) that this event was essential ground on which to fight old struggles and vie for power. Fourth, it obscured the difficulties of resolving thorny issues such as racism, sexism, and homophobia in a new organization. Finally, it raised expectations to heights unscalable in the short run at least.

After months of anticipation and negotiation over structure and agenda (most significantly between Rutgers and the more anarchistic and decentralist delegations from Berkeley and MIT), the long-awaited moment arrived. With it came almost 700 students from over 130 schools, many of them last-minute arrivals who'd read about the convention in progressive journals and campus press.

From its opening moment, it was clear that the convention was badly off track. Like some sixties psychodrama gone berserk, delegates (most of them decent and well intentioned off camera) re-enacted traditional movement rituals of trashing and selfdestruction. Beginning with the first (wildcat) plenary, the volume was turned to maximum, and vitriolic pronouncements replaced respectful discussion.

Anarchists attacked the Rutgers organizers as anti-democratic bureaucrats for seeking some kind of national structure. Caucuses representing a minority of delegates passed resolutions and tried to impose them on the convention. The agenda was scuttled without benefit of democratic decision. Impossible demands were made on the Rutgers committee to provide food and shelter for the hundreds of unexpected, last-minute arrivals. Confronted with the

presence of over a dozen Marxist-Leninist groups, students argued hotly over whether to exclude them (via wall poster and handout, with no parliamentary forum in which to power of media resolve the issue), and were diverted by this preoccupation from developing political program and organization based on real commonalities. break movements.

The Rutgers committee, demoralized as they watched eighteen months of dedicated work crumbling and prone to sixties-style guilt about authority, abdicated political leadership, turning logistical somersaults in an attempt to placate the most aggressive and vocal students. The majority of the delegates roamed the lobby, chronically bewildered. Friendly journalists (many themselves movement veterans) milled around the edges, interviewing, analyzing, and in some cases agonizing over how to interpret the scene before them.

Scuttled Compromise

Whether from political wisdom or physical exhaustion, the brutality of the encounter seemed to wane by the midpoint of the weekend, and leaders of the anarchists and the Rutgers group turned their energies toward hammering out a compromise on a temporary structure to be presented to the convention. Briefly it appeared that something real, modest, and promising might emerge from the rubble.

But it was not to be. As the final day of the plenary began, the People of Color Caucus (mostly black), which had been meeting through the night, declared the convention to be racist, since all but 50 of the nearly 700 delegates were white. Joined by the Lesbian/Gay /Bisexual Caucus, they demanded that no constitution be ratified, no representatives be elected, and no name be chosen. To do so, the caucuses argued, would be to entrench discrimination and deter minority participation.

The students were sharply aware of the power of media imagery to make and break movements.

**The seeds of
debacle may have
been sown in
the soil of the
sixties mythos.**

To back up their demand, caucus members threatened to walk out if the convention failed to comply. On a voice vote of those assembled (voting rights, like all other procedural issues, had never been resolved), the proposal carried. The convention ended without even an interim structure to carry out the mandate to recruit racial and sexual minorities, or to organize a second try at a national convention.

The failure of the National Student Convention to establish at least a minimum working framework has been attributed largely to what one journalist called the “intractable issue of minority participation in radical movements.” Some see the demands of the People of Color Caucus as a painful but necessary step toward creating the structural basis essential to ending racism (and homophobia and sexism) within the movement. Others see the response of the white delegates as guilt-induced capitulation to a group raising a legitimate concern with unwarranted absolutism.

Convention organizers claim to have made an earnest attempt to involve people of color, gays, and lesbians. Many have pointed out the difficulty of convincing blacks and other minority activists to put energy into what would likely remain a white majority organization: minority groups rightly have their own political agendas which would necessarily be compromised in a mixed organization, as tactical disagreements between white and black students in anti-apartheid campaigns have amply demonstrated.

But it may be that what brought the convention down had little to do with demands for racial parity per se. Ironically, the seeds of debacle may have been sown in the soil of the sixties mythos so successfully evoked by the organizing committee. By convincing so many students, elders, and journalists that this was, at last, The Real Thing, the organizers unwittingly created a situation in which the possibility of being left out of the action seemed intolerable. This in turn activated a kind of frenetic, hyperbolic, eventually destructive style in those most ambitious for place and power within a reborn New Left-making rational debate, to say nothing of compromise, impossible. The

norms of discourse and the height of the stakes had been established long before the final plenary when the People of Color Caucus spoke its demands. By that time, it appeared as though the only language that registered was accusation and ultimatum.

Further irony: it was the anarchist students, smart people with a deep concern for democracy, who set the accusatory, uncompromising tone that prevented democratic solutions. Yet more irony: some black students, surprised at the ease with which the convention acceded to their demands, indicated their regret that no compromise had been offered. More irony still: their real differences notwithstanding, the Berkeley and Rutgers students have much in common politically; their differences could provide needed balance in a new organization. But the high-profile, high-stakes circumstances under which they met made the discovery of possibilities difficult.

Until We Meet Again

The Rutgers convention provides some painfully learned lessons for next time. It points clearly to the difficulty of resolving significant conflicts and finding sustainable points of real unity, and to the amount of courage and compromise that will be needed if they are to be discovered and nurtured. It raises questions about the use of media to bring people to a major decision-making event, bypassing essential processes of shared work experiences and in-person discussion and appraisal. It suggests that the myth of rebirth of the sixties, while a surefire way to attract attention, spawns deadly rivalries as well, bringing out exaggerations, even parodies, of political behavior, as groups contend for title to the real Newnewleft.

Bypassing the media and down playing sixties mythology which is by no means the magic solution to the many problems facing young radicals may mean that a slower, more painstaking process will be necessary to produce a national student organization. But because such an organization could make a real contribution to social change, it is vital to remove as many obstacles as possible to its eventual formation.

Barbara Haber attended the Port Huron Convention and was active in New Left and feminist politics throughout the sixties. Still an activist, she practices psychotherapy in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Reagan's Propaganda Ministry

Officially, the Office of

PETER KORNBLUH

Public Diplomacy was part

of the State Department

In reality it was being run

by Oliver North.



“All we have done is to make the facts available,” stated the director of the Office of Public Diplomacy (OPD) as Congress was shutting its doors in late 1987. But documents and depositions released by the Iran/contras committee show that the Reagan Administration’s concept of public diplomacy involved very few facts. Instead, OPD’s activities constituted what one official called a “vast psychological warfare operation” aimed at Congress and the American people. 1

Early in Reagan’s tenure, officials recognized the battle for “hearts and minds” at home and abroad as a critical front in Washington’s counter-insurgency and pro-insurgency wars in Central America. An April 1982 “Top Secret” National Security

Planning Group report on Central America strategy noted, “We continue to have serious difficulties with US public and congressional opinion, which jeopardizes our ability to stay the course.”

To address this problem, President Reagan signed a directive called “Management of Public Diplomacy Relative to National Security” on January 13, 1983.2 The directive mandated the institutionalization of a propaganda capability within the national security bureaucracy. It authorized a new infrastructure, starting with the creation of a Special Planning Group in the National Security Council (NSC), to be “responsible for the overall planning, direction, coordination and monitoring of implementation of public diplomacy activities.”

Although the CIA’s own charter explicitly prohibits it from engaging in domestic propaganda activities, CIA officials were heavily involved in carrying out Reagan’s orders. CIA director William Casey was a key proponent of what he called, in classified memoranda, the need “for more effective governmental instrumentalities to deal with public diplomacy and informational challenges.” Walter Raymond, a veteran CIA

psychological operations specialist, was transferred to the NSC to become the “public diplomacy coordinator,” even as he continued to play a role in policy-making for the covert war in Nicaragua. Among Raymond’s responsibilities was the so-called “Thursday morning group” -a weekly interagency meeting on Central America propaganda activities attended by Lt. Col. Oliver North and officials from the CIA, State Department, and United States Information Agency (USIA).

In May 1983, Raymond advised that the “office of the Central American public diplomacy coordinator must be strengthened” and recommended that Otto Reich, an anti-Castro Cuban, be given “a White House cachet” to direct these operations. Reich assumed his position as head of OPD in July 1983 and received NSC authorization to recruit personnel from other national security agencies, including Defense, State, and USIA.

Within a year, OPD had a staff of twenty and an annual budget of \$1 million. Officially, it operated as a State Department office. In reality, as Congress member Dante Fascell complained to Secretary of State George Shultz during the Iran/Contra hearings, “the whole thing was being run by North out of the NSC.”

The activities of the Office of Public Diplomacy can be divided into four categories. The first might politely be called public information activities-the legal dissemination to the public and the press of the Administration’s line on Central America. The second category is media management, a task that consisted of selectively leaking tips to and applying pressure on the print and broadcast media. Third is what’s called in the trade “white propaganda”--illegally planting stories and op-ed pieces in the media. Finally, OPD mounted a massive lobbying and public relations campaign, jobbing out the grunt work to private PR firms.

The Propaganda

During his Iran/contra deposition, OPD director Otto Reich testified that the principal activity of the office was “producing

documents, speeches, publications, [and] background papers” for dissemination to the public and press. Indeed, OPD issued a steady stream of vituperative White Papers and pamphlets, with titles such as “The Managua Connection: The Sandinistas and Middle Eastern Terrorists” and “Revolution Beyond Our Borders.”

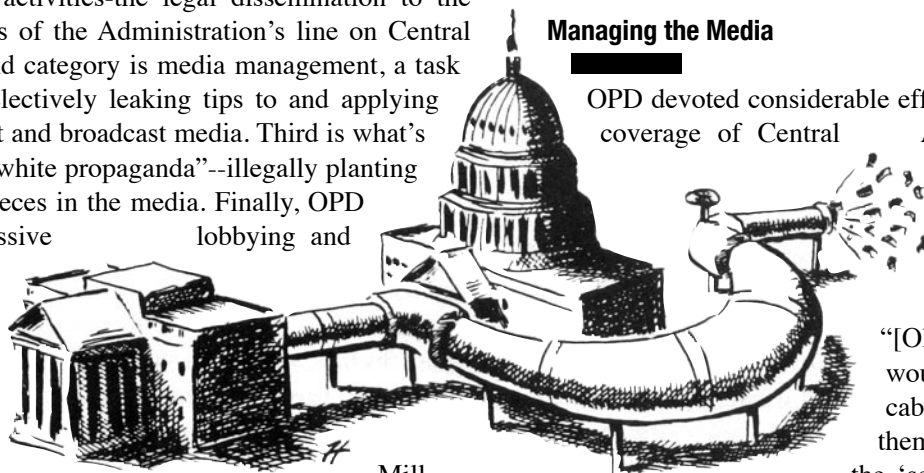
These documents, which Reich and his staff presented to hundreds of civic groups, rotary clubs, and university audiences, were invariably filled with innuendo, rhetoric, and misinformation meant to cast the Sandinistas in the worst possible light and the contras in the best. “Revolution Beyond Our Borders,” for example, portrays a statement by Nicaraguan Interior Minister Tomas Borge that the revolution “goes beyond our borders” as proof that the Sandinistas intended to promote subversion in Central America. Conveniently omitted are Borge’s following sentences: “This does not mean we export our revolution. It is sufficient that they follow our example.”³

Another OPD pamphlet contains flagrantly deceptive denials that the contras engage in terrorism. According to the document, “the armed opposition has attacked very few economic targets and has sought to avoid civilian casualties” -a statement contradicted by every reputable international human rights organization. Reports to the contrary, stated the pamphlet, are attributable to a Sandinista “propaganda campaign.”

Managing the Media

OPD devoted considerable effort to influencing media coverage of Central American issues. One commonly used tactic was to leak tidbits of classified material to favored journalists at propitious times. “[O]ften office staffers would merely read secret cables to reporters or show them documents still bearing the ‘secret’ label,” the Miami Herald reported on October 16, 1986.

Leaks were supplemented by intimidation. Reich personally brought pressure on television, print, and radio news personnel



The Propaganda Mill

to air stories that conformed with the Administration's view. After National Public Radio's All Things Considered broadcast a story on a contra massacre of civilians, for example, Reich demanded a meeting with NPR's top editors and producers to protest their "biased" coverage and made it clear that OPD monitored and analyzed all NPR stories on Central America. According to a participant in the meeting, Reich bragged that "he had made similar visits to other unnamed newspapers and major television networks [and] had gotten others to change some of their reporters in the field because of a perceived bias, and that their coverage was much better as a result."

White Propaganda

In its effort to manipulate the media and the public mindset, OPD employed a tactic the CIA frequently uses in foreign countries: planting articles and stories in the press under the names of third parties. Known in the intelligence community as "white propaganda," these activities were conducted inside the United States with the full knowledge of the White House.

In a "confidential" March 13, 1985 memorandum, OPD deputy director Jonathan Miller informed Patrick Buchanan, Assistant to the President for Communications, of "five illustrative examples of the Reich White Propaganda operation:" an op-ed piece in the Wall Street Journal attributed to an academic but actually written by OPD staff; a positive NBC news story on the contras; two opinion pieces written by OPD "consultants" but published under the names of the contra leaders (one in the New York Times and another in the Washington Post); and briefings for contra leader Alfonso Robelo, arranged by a "cutout," at the Post, Newsweek, and USA Today. "I will not



attempt in the future to keep you posted on all activities," Miller wrote Buchanan, "since the work of our operation is ensured by our office's keeping a low profile. I merely wanted to give you a flavor of some of the activities that hit our office on anyone day."

At the request of Congress, the General Accounting Office investigated the Office of Public Diplomacy and ruled that these operations were illegal. Investigators concluded that OPD had "engaged in prohibited, covert propaganda activities designed to influence the media and the public to support the Administration's Latin American policies."

The Contra Lobby

One of the Reagan Administration's unique contributions to the manipulation of the public has

been its reliance on the private sector to conduct propaganda, lobbying, and fundraising operations that would otherwise be illegal for the executive branch. Again, CIA director Casey was the driving force behind this plan to foster a "public-private relationship."

Congressional investigators reviewed a series of contracts between OPD and a public relations firm known as International Business Communications (IBC). Between 1984 and 1986, OPD gave IBC over \$440,000—including one contract for \$276,000 that was classified "secret"—to conduct various contra-related services. (During the same period, IBC played a key role in Oliver North's illegal contra resupply operations.)

In short, IBC helped to develop and carry out a sophisticated lobbying and public relations campaign for the contras. In testimony during the Irani contra investigation, IBC president Richard Miller (who in April 1987 pled guilty to defrauding the US treasury by illegally raising money for guns and funneling

The OPD became a

“vast psychological

warfare operation”

aimed at Congress and

the American people.



it into Lt. Col. North’s Geneva bank account) testified that his company “set up interviews and press conferences. We arranged television appearances ... we provided text for op-eds, editorials, letters to the editor, articles, translations of publications outside the United States that were then distributed by the Office ... We helped draft reports on public-affairs strategies. We helped edit texts for speeches.” And so on.

Internal company memoranda show that mc also acted as an intermediary in an illicit NSC lobbying operation to garner votes-as opposed to guns-for the contra forces. In specifically targeted swing districts, IBC took contra leaders to meet the press, arranged for broadcasts of pro-contra advertisements, and ran ads attacking Congress members who voted against contra aid. Trained lobbyists were paid to walk the halls of Capitol Hill.

The Fate of the Propaganda Ministry



In April 1986, the State Department bestowed a Meritorious Honor Award upon the Office of Public Diplomacy for “superior performance” in support of US policy in Central America. “Public diplomacy is a new, non-traditional activity for the United States Government,” the award justification intoned. Thus, OPD’s “staff have been pioneers in forging a

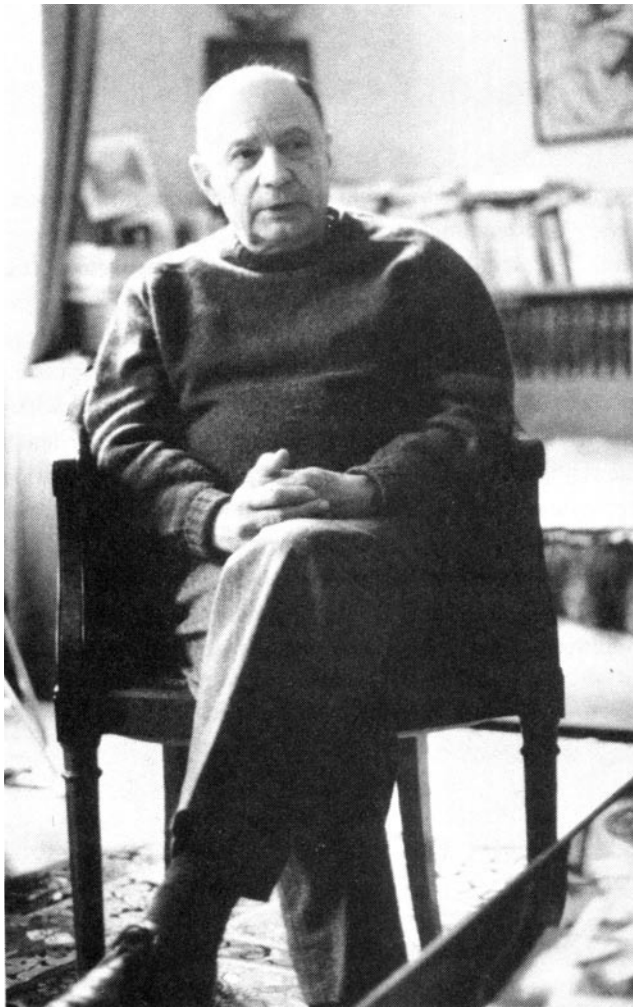
new tool for the implementation of foreign policy.”

A year and a half later, however, Congress was characterizing this “tool” as an institutionalized propaganda ministry. Indeed, the Office of Public Diplomacy became the only government institution to be sacrificed in the aftermath of the Iran/Contra scandal.

But OPD may be gone in name only. As Congress forced it to shut its doors, State Department officials let it be known that they would “simply reorganize the office, distributing its functions to other parts of the department.”

Peter Kornbluh is an information analyst at the National Security Archive, a documentation center in Washington DC. (The views expressed here are not necessarily those of NSA.) Kornbluh is the author of *Nicaragua: The Price of Intervention* (Washington DC: Institute for Policy Studies, 1987) and co-editor of *Low Intensity Warfare: Counterinsurgency, Proinsurgency and Anti-Terrorism in the Eighties* (New York: Pantheon, 1988).

- 1 In government documents, the Office of Public Diplomacy is variously referred to as S/LPD, LPD, and the Office of Public Diplomacy for Latin America and the Caribbean.
- 2 This document was obtained through the Freedom of Information Act by the National Security Archive.
- 3 Kornbluh, *Nicaragua: The Price of Intervention*, p. 171.
- 4 Ibid., p. 164.
- 5 “Shut and Open,” *New York Times*, December 30, 1987.



Jacques Ellul: Quirky Trailblazer of Propaganda Theory

CLAUDE STEINER
AND
CHARLES RAPPLEYE

By the middle of the 1950s, critical thinking about the phenomenon of propaganda had reached an impasse in the United States. Stirred by the obvious power and success of wartime mobilization campaigns on both sides of the Atlantic, mainstream sociologists like Harold D. Lasswell, Curtis MacDougall, David Krech, and Richard S. Crutchfield launched a raft of mechanistic analyses of the characteristics and effects of propaganda. Their literature moralized against the use of lies and hyperbole to influence the body politic, but that said, their critique ran out of steam. They failed to address the expanding fields of advertising, communications consulting, opinion polling, and market research; they regarded the rise of television and its propaganda implications as incidental.

Publication in 1965 of Jacques Ellul's *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* helped break that impasse by proposing new ways of looking at persuasion and mass communication. Received with little fanfare by the public, the book was nonetheless recognized by a small community of intellectuals and activists as a landmark.

Propaganda is startling and in some ways extreme, proposing that modern technology-driven propaganda presents the single greatest threat to democracy—indeed, to humanity. Key to this insight is Ellul's view of the crucial role propaganda plays in the relationship between the isolated individual and mass society.

Instead of accepting the standard model of propaganda as an evil perpetrated on an innocent public by a small cabal, Ellul looks at it as a partnership. He finds that propaganda satisfies a strong need in people to resolve fundamental questions about their role in a bewildering world. "There is," Ellul proposes, "a citizen who craves propaganda from the bottom of his being and a propagandist who responds to this craving" (P 121). The longterm effect of propaganda is the creation

of “a one-dimensional being without depth or range of possibilities” (P 165).

Ellul describes a closed system of psychological need and fulfillment that leads to the virtual disintegration of the personality. The intrusion of propaganda on people uprooted from traditional support systems—family, church, community—fosters widespread alienation and, in extreme form, the dangerous mass behavior seen in fascist states.

Propaganda, the Individual, the State

Ellul offers a psychological interpretation of the effects of the “information environment,” in which fear and isolation drive people to seek out propagandistic certainties. “That loneliness inside the crowd,” says Ellul, “is perhaps the most terrible ordeal of modern man ... [and] for it...propaganda is an incomparable remedy” (P 148).

But the price of that remedy is dear, since it sacrifices personal judgment to received knowledge. As Ellul puts it, “Prejudices ... [are] greatly reinforced and hardened by propaganda” (P 162); the need to justify those prejudices leads to denial of internal conflicts, self-criticism, and self-doubt. The mind is closed to new ideas; the individual

Ellul's Life

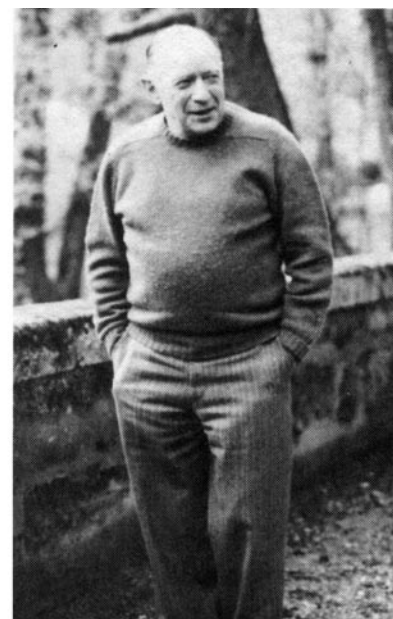
The son of a Frenchwoman and a once-wealthy Serbian aristocrat, Jacques Ellul grew up in extreme poverty without books or other cultural amenities. An avid and brilliant student at the lycee, he went on to study law for purely practical reasons. During his law studies, he encountered Marx's writings and found there a “total vision of the human race, society and history” (PS 5).

Soon after, Ellul tells us, he underwent “a very sudden and very brutal conversion” (PS 14) to a personal form of Christianity related to the Reform church, though he declines to detail the circumstances of the event. From that

can now “throw off all sense of guilt; he loses all feeling for the harm he might do” (P 165).

One might expect education to be the antidote to propaganda. But according to Ellul, education increases people's susceptibility to it. The educated and upwardly mobile, who believe they are beyond propaganda, in fact need it most.

Political propaganda, “the type called immediately to mind by the word propaganda itself,” involves “techniques of influence employed by a government, a party, an administration, a pressure group, with a view to changing the behavior of the public” (P 62). The mass public, according to Ellul, has become a crucial factor in politics, but has proven too volatile to make the coherent decisions required to run a state.



moment on, he says, “I lived through the conflict and the contradiction between what became the center of my life—this faith—and what I knew of Marx and did not wish to abandon” (PS 14). Ellul developed these conflicting themes throughout a prolific writing career: he is the author of 23 books, most on religious subjects.

Ellul obtained a doctorate in law but rejected a position on the bench because “both as a Christian and an adherent to Marxist thought” he could not perform the duties of a judge who would be “required to be a faithful servant of capitalist society” (ps 17). He chose teaching instead,

The democratic state needs propaganda, according to Ellul, in order to bring its population into line while maintaining the illusion of popular support that is its source of legitimacy. “[A]ny modern State, even a democratic one, is burdened with the task of acting through propaganda. It cannot act otherwise,” he says (P 128). Yet the very function of propaganda is to undermine the characterological capacities that are needed for democratic decision making. It is a daunting paradox; Ellul lays it out dispassionately and offers no resolution.

Ellul highlights the dire consequences of political propaganda more clearly than do the mainstream analysts. But his greatest contribution may lie in his identification of a broader and more diffuse kind of propaganda, which he labels sociological. In proposing this category, Ellul seeks to address the coercive nature of mass culture, the ways in

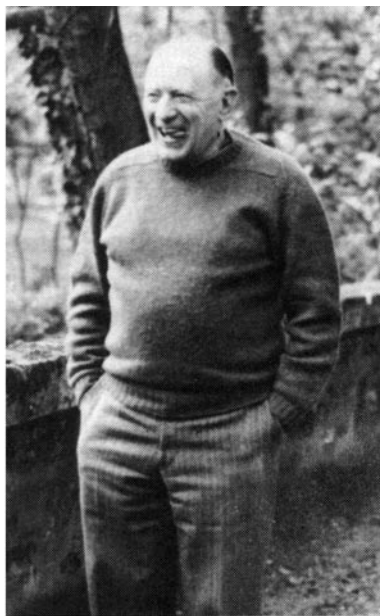
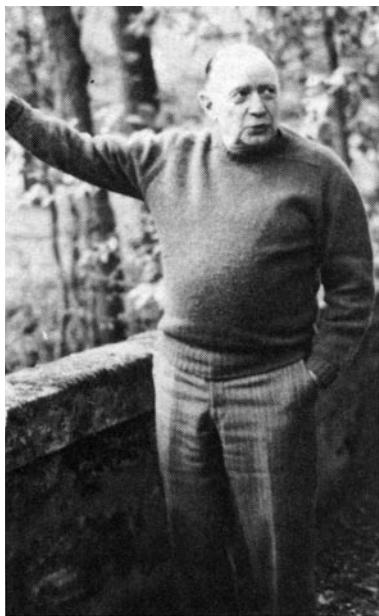
which “the existing economic, political and sociological factors progressively allow an ideology to penetrate individuals or masses” (P 63).

Sociological propaganda encompasses advertising, public relations, human relations, human engineering, movies, and television. It “springs up spontaneously; it is not the result of deliberate propaganda action,” Ellul writes (P 64). Sociological propaganda is “much more vast and less certain” (P 62) than its conventional cousin; it is influence aims more at an entire life style than at opinions or even one particular course of behavior” (P 62-63).

Propaganda: Techniques and Effects

Propaganda can be read as a disorganized but prescient handbook for the modern propagandist, a catalog of methods for manipulating the human will. In it, Ellul observes that the propagandist’s key tool is knowledge of “the sentiments and opinions, the current tendencies and the stereotypes among the public he is trying to reach” (P 34). Here he anticipates the use of polling for propaganda purposes.

“Propaganda cannot create something out of nothing,” Ellul writes (P 36), but must use material already existing in the psychological and



a position at the University of Bordeaux.

Ellul lost his job when Hitler invaded France because he advised some of his students against cooperating with the Germans. Unemployed and persecuted, he vanished with his wife and child into the countryside, where he raised sheep and became a potato farmer. He joined the French resistance but became progressively disillusioned with communism, especially with the conduct of the French Communist Party during the War. After the War, he returned to the university

where he became a full professor and developed a large following.

Today, at 77, he is retired but continues an active schedule in Bordeaux, the town where he was born and where he is a public figure, having once been elected mayor. He does not speak a foreign language (though he reads several) and has barely traveled outside of France. He lives in an ancient, shuttered, stone farmhouse, does not drive a car, and perhaps most surprising, does not own a typewriter. His one concession to technology is a large television, which he considers his one-way eye into the world of propaganda. Otherwise, his spacious, book-filled study could serve as a museum exhibit of an intellectual’s den from the turn of the century.

-C.S.

Citizens crave

propaganda from

the bottom of

their beings. And

propagandists

respond.

████████████████████

forget is unlimited.” The propagandist can be sure that “a particular theme, statement or event will be forgotten within a few weeks” (P 47).

Borrowing heavily from Goebbels, Ellul describes the kind of lies that are likely to work. The propagandist should never tell factual lies that can be exposed, he says. Much more effective are those that attribute intentions-which after all cannot be proven. “The propagandist must insist on the purity of his own intentions and at the same time, hurl accusations at his enemy” (P 58). However, the propagandist must not accuse the target of “just any misdeed; he will accuse him of the very intention that he himself has and of trying to commit the crime that he himself is about to commit” (P 58).

In Ellul’s view, propaganda does not rely, as is commonly believed, on changing ideas and opinions. Instead, it “aims solely at participation” (P 26). Agitation propaganda

sociological “terrain” of the person at whom it is aimed. Thus, the propagandist must never make a direct attack on an established, reasonable, durable opinion or on an accepted cliché. Effective propaganda depends not on lies, but on selective interpretations of an unending stream of “facts.” What makes this process of distortion work, says Ellul, is that “man’s capacity to

encourages the individual to take part in political action; integration propaganda fits her or him smoothly into the system. These ends “cannot be obtained by the process of choice and deliberation,” Ellul says. “To be effective, propaganda must constantly short-circuit all thought and decision” (P 27). The individual’s participation reinforces the power of the propaganda regime: “[H]e who acts in obedience to propaganda .. is now obliged to believe in that propaganda because of his past action” (P 29). Once propaganda has taken hold, it becomes a self-reinforcing means for affecting and influencing people. Ellul notes with irony that “truth is powerless without propaganda” (P 235).

Ellul’s Christianity

████████████████████

Ellul lays down a storm of ideas without necessarily organizing them for the reader, and without presenting an overall analysis that puts propaganda into perspective. Nor does he offer an accessible alternative to mass manipulation.

Ellul draws heavily on personal experiences-poverty, Europe’s battle against the Third Reich, and the Cold War.

Through it all, he remains deeply provincial; his theory attempts to restore the values of the rural community to individuals powerless in the face of modern society. His pursuit has led him to embrace both Marxist and Christian perspectives.

From the time he was a law student, Ellul believed that Marx had laid out with irrefutable logic the dynamics of history and the true nature of modern social relations. Early

PR Interviews Jaques Ellul

████████████████████

STEINER: Does the media have to be centralized to be effective as a propaganda tool?

ELLUL: It is not centralized in the US, but the United States has a propaganda of a different nature from the propagandas used under Hitler and Stalin. It is the US society itself that produces its own propaganda. There is no longer an authority that directs the propaganda; it directs itself.

STEINER: As I understand it, you believe that propagandawhether its ends are good or bad-is not only destructive to democracy, but a serious threat to humanity.

ELLUL: That is correct. But again, it’s not exactly the same kind of propaganda as in the past. Today, the greatest threat is that propaganda is seeking not to attract people, but to weaken their interest in society. I am astonished by the enormous number of TV game shows, football games, computer games. They encourage people to play: “Let yourselves be entertained, amuse yourselves, do not concern yourselves with politics, it’s not worth the trouble.” In the Soviet Union, the situation is identical. They are n() longer trying to convince the Soviet people that communism is the truth. Rather, they are trying to distract them to make life easier for them, to satisfy them.

STEINER: You have no suggestions in your book about what might be done to help people overcome propaganda and their need

on, however, “when faced very concretely with the question of death,” Ellul realized that “Marx did not have answers for everything; the questions of life and death and ... love” (PS 14). The balance of the equation, he came to believe, lay in Christianity.

Still determined to resolve the issues raised by Marx, Ellul proposed that “technology was the most decisive factor explaining our era” (PS 32), permeating every aspect of social relations. Ellul published these views in *The Technological Society*. Propaganda was written later, almost as an appendix. Ellul regarded propaganda as the aspect of technology that impinges most directly on the individual. “In the midst of increasing mechanization and technological organization, propaganda is simply the means used ... to persuade man to submit with good grace” (P xviii).

Later, while trying to find an effective response to the damage done by technology, Ellul turned to religion. “The Christian Revelation,” he writes, “offers a reference point that is not incorporated into the system, which can aid us in escaping it. [O]nly something that belongs to neither our history nor our world can do this” (PS 100). We need transcendence, he believes, and that transcendence is available through faith in Christ.

By linking propaganda to his overarching theory of technology, and escape from propaganda to a transcendental notion of Christianity, Ellul presses his audience to accept a sweeping and eccentric world view, one nostalgic for an anachronistic rural life. He offers little hope for effective social responses to propaganda; he believes that the best and perhaps only recourse is the development of individual awareness and responsibility.

for it.

ELLUL: I think there is no other way to struggle than to develop each individual’s personality and his or her awareness. STEINER: You can’t use propaganda methods to destroy propaganda?

ELLUL: That’s correct. Sometime ago I was teaching a course on propaganda techniques. I wasn’t studying the principles of propaganda as I do in my book; I was trying to teach my students about propaganda techniques in various countries so they could recognize them.

At that time, I discovered that a French officer had been arrested in the Algerian War and imprisoned because he was in possession of secret documents which belonged to the Fifth Office, the office for propaganda during the Algerian War. I tried

In spite of Ellul’s theoretical opacity, his work offers startling insights. By looking at modern communications through an idiosyncratic lens shaped by Christianity and revisionist Marxism, Ellul opened the doors to a new, more sophisticated critique of propaganda. In a field fraught with vague notions, his pointed observations serve as a reliable point of departure to anyone interested in the still nascent subject of propaganda analysis .•

Claude Steiner *is a psychologist and the author of a half dozen books.*

Charles Rappleye *is a freelance writer living in Los Angeles.*

1 Ellul consistently used male pronouns when referring to human beings. We have not altered this.

Books abbreviated as P and PS are, respectively, *Propaganda, The Formation of Men’s Attitudes*, New York: Vintage Books, 1965 and *Perspectives On Our Age*, New York: Seabury Press, 1981.

to contact this prisoner and to get hold of his secret documents because I hoped I could use them in my study. When I finally managed to obtain them, I found that they were notes from my course. The Fifth Office had taken my classwork to construct their propaganda in Algeria. I decided never to write anything on propaganda techniques again.

These excerpts are from an interview conducted in April 1986 for PR at Ellul’s home in Bordeaux. The complete text of the interview and a bibliography of Ellul’s works can be obtained from Claude Steiner. Send a self-addressed, stamped envelope and \$3 to 2901 Piedmont Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94705.

Speak No Evil

MICHAEL
MILEY

"The history of FCC harassment of Pacifica has been unrelenting during the nearly 40 years since the network was created. Today, once again, Pacifica feels the need to undertake the administrative and financial burdens of fighting this latest FCC assault. And, once again, it seems entitled to prevail."

**-Nicholas Johnson,
former FCC Commissioner,
*Washington Journalism
Review*, July/Aug 1987.**



Daniel Ziegler

In April 1987, the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) launched an assault on the airwaves, dramatically broadening its definition of obscenity and indecency and withdrawing a 10 p.m. "safe harbor" for adult broadcasting. The crackdown came on the heels of a single complaint lodged against Pacifica Foundation's KPFK radio station in Los Angeles, as well as complaints against two other stations that had allegedly broadcast indecent shows.

The new restrictions stirred broad controversy in the media over questions of constitutionality. But what the hullabaloo largely ignored was an even more sinister subtext: evidence supporting Pacifica's claims of political harassment and of illegal

collusion between the FCC and right-wing evangelical groups in efforts to engineer the crackdown. The first claim can be supported by a glance at the long history of FCC, Congressional, and right-wing harassment of the Pacifica Foundation, which operates five progressive radio stations. (See sidebar.). The second is substantiated by documents recently released under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

Hear No Evil, Speak No Evil

- Pacifica's most recent trouble began in the evening of August 31, 1986, after 10 p.m., when an excerpt from the play *The Jerker* by gay activist Robert Chesley was aired on KPFK. The

excerpt, part of a program geared for gays about safe sex, dealt with two men with AIDS who share their fantasies over the phone, masturbating to satisfy themselves without contact. The play is poignant and graphic, its language explicit; nonetheless, it won high praises from the New York Times and many other publications.

It just so happened-so the pro-censorship version of the story goes-that while driving home from the airport that night with his teenage son, the Reverend Larry Poland, president of the Christian right-wing anti-porn mediawatch organization called Mastermedia International, tuned into KPFK with his automatic search radio. He was appalled, he says, by what he heard. He noted all instances of four-letter words, and the next day sent off an angry letter to the FCC urging action against Pacifica.

An ax was in motion. By April, the FCC issued its Memorandum Opinion and Order warning Pacifica that The Jerker broadcast had violated the indecency law, and that the broadcast was "actionable under the indecency standard as clarified today." That "clarification" amounted to a set of new guidelines. Future violations, said the FCC, could lead to revocation of Pacifica's license. The FCC also referred the Pacifica case to the Justice Department for criminal prosecution.

Pacifica immediately arranged criminal defense attorneys for the parties involved and hired others to appeal the ruling on First Amendment and other grounds: KPFK had aired the show after 10 p.m., with all the requisite warnings, under the FCC guidelines in effect at the time; any change in FCC policy could not be applied retroactively. Furthermore, the changes in policy came without prior public or private hearings-a violation of the federal Administrative Procedures Act.

The appeal was largely successful. In December, the case for criminal prosecution was dropped by the Justice Department and the FCC announced it had removed legal sanctions against Pacifica. The Commission took pains, however, to declare that it considered the broadcast of The Jerker indecent, and it has not backed down from its attack on adult broadcasting.

The Right Foot of the FCC

Meanwhile, Pacifica had begun to unravel secret maneuverings between the FCC and the religious right that had preceded the

crackdown. In May 1987, Pacifica's lawyers and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Southern California filed FOIA requests with the FCC for all papers surrounding the ruling and the changes in policy. They specifically requested all memoranda, logs, calendars, notes pertaining to meetings and phone conversations, and correspondence to and from the FCC dated on or after January 1, 1986.

The FCC is notoriously slow when it comes to fulfilling FOIA requests, and its compliance with Pacifica's requests was no exception. The delay, in fact, compelled Pacifica to file a lawsuit. A few documents began to arrive and a picture of joint efforts between the FCC and the religious right began to emerge. Their censorship campaign, involving meetings, letters, and phone calls, was planned before Poland's complaint and continued after it-significant because the FCC is prohibited by its ex parte rules from receiving private transactions from a complainant after a complaint has been lodged.

Several key letters were among the documents pried loose by the FOIA request. The first, dated July 9, 1986, was sent to FCC Chair Mark Fowler by Brad Curl, National Director of the National Decency Forum (NDF). Curl thanks Fowler for his time at past meetings and states that the NDF will discontinue opposition to his tenure "in hopes that your assistants might have time to thoroughly research the law and the argument" in favor of our position on FCC decency enforcement." He goes on to tell Fowler that he had a good talk with your General Counsel, Jack Smith, and he seems willing to cooperate on some decency actions;" he then agrees to give the FCC what Fowler apparently asked for: "I will take action to publicize the need for more documented citizen complaints. Jack Smith said he would be more than willing to cooperate on a few 'send a message' cases." The letter winds up revealing past pressures: "If we are satisfied that there is significant response to our deep concerns about the material reaching our children, we will abandon our growing and campaign to secure new FCC leadership."

The second letter, dated July 23, was written to FCC General Counsel Jack Smith by Paul McGeady, General Counsel for Morality in Media, one of the National Decency Forum's subsidiary organizations. In it, McGeady lays out his case for a more pro-active role for the FCC in enforcing community standards (and in determining these standards itself). He urges action against violators in the form of fines, revocation of licenses, and civil sanctions, since civil suits are so much

Secret documents

revealed

maneuverings

between the FCC

the religious right.



specification as to what community was referred to.”

A third letter mentions Smith’s reply in September 1986 to a letter from Donald Wildmon, executive director of the National Federation for Decency, another NDF progeny. Wildmon had wanted FCC to take action against independent station WPTYTV in Memphis for its broadcast of the R-rated movie *The Rose*. Smith’s response was, “I do not believe this presents the kind of airtight case that you want to push at this time. We are inquiring into a couple of other cases which we think may be more clear violations. I think you should agree with our reasoning on this matter.” Smith later defended this action, saying that “one of the obligations [of the FCC staff] is to inform citizens as to how to file complaints.”

easier to win than criminal ones. McGeady advises Smith to stop passing the buck to the Justice Department, especially since criminal convictions require that “a transgressor be found guilty ‘beyond a reasonable doubt,’” while civil sanctions only require “preponderance of the evidence” and “clear and convincing” evidence. He notes that the notion of community standards could be applied “without

A fourth letter, particularly damning, was sent by Curl to the then out-going Fowler on February 23, 1987. Curl thanks Fowler for initiating three inquiries and states that “we will be especially grateful if you can complete these three cases before you leave, as you promised me in our last phone conversation.” Since this letter was received privately after the complaint for *The Jerker* broadcast, it too, violates ex parte rules.

Though the Reverend Larry Poland has yet to be directly implicated in these behind-the-scenes maneuverings, it’s hard to imagine that Mastermedia was exempt from the NDF’s call in July 1986 to make documented complaints. Mastermedia would certainly not have left the monitoring of the airwaves to chance; it would target potential offenders. Regardless, Jack Smith phoned Poland a couple of weeks after receipt of his letter to tell him “he’s going to be famous,” almost commending him for his efforts. The call, another violation of ex parte, certainly suggests that the FCC and Mastermedia were engaged in a joint censorship effort

The Left Foot of the Broadcast Industry



After the FCC issued its new restrictive guidelines in April 1987, a petition for reconsideration was filed by the national ACLU, the People for the American Way, and three public television networks (NPR, PBS, and APR). On December 29, the FCC issued an opinion refusing to modify its position and withdrew the notion of a safe harbor altogether.

As a result, on January 28 of this year, public television

Highlights from a Chronicle of Harassment



The Pacifica Foundation has long been under fire from the FCC, Congress, and conservative religious organizations. Since it was created in 1949, by journalist Lewis Hill, Pacifica has been pressured, harassed, threatened and even bombed. A full chronicle of its battles would fill pages. Here are some excerpts.

1954: The US Attorney General impounds the tape of a Pacifica broadcast after a program in which four people describe the effects of marijuana.

1960 to 1963: The House Un-American Activities Committee and the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee investigate

Pacifica programming for signs of disloyalty. Suspected artists included Norman Cousins, Carey McWilliams, W.E.B. Dubois, and Herbert Aptheker.

1962: Pacifica’s New York station, WBAI, fights back with the first radio or television broadcast ever to present a sustained attack on the FBI and its director J. Edgar Hoover. The program is followed by threats of arrests and bombings, as well as pressure from the FBI, Justice Department, and major broadcast networks.

1964: The FCC renews the licenses of WBAI, KPFA, and KPFA after a three-year delay caused by the investigations. In a major victory for Pacifica, the FCC issued a policy

networks and twelve media reform groups joined together to file an appeal of the denial. With Action for Children's TV as the lead appellant, the coalition is charging that the guidelines are "in violation of the First Amendment," "arbitrary and capricious," and "otherwise contrary to the law." Pacifica-which cannot be a formal party in this appeal-is watching it closely.

To this date, the FCC has never clarified just what it considers indecent. Journalists never know which words might offend the FCC. Phrases like "up the gazoo" are generally considered candidates for obscenity by broadcasters who are polled; they're also convinced their stations would be shut down if anyone said "eat it" or "stuff it" on the air.

When the April rulings went into effect, reporters from the Los Angeles Times asked FCC spokesperson Rosemary Kimball how a station could discern in advance whether its programming was in violation of the FCC's indecency rules. Her response, noted in the June 16, 1987 issue of the Village Voice: "We have nothing to tell them-that 'This is OK' and 'This is not OK.' Basically, we're going to react to programming when there's a complaint [and each situation] will be considered on a case-by-case basis." The result of this arbitrary application of "law" has been an across-the-board chilling of the airwaves.

In the meantime, the Pacifica Foundation is building its own case. Despite the fact that it has spent over \$100,000 in legal and related fees since The Jerker case began, future battles are on the horizon. "Pacifica sees a fight gearing up over the unconstitutionality of the new FCC guidelines and we're doing all we can to publicize the cultural issues involved," Executive

Director David Salniker told Propaganda Review. "In the meantime, we're continuing our investigation surrounding the illegal maneuvers of the FCC and right-wing morality groups that led up to the new rulings."

On the other side, Poland has implied in a recent letter to Mastermedia supporters that his organization needs funds for a potentially protracted legal battle. But Salniker doesn't rule out a preemptive legal attack of his own. "Regardless of which strategy we pursue--political or legal or both-we intend to show that the Pacifica Foundation is not a convenient whipping boy for rightwing groups who set about pressuring the FCC." •

Research assistance for this article was provided by Annette Doombos, Nanette Leuschel, and Mary Tilson.

Michael Miley, former anchor for Radio Free Chicago on Loyola University of Chicago radio station WLU W, was twice thrown off the air for alleged indecency: once for airing the poetry of Carolyn Forché from *The Country Between Us*, and a second time for airing an interview with a right-wing death-squad member from El Salvador.

1969: statement barring censorship of "provocative" programs, probes of leftist ties, and obscenity. Pacifica's application to build a new station in Houston is challenged by the Christ Church Foundation on the grounds of anti-Semitism and obscenity. The application is finally granted in March 1970, and KPFT begins broadcasting. Three months later, the station is bombed. After months of inactivity by federal agents and Houston police, Pacifica mounts a massive media campaign. In October, KPFT is bombed again. Federal agents arrest a former red squad employee and Klansman. He is charged with plotting to blow up KPFA and KPFK, as well as with

the KPFT dynamiting, and is sentenced in October 1971. **1975:** The FCC challenges a WBAI broadcast of George Carlin's "Seven Dirty Words That You Can't Hear on TV." No sanctions are imposed, but the Carlin case sets the limits of broadcasting for over a decade. **1980:** A complaint is filed with the FCC against KPFA for its "indecent" programming of a four-part series on sex therapy. The FCC dismisses it, after extensive legal arguments, primarily because the series was aired after 10 p.m. **1987:** The post-10 p.m. safe harbor is withdrawn in The Jerker incident.

M.M.

Remystifying Ethel Rosenberg?

MARJORIE PENN LASKY

Ethel Rosenberg: Beyond the Myths by Ilene Philipson. New York: Franklin Watts, 1988.

Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, “ordinary people” who led what their attorney called “unexceptional lives,” attained mythological status even before they were executed for conspiracy to commit espionage on June 19, 1953. For 35 years, much of the American left has preserved the image of heroes holding fast to their ideals, victims of the injustices of the capitalist system.

Has the left hopelessly mystified

Has the left hopelessly

mystified the Rosenbergs,

creating heroes

of mythic proportion?

the Rosenberg case, turning history into doctrine and inevitably fallible human beings into heroes of mythic proportion? Has it used the Rosenbergs as a kind of propaganda that serves its own political interests?

For some leftists, ideology has dictated historical interpretation. Perhaps because the left’s marginalization creates a need for larger-than-life heroes, an insistence on the Rosenbergs’ innocence was elevated

to the status of creed. That blind conviction persists in certain quarters even today, particularly among those who continue to demand that the government reopen the case.

For others on the left, the question of the Rosenbergs’ guilt or innocence has always been secondary to other issues: government

conspiracy, the dubious proposition that the A-bomb “secrets” the Rosenbergs allegedly stole were of use to the Soviet Union, and the Cold War equation that ties radicalism to espionage and anti-Americanism.

During the Rosenbergs’ trial and incarceration, the left responded either by ignoring the case, by trying to prove Ethel and Julius innocent, or by questioning the severity of their sentence. Although the probability of the Rosenbergs’ innocence captured the public’s imagination, none of the left’s responses succeeded in communicating the underlying issues. Today, after years of research have shown that there was indeed a massive government conspiracy against the Rosenbergs, the focus remains on their guilt or innocence—and the case’s larger implications are still obscured.

Outside the right-wing consensus, one of the first observers to deviate from the left’s hagiography was Ronald Radosh, who (with Sol Stern in 1979 and with Joyce Milton in 1983)



argued that Julius Rosenberg was guilty of coordinating an extensive espionage operation and that Ethel was his accessory. Now comes Ilene Philipson’s *Ethel Rosenberg: Beyond the Myths*, which provides another less-than-reverential-albeit more sympathetic-appraisal from the left.

Philipson, a sociologist and former editor of *Socialist Review*, contends that Julius probably was a spy and that Ethel, always her husband’s confidant, must have known so. Within this framework, Philipson uses a psychological approach to explain Ethel “on her own terms,” and to go beyond both the myths of the left and those of anti-communists who have clung to the Rosenbergs’ guilt to justify the development of the national security state.

The practice of psychology to interpret the past (a practice often called “psychohistory”) is quite controversial. Some critics have denounced it as reductionist, illogical, and unhistorical

for flattening the complexities of human behavior into one-dimensional caricatures. Others have condemned it for emphasizing unconscious rather than conscious motivation and for ignoring the social determinants of individual behavior.

Although some psychohistories deserve these criticisms, psychology and psychoanalysis do offer scholars tools for interpreting historical evidence and all of us insight into the human complexity of historical figures. At times, Philipson effectively uses such tools and provides such insights, especially when she examines how Ethel's family, always antagonistic, turned against her after her arrest. But Philipson too often advances psychologically simplistic conclusions based on unsubstantiated theoretical deductions, rather than convincing explanations based on reliable data. Unfortunately, she may be unwittingly creating new psychohistorical myths in the process of trying to transcend the old ones.

According to the old myths, Ethel was either a cold, domineering partner in crime or a strong but victimized martyr. For Philipson, Ethel's apparent indifference in the face of adversity was a facade, a defense mechanism she used to ward off public or private acknowledgement of vulnerability. Behind this veneer lay a fragile, somewhat naive, and defenseless woman who in 1948 sought therapy for her five-year-old son and herself in order to untangle their relationship; who in 1949 began psychoanalysis; and who often cried herself to sleep in prison, as she suffered from back pain, migraine, and ever-deepening

depression.

According to the myths, Ethel was either a devoted mother or a Communist fanatic who abandoned her children rather than sacrifice her principles. For Philipson, politics and morality contributed to Ethel's decision to go to the electric chair rather than confess (Philipson uses quotes around the word, thus hedging on the question of guilt), but more important was Ethel's devotion to Julius and her ambivalence as a mother.

Philipson argues that Ethel saw Julius as a savior who had rescued her from a deprived, unfeeling household. She idealized Julius and depended upon him to validate her existence. Implicating her champion and mainstay as a spy so that she might someday nurture her children was too much to ask of her, particularly since she continually questioned her adequacy as a mother.

Philipson concludes that Ethel's refusal to confess constituted child abandonment. She attributes this decision not to Communist fanaticism,

but to a complicated psychopathology that only partially involved ideological commitment.

In posing Ethel's choice as one between abandonment and confession, Philipson seems to suggest that she had some reasonable alternative. But if Ethel didn't know about Julius' actions or if he were innocent, she had nothing to confess. If Julius were guilty and Ethel knew it, she might have informed on him, and been executed anyway. Ethel could have accepted the last-minute deal (offered to each of the Rosenbergs separately) to escape the electric chair by confessing, but that might have sent Julius to his death. And confessing might still have brought her a 30-year sentence—another form of child abandonment, and one that would have forced her to live with and pass on to her children the legacy of Ethel the informer.

Moreover, Philipson presumes that Ethel lucidly understood her alternatives. Because of her occasional optimism, Julius' reassurances, and the worldwide movement to free the Rosenbergs, Ethel must have wondered

The Rosenbergs' son Michael presents clemency petition.



if she were really going to die. Philipson also fails to evaluate how two years in nearly solitary confinement affected Ethel's perceptions, especially as the end drew near and she began to think of herself as a modern Joan of Arc.

To her credit, Philipson effectively delineates the historical background to the Rosenberg case, including the strategy and tactics of the Communist Party in the 1930s and the radical culture at City College of New York. She ably demonstrates how Julius as a student gravitated to the alcoves of campus buildings to debate Marxist principles, and gradually aligned himself with the Communist Party.

However, for the psychological dimension of her study, Philipson mistakenly depends upon a paucity of sources that require much more judicious handling than she gave them: biased secondary works, prison letters written for public consumption, interviews conducted long after the events, trial testimony, affidavits from Julius' unreliable prison cellmate, and thousands of pages of FBI reports of dubious validity. An insufficiently critical use of these sources frequently leads her to accept questionable documentation at face value, to make inferences based on little support, and to offer controversial interpretations with no corroboration. Qualifiers litter the text, increasing the reader's wariness.

One example of faulty methodology is Philipson's acceptance of Ethel's analyst's report that she was thinking of placing her son Michael in foster care. Philipson takes this as literally true, rather than evaluating it as an understandable fantasy shared in

different versions by many parents of difficult children.

The flaws in Philipson's work have already exacted a toll. Apparently, the Rosenbergs' sons, Michael and Robert Meeropol, initially supported Philipson's project, giving her access to their parents' unpublished correspondence and furnishing names and addresses of potential interviewees. However, after reading the manuscript, they were quite distressed, and revoked her permission to quote from either the published or unpublished letters.

Because the Meeropols have refused to specify their problems with the book, Philipson concludes that they are acting as guardians of a myth; that they want nothing in print that contradicts their idealization of their parents. Again, she seems to be jumping to conclusions. Given the book's defects and the fact that they are the Rosenbergs' sons, the Meeropols' behavior is understandable. Still, their decision raises the question of whether individuals, particularly leftists, should withhold information from writers with whom they disagree.

As a general principle, full disclosure of historical documents helps demystify the past and differentiate between false gods and real heroes. For the left, a nuanced and sensitive understanding of its history would help it evaluate its strengths and its many weaknesses, including its failure to achieve popular credibility. Psychohistory

can expedite these processes, as long as its practitioners don't set out to impose theory or to discover pathological behavior that is irrelevant to understanding an individual's historical significance.

In spite of its serious flaws, Philipson's book points to the importance of moving away from the old questions about guilt versus innocence, and from the old myths about saint versus sinner. Both the book and Philipson's conflict with the Meeropols highlight the need to demystify not only the Rosenbergs, but other heroes as well. •

Marjorie Penn Lasky, a history instructor at Diablo Valley College in Pleasant Hill, CA.



Readin', Rantin' and Rhetoric

PAUL LICHTERMAN

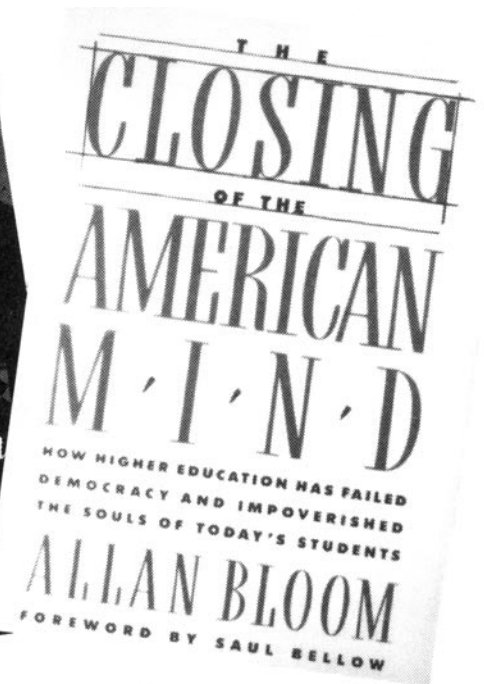
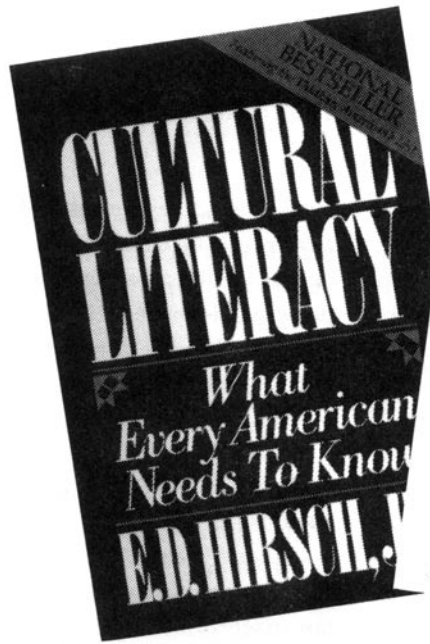
The Closing of the American Mind
by Allan Bloom. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987.

Cultural Literacy by E.D. Hirsch, Jr.
Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987.

Public schooling is inseparable from the American dream: getting an education is universally considered both the way to get ahead and the prerequisite for an informed and aware citizenry. Not surprisingly then, educational policy has often become a noisy arena of struggle between different groups with different priorities.

In recent years, debate about education has come to focus on school curriculum. This is a contest about which bodies and pieces of knowledge should be officially sanctioned as worth knowing, and which realities should be mass distributed through schooling. Skirmishes over the content of undergraduate core courses at Stanford and other universities represent one important front in the battle. Another is taking place on the unlikely turf of bestsellerdom.

Two books-Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* and E.D. Hirsch Jr.'s *Cultural Literacy*-have been central to the curriculum debate. Bloom's book was on the *New York Times*' bestseller list for nearly a year; Hirsch's for about half that long. Both have been reissued as paperbacks. They have been reviewed in countless magazines; they have been chatted about on talk show after talk show. But for all the controversy about what Jane and Johnny should read, the question of who should make these



decisions has been largely ignored.

Bloom and Hirsch implicitly invite their readers to take their places as spectators at the ringside, watching as philosophical traditions and educational theories compete for control of the classroom. Neither these authors nor their reviewers have given serious thought to the role of people just like their readers in actual debates and decision-making about new

educational standards. In fact, the thrust of their arguments discourages ordinary citizens from playing a well-informed role. And yet, the very popularity of Bloom's and Hirsch's books seems to suggest that the "American mind" may be more open now than ever before to a discussion about what students should know in common and how we should define standards for that knowledge.

Looking for a Few Good Men

Allan Bloom is particularly uncharitable to the possibilities of a broad public discussion of what schools should teach. His book about what he considers the deterioration of the American university is a beleaguered plea for the Old Literacy.

The problem with American universities, as far as Bloom is concerned, is that they have opened themselves to popular scrutiny, thus closing themselves to the lofty universal truths of intellectual tradition. The very institution that was supposed to "maintain the permanent questions front and center" has instead let itself be trampled by the partisans

Skirmishes over school

curriculum are unfolding

on the unlikely turf of talk

shows and bestsellerdom.

of relevance, the sans-culottes of race and gender sensitivity. Bloom argues that a democratic society needs an “unpopular institution” in its midst. In the good old days, the Great Books were good enough for training the Great Men, and Bloom is quite worked up—in fact, he’s personally offended—at attempts during the last two decades to change that state of affairs.

Bloom constructs a grand history of the downfall of the American university. In it, ideas rather than people are the principal actors; German ideas are held to have been especially pernicious. According to Bloom’s idea-centered history, nazis and new leftists shared similar impulses: both tried to infiltrate universities whose resolve to continue the reasoned pursuit of timeless truths had already been weakened by nihilist and spontaneist philosophies. American universities of the sixties, like their German counterparts 30 years earlier, had already succumbed to Bad Ideas before the first student radical lifted a bullhorn.

We dwell now in the intellectual ruins of the student uprisings. The integrity of the liberal arts curriculum has been choked by the weeds of relevance and intellectual “openness.” Universities no longer have the will to teach “the best of the past,” to pursue “the truth.” They are no longer committed to the transcendent standards that Bloom favors: the ones that come from the “soul.”

Perhaps Bloom’s evocation of the timeless virtues brings to a fragmented public culture a comforting note of certainty about the (hierarchical) order of things. But this is not the sort of comfort that we can afford to indulge. Perched high on pretension, Bloom

stands against easy relativism, against anything-goes curricula. He is too high up to see the actual peoples and cultural traditions that will enact and reshape whichever great ideas we share.

Democracy doesn’t have to mean that every idea and every cultural tradition is as worthy of being nurtured as every other one. But a diverse society cannot hope to preserve democracy if its citizens are taught to abdicate their

like Bloom’s, suggests that a few philosophers and educators—if not ideas themselves—are the real acting subjects of debates about schooling, past or present. Real everyday people, along with their differences and conflicts, disappear.

Now Hirsch is no Restorationist like Bloom, and his curriculum is no Great Books revival to keep alive the perilously flickering flame of Western



Courtesy of Oneida Silversmiths

own participation in order to let Great Ideas, or Great Ideabearers, do all the work.

All for One and One for All

In *Cultural Literacy*, E.D. Hirsch wants to convince us that he has a plan for education in which all Americans can share. His concern is that schools must teach a common repertoire of historical, literary, and scientific knowledge. But in the end, Hirsch’s discussion of educational policy and its history,

civilization. But Hirsch’s top-down orientation to schooling oversimplifies what could otherwise be a rich debate about a new cultural literacy curriculum. Couched in terms of neutral expertise, Hirsch’s arguments work much more deceptively than Bloom’s outright condescension.

Hirsch starts out reasonably enough. To bolster the common-sensical notion that students need a certain amount of cultural “background knowledge” to function in US society, he brings to bear some imaginative experimental

research in reading. These studies show that students with relevant background knowledge read more quickly and recall more easily than those without such knowledge. It's easier for students to slog through a passage on Generals Grant and Lee, for instance, if they know that the two fought on opposing sides during the Civil War.

Hirsch argues that educators, in their zeal to assist personal growth,

Bloom, Hirsch, and

their critics are battling

over which realities

should be mass distributed

through schooling.

have neglected to hammer home this sort of concrete information that gives one bearings in the social world. The solution to low test scores -and to cultural malaise, as well as almost suggests itself: teach cultural literacy. So Hirsch and two collaborators present a list of the names, places, titles, and themes that "literate Americans know," in a preliminary push for a cultural literacy curriculum.

To his credit, Hirsch realizes that it won't be quite as easy as list-making. He sets aside several chapters to demonstrate for the skeptical reader that Americans really do share a

common cultural repertoire, and that this repertoire really isn't unfairly weighted towards a dominant social class or ethnic group. The question he consistently ignores is whether it makes much sense to talk about lists without being clear about who can enter the schooling debates and which interests they can represent.

Hirsch embellishes his case for the cultural literacy curriculum with homey references to George Washington and his cherry tree, and to Betsy Ross and her flag. These quaint yarns, he tells us, have been so long a part of national mythology due to their general appeal, their "human universality"-Bloom's virtues in comfy den attire--rather than because of any "conscious political design."

Not all of our myths and folk knowledge are so snugly woven into the national fabric, and Hirsch apparently knows it. Included on his literacy list, for example, is the item "Manifest Destiny," a myth that has had at least as much to do with national solidarity as have stories about George Washington and Betsy Ross, and that by no means appeals to human universality. But though a number of darker myths and contentious historical figures make it onto his list, they are absent from Hirsch's argument for a cultural literacy program. Acknowledging their presence would have gone a long way toward shifting the tenor of the discussion, toward inviting a lively debate about the meaning of a literacy list and the items on it.

Hirsch's top-down, administrative approach to schooling allows him to simplify not only his arguments for changing US schools, but his view of US educational history as well. His

history of schooling focuses on the rise of policies that, in his account, reflect Jean-Jacques Rousseau's and John Dewey's ideas about child development. While these ideas have certainly played their part, it is striking that the role played by students and their parents, in all their social diversity, get practically no attention in Hirsch's treatment.

In fact, Hirsch neglects the entire history of the extension of public schooling throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. The omission of this messy, highly contentious process makes it easier to swallow the idea that a common national culture can be distilled without a large-scale and thoroughgoing public debate.

Conflicts over school policy and curricula arise because social groups have opposing visions of the meaning and uses of certified knowledge. When urban working-class people fought business-sponsored groups for control of Northeastern schools in the middle and later 19th century, they did so to insure the kind of education for their children that would best maintain community solidarity and promote chances for social mobility. When bilingual education advocates fight to keep Spanish in the schools, they do so for similar reasons. Hirsch's history of school policy as one of ideas and research findings; alone obscures the conflicting interests and ideals that underlie school planning.

If we are to figure the various class, ethnic, and racial experiences of the US into a common cultural literacy curriculum, it would be helpful to understand how school policies and curricula have reflected or distorted the needs of contending groups. Instead,

Hirsch sets out a nutshell treatment of past ideas and proposals—now to be replaced by other ideas and proposals made legitimate by reading experiments and easy assumptions about the shared national heritage. It is ironic that a would-be cultural guardian is giving us just the sort of disemboweled, disempowering history that Americans weak on historical awareness don't need.

Hirsch might also have considered the actual targets of the new curriculum students who live in social milieus beyond the reading laboratory. Instead, assuming that the problem is the students' lack of background knowledge (a result, he believes, of bad educational theory), he proposes that the solution is to correct the deficit (by using his new theory). But a low place in the social hierarchy may convince students that there's little point in learning the background information necessary for reading a newspaper, much less for reading about Generals Grant and Lee. Students are not blank slates; they come to school already having learned different attitudes about the value and purpose of academic knowledge. They live in a world of cultural discrimination and economic inequality that will condition their receptivity to any curriculum of official knowledge.

The point is not to reject the idea of cultural literacy altogether. But a debate about cultural literacy will have to pay much more attention than Hirsch does to the varied cultural and economic barriers that confront any attempt to teach a common core of knowledge to Bible-belters, cynical suburbanites, new Asian immigrants, and kids who come to school knowing

that all the cultural proficiency in the world won't get them much of a job in the inner city.

Smarter Living Through Popular Culture?

While Bloom's elitism makes him an easy target, much of the criticism directed at Hirsch has remained within his limited list-making paradigm. Several critics have constructed alternative cultural literacy lists in an attempt to show the weaknesses of Hirsch's. Etta Mooser (*The Nation*, January 9, 1988) and Benjamin Barber (*San Francisco Chronicle*, January 17, 1988) both present mock multiple choice tests that they suggest students would do very well on indeed—tests of literacy in the students' own subculture.

Mooser's questions are essentially a test of familiarity with mass culture. It's smart to look outside the classroom window to see what knowledge students do bring to school. What we see is that students, like everyone else, live in several cultural milieus at once—not all of which make it onto Hirsch's list, much less into Bloom's ivory tower. But are we really to be satisfied, as Mooser seems to suggest, that students know what Madonna and Sean did for April Fool's Day? Of course, students twist and reappropriate mass culture to make their own messages. But we celebrate their cleverness at the cost of disenfranchising them from political debate.

Barber works up a test of social smarts, of folk knowledge about how society really works behind the formalities and fakes of meritocracy. As he wryly comments, students learn

all too well from their elders' everyday behavior what is really important—how to strategize, for example, and how to impress. But if image counts for practically all, as Barber sadly concludes about the orientations of both students and their elders, we need to question the social arrangements that produce such good apprentices. It is time to take the next step in a debate about schooling—to move beyond list-making and counter-list-making.

It's important for more Americans to be able to point to Nicaragua on a map. And it's a perfectly good idea for Americans to understand the wars their country has fought, and is fighting. But we should insist on more popular, informed participation in decisions about the Ideas to which students will be exposed, the standards to which they will be held.

The debate about curricula, standards, and cultural literacy can be an opportunity to challenge the elitists, the list-makers, and the hasty celebrants of mass culture. It is a chance to open a discussion of just what Americans do share culturally, and what we should share. The advent of Bloom, Hirsch, and their critics makes it clear that an open discussion of these matters has barely begun. It is way too early to order up the new exam sheets. •

Paul Lichterman is a graduate student in sociology at the University of California, Berkeley. He studies culture, mass media and education, and is writing a dissertation on popular psychology in the United States.

The Tasteless Intrigue

That sex sells is old news; that women's bodies are used to peddle goods is hardly unusual. Drambuie extends the logic, completely merging the woman and the commodity. The pale and lifeless nude isn't just selling a luxury consumable, she is one. Bound in gold ribbon, she is the equivalent of the gift-wrapped bottle of liquor she holds.

The Drambuie ad is also unsettling in its celebration of female bondage. The wrapped head, the blindfolded eyes, the pallor of the exposed flesh speak less of "Intrigue" than of subjugation. Like certain forms of pornography, this image suggests that the classy woman, the sexy woman, is the woman who revels in her chains.

"Taste the Intrigue" was created by ad agency J. Walter Thompson and has appeared as a one-and-a-third page full color spread in ten national magazines, including the December 7, 1987 New Yorker. When asked about the problematic message, Drambuie ad coordinator Celio Romanach explained that the bound woman was "of secondary concern." Of primary interest, he said, were the "artsy, contemporary photographic techniques."

Romanach did mention that the ad has produced a "polarizing" effect—people either love it or hate it. But in spite of complaints from sales reps in the field and critical phone calls and letters, Drambuie considers "Taste the Intrigue" a great success.



-Valerie Kuletz

Point and Click

If a possession's value is calibrated by its rate of use, my remote control device is right up there, bigger than the refrigerator, bigger than any other object in the house except maybe the bed. Say what you will, remote control is a concept with resonance. The average North American spends eight hours a day in front of the TV, after all, typically with a remote control device within fingertip reach.

The fact is, life in front of the tube has certain pluses over real life. You see something you don't like--BAM! you change the channel. Ads get in your way--CLICK! you turn off the volume. Nothing appeals to you? No problem--there's always the video store, where the clerks know you by name. People with VCRs don't even settle for quasi-reality in realtime; they tape shows--even if they're on at a convenient time--just so they'll be able to fast-forward through the ads. For the truly discriminating, muting is not enough.

This kind of power is seductive. You get used to it, especially if you spend eight hours a day in front of that other tube, the personal computer, with all those software programs that feature an UNDO command. Gain without pain, the wages of sin have been rescinded, get wiser while maintaining your current age. Use UNDO often enough and you start looking for it in real life.

Inevitably, a certain low-level depression sets in. You live in a two-tiered reality, the one where you have control, leeway, out-and-out power; and the other, that tawdry, worldly plane whose features made Yesterday such a

monster hit, where you have to actively work to filter out the humiliation and boredom of day-to-day life.

Pepsi--you knew I was coming to Pepsi, didn't you?--understands this uniquely contemporary malaise. Consider the company's current ad, "Fast Forward," starring Teri Garr. She's alone with her remote control, watching TV. Just for a kick, for a little variation, she points the remote away from the TV at a glass of Pepsi, and she clicks on it. Wonder of wonders, the Pepsi instantly drains. Garr is taken aback, understandably enough. She clicks in the other direction, and damned if the glass doesn't fill right up again, to the point where the soda's fizzing over. Quick on the ball, she hits PAUSE, just in time to save the rug, and there's a shot of the soda, frozen in mid-overflow.

Garr gets a wild gleam in her eye. She turns her remote to the cat snuggled up on the sofa beside her, and she clicks. The cat turns into a Great Dane. Garr is mastering the possibilities. The gleam has graduated into an excited glow. She clicks again and gets--a man. He's Warm, sensitive, attractive in a quiet, trustworthy kind of way. He's homey.

She smiles at him, he smiles at her, and "he turns to the TV and clicks it off (an interesting recognition within TV-land that TV--given other options--is of secondary entertainment value. Your TV stays on. You don't have something better to do.) There's also a long version

of the ad in which Carr clicks her way through a variety of men, from muscle-bound hunk to concave-chested dork, before hitting on the Right Guy. You know how it is. Sometimes you gotta change the channel to find what you really want.

You will note that this ad does not touch on the features and benefits of Pepsi. In a similar technology-as-modern-magic ad, an elfin, lovable Michael J. Fox transmits the image of a can of Pepsi into a photocopier via the power of his imagination. The copier dutifully produces a piece of paper with a picture of a can of Pepsi on it; Fox folds the paper into a cylinder and then takes a satisfying, thirsty pull out of it, complete with fizz and gulp sounds.

This ad does suggest that drinking

Say what you will, remote control is a concept with resonance.

Pepsi is deeply gratifying. In "Fast Forward," the entire sell is simply that we connect to Pepsi because Pepsi connects to us, the wistful Pepsi Generation, with its shared longing that fantasy could be made real, that today's two-tiered reality could merge into one. If only control weren't so remote ...

Pepsi knows how you feel.
--Marina Hirsch

The Corporate Communicators

J. A. S A V A G E

This is not a hypothetical situation.

A trusted source, one with good reason to know what's going on, has made a claim about Company X. I put the statement in my story and turn it in. Immediately, the editor calls and asks me to get a rebuttal "in the interest of fairness."

Having been through this routine before, I know what the company spokesperson will say—something on the order of "no danger to the public." But I also know that at X, as at most other large companies and government agencies, no one will talk to me without prior permission from the "corporate communications" department. So I make the phone call, patch the story, re-file it.

This exercise is supposed to make the news objective. In reality, it's a sham and a waste of time. (The corporate communicator, also known as a "flak," is not wasting time, of course. The flak gets paid.)

The word "flak" derives from "flak catcher," a reference to the stooge who

The ranks of the flaks are growing, and their influence is becoming wider and deeper than ever before.

soaks up all the shrapnel meant for the honchos. Today, it seems to me, the ranks of the flaks are growing, and their influence has become wider and deeper than ever before. I don't have numbers, but my impressions coincide with those of a dozen writers and a couple of sympathetic public relations people whom I polled informally.

One increasingly popular practice is for the flak to put you in touch with a source, and then stay on the phone line (curse conference-call technology) or physically hang around to monitor the interview. If the interviewee happens

to let a piece of truth slip out, the communicator interrupts to "restate" the point.

Once I complained about this interference. The response from a Pacific Gas & Electric flak was, "The Wall Street Journal puts up with it. The [San Francisco] Chronicle puts up with it." The implication is that the objection is unprofessional: the big boys let the flaks filter information, so what's your problem?

At several other companies where I've attempted to get to the best source of information without the blessing of the corporate communications department, I've been scolded like a small child caught with her hand in the cookie jar. Then their game is to threaten to withhold information if you don't play by their rules.

If necessary, the flaks can-and do try to intimidate the employee who had the nerve to talk to you in the first place. Several people have told me of their jobs being threatened after talking to the press. These were not cases of whistle-blowing, or of revealing

Can PG&E Pull the Plug on Free Speech?

Last November, not long after J.A. Savage proposed writing about corporate communicators for Propaganda Review, she got a taste of another flavor of corporate information control. At the behest of Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E), she was suddenly fired from her job as energy correspondent for Energy User News .. Savage soon learned that three top PG&E executives had convinced the publisher and editor to get rid of her.

At her next job, as a stringer for the Journal of Commerce, PG&E intervened again. The head of the utility's corporate communications department called

to complain about her; that very day, Savage was told that she could no longer report on electricity issues. The Journal of Commerce claims that the new restriction was unrelated to the phone call from PG&E.

Why is PG&E interested in a vendetta against a freelance reporter for a few small trade publications? Apparently the utility finds it intolerable that Savage used to be active in the Redwood Alliance, an anti-nudeargroup in Humboldt County. Or perhaps the real sin is that the Redwood Alliance has scored some points against PG&E in the battle over who is to pay for decommissioning its \$5 billion Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant.

proprietary information: the sin was simply not playing the corporate communicators' games.

No journalist likes this kind of treatment. And even when the interaction is smooth, the average reporter's attitude toward flaks might best be described as a tolerance/hate relationship. Yet most of us accept the facile refrains of corporate communicators with remarkably little protest, effectively resigning ourselves to complicity in the routines of information control.

News hounds offer two reasons for their roll-over-and-play-dead response to the information-filtering tactics of the flaks. First, it's an easy way to appear "objective" -still a must in mainstream journalism. Second, the easy way is the only way when a deadline looms: foregoing the corporate communications department for what often turns out to be dozens of phone calls is a luxury that can take weeks. In short, the problem boils down to one of deadlines and editors-read time and money.

Some reporters try to make end runs around these barriers by educating their audience to the role of the flak. After all, not many people, when reading a quote from a named source, conjure up an image of that source speaking while the corporate flak is breathing down his or her neck.

But don't expect most journalists to give you these clues in a story. It would put them in the rotten position of looking inept, of being unable to get reliable, unfiltered information. And editors are unlikely to accept such caveats about sources. Usually, a

**Most of us resign
ourselves to complicity in
the routines of
information control.**

journalist can get away with a phrase like "failed to return repeated phone calls" only in response to inordinate stonewalling.

Bill Walker, a staff writer at the Sacramento Bee, says he's been able to go as far as "would discuss only in the presence of public relations staff." He adds, "I wish there was a more pejorative way to phrase it in a story."

J.A. Savage has reported on energy and environmental issues as a freelancer and reporter for several industry trade journals.

Make a Long Story Short

... and we may publish it. Send us your ruminations, rants, and sagas about life in the propaganda environment. We're particularly interested in inside stories from the consciousness and culture industries: media, advertising, marketing, polling, market research, education, film, fashion, public relations.

As an authorized intervenor in a 1986 case before the California Public Utilities Commission, the Alliance argued that PG&E should be required to start now setting aside money for decommissioning Diablo Canyon. (The nuclear industry and most utilities that own nuclear plants prefer not to publicly acknowledge or plan for the fact that the life span of a reactor is only 30 years, and that the price tag for dealing with its radioactive remains is well over a billion dollars.)

The Public Utilities Commission ruled against PG&E-sort of. It ordered the utility to set up a billion-and-a-half dollar decommissioning fund, but will allow the money to be collected from ratepayers, rather than from the

company itself. The Commission did agree to reimburse the Redwood Alliance for the costs of its intervention. Savage, who had appeared on its behalf at two pretrial hearings, was paid \$262.50 out of the \$80,000 award. PG&E cites this payment as the "conflict of interest" that justifies its harassment of Savage at *Energy User News* and the *Journal of Commerce*.

There may be a silver lining in this cloud of blacklisting and first amendment violations: Savage has filed a \$100.8 million lawsuit against PG&E. If she wins, she'll donate 90 percent of all money over a million dollars to defending other first amendment and environmental cases.

--Marcy Damovsky

Project Censored's Top Ten

Each year, a national panel of media experts chooses the ten most under-reported news stories of the past twelve months. Here's Project Censored's 1987 list--important stories you probably didn't read about, or didn't read enough about:

- 1 The Information Monopoly. As of 1987, half or more of the US media business is controlled by only 29 corporations.
- 2 The US and Its Contra/Drug Connection. Evidence mounts of a large-scale CIA/ contra drug smuggling network.
- 3 Unreported Worldwide Nuclear Accidents. A secret report on reactor accidents around the world is published in West Germany.
- 4 Reagan's Mania for Secrecy. A massive network of executive orders and secret directives edicts has institutionalized secrecy throughout the government.
- 5 George Bush's Role in the Iran Arms Deal. Bush was more involved than Reagan in the Iran/ contra scandal.
- 6 Biowarfare Research in University Labs. The Reagan Administration continues its push for biochemical weapons.
- 7 Biased Press Coverage of Arias Peace Plan. Studies by FAIR and Media Alliance uncover bias in media coverage of Central America, especially Nicaragua.
- 8 Third World. The export business in hazardous wastes continues to boom.
- 9 The Censored Report of Torture in EI Salvador. Political prisoners are routinely subjected to at least 40

kinds of torture by Salvadoran police trained and occasionally supervised by American military advisers.

- 10 Project Galileo Shuttle to Carry Lethal Plutonium. NASA plans to launch 49 pounds of plutonium into space.

Are these stories really censored? Project Censored director Carl Jensen notes, "Each of [these] stories should have been on the front page of every newspaper and on every network news program in the country. The fact that they weren't suggests there is an effective covert form of censorship in America."

For more information-or to nominate a 1988 story for next year's top ten contact Carl Jensen, Project Censored, Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, CA 94928.

Media&Values

Rather than simply complain about the media producing garbage and drivel, Media&Values treats the "media environment" as a two-way relationship between audiences and broadcasters. And it challenges audiences to assert themselves in the affair. Each issue raises awareness about a particular problem: past themes include violence, militarism, the consumer economy, and racism.

Media&Values considers each topic from a number of angles, gives suggestions for action, and showcases a group working on the problem. Run by religious organizations of several faiths, the quarterly magazine is a perfect tool for school, church, and youth groups. With its refreshingly plain prose, Media&Values goes much further than "preaching to the converted."

Back issues are available at a special price for Propaganda Review readers:

\$3 each, or five for \$1 O. Subscriptions are \$14 per year or \$26 for two years. Media&Values is located at 1962 South Shenandoah, Los Angeles, CA 90034; or call 213-559-2944.

The National Security Archive

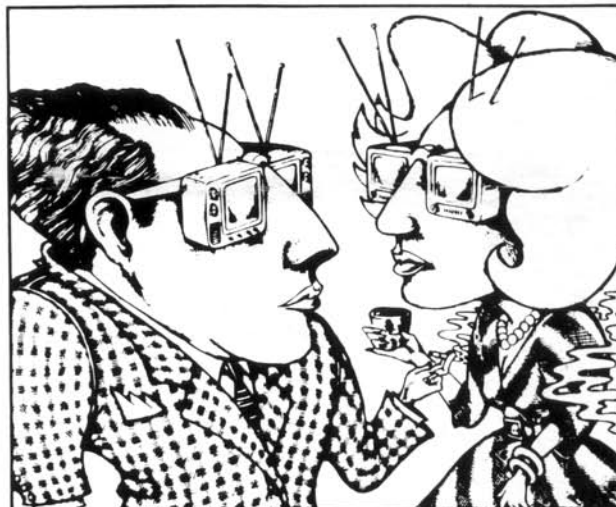
Extracting documents from the government, scouring libraries for Congressional testimonies and background information, interviewing decision makers, deciphering cryptic memos and other primary materials: piecing together the hidden history of foreign policy decisions can be tedious, expensive, or impossible.

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You can use the Archive's resources by going to Washington DC, or Archive staff can provide quick responses to many phoned-in foreign policy questions. And it's free. There is no charge for staff assistance or use of the research library in Washington. For more information, write the National Security Archive, 1755 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20036; 202-797-0882.

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