The enterprise has many facets and agents. I will be primarily concerned with one aspect: thought control, as conducted through the agency of the national media and related elements of the elite intellectual culture.

There is, in my opinion, much too little inquiry into these matters. My personal feeling is that citizens of the democratic societies should undertake a course of intellectual self-defense to protect themselves from manipulation and control, and to lay the basis for more meaningful democracy. It is this concern that motivates the material that follows, and much of the work cited in the course of the discussion.

Noam Chomsky, Necessary Illusions

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Democracy and the Media

Under the heading "Brazilian bishops support plan to democratize media," a church-based South American journal describes a proposal being debated in the constituent assembly that "would open up Brazil's powerful and highly concentrated media to citizen participation." "Brazil's Catholic bishops are among the principal advocates [of this] ... legislative proposal to democratize the country's communications media," the report continues, noting that "Brazilian TV is in the hands of five big networks [while] ... eight huge multinational corporations and various state enterprises account for the majority of all communications advertising." The proposal "envisions the creation of a National Communications Council made up of civilian and government representatives [that] ... would develop a democratic communications policy and grant licenses to radio and television operations." "The Brazilian Conference of Catholic Bishops has repeatedly stressed the importance of the communications media and pushed for grassroots participation. It has chosen communications as the theme of its 1989 Lenten campaign," an annual "parish-level campaign of reflection about some social issue" initiated by the Bishops' Conference.[1]

The questions raised by the Brazilian bishops are being seriously discussed in many parts of the world. Projects exploring them are under way in several Latin American countries and elsewhere. There has been discussion of a "New World Information Order" that would diversify media access and encourage alternatives to the global media system dominated by the Western industrial powers. A UNESCO inquiry into such possibilities elicited an extremely hostile reaction in the United States.[2] The alleged concern was freedom of the press. Among the questions I would like to raise as we proceed are: just how serious is this concern, and what is its substantive content? Further questions that lie in the background have to do with a democratic communications policy: what it might be, whether it is a desideratum, and if so, whether it is attainable. And, more generally, just what kind of democratic order is it to which we aspire?

The concept of "democratizing the media" has no real meaning within the terms of political discourse in the United States. In fact, the phrase has a paradoxical or even vaguely subversive ring to it. Citizen participation would be considered an infringement on freedom of the press, a blow struck against the independence of the media that would distort the mission they have undertaken to inform the public without fear or favor. The reaction merits some thought. Underlying it are beliefs about how the media do function and how they should function within our democratic systems, and also certain implicit conceptions of the nature of democracy. Let us consider these topics in turn.

The standard image of media performance, as expressed by Judge Gurfein in a decision rejecting government efforts to bar publication of the *Pentagon Papers*, is that we have "a cantankerous press, an obstinate press, a ubiquitous press," and that these tribunes of the people "must be suffered by those in authority in order to preserve the even greater values of freedom of expression and the right of the people to know." Commenting on this decision, Anthony Lewis of the *New York Times* observes that the media were not always as independent, vigilant, and defiant of authority as they are today, but in the Vietnam and Watergate eras they learned to exercise "the power to root about in our national life, exposing what they deem right for exposure," without regard to external pressures or the demands of state or private power. This too is a commonly held belief.[3]

There has been much debate over the media during this period, but it does not deal with the problem of "democratizing the media" and freeing them from the constraints of state and private power. Rather, the issue debated is whether the media have not exceeded proper bounds in escaping such constraints, even threatening the existence of democratic institutions in their contentious and irresponsible defiance of authority. A 1975 study on "governability of democracies" by the Trilateral Commission concluded that the media have become a "notable new source of national power," one aspect of an "excess of democracy" that contributes to "the reduction of governmental authority" at home and a consequent "decline in the influence of democracy abroad." This general "crisis of democracy," the commission held, resulted from the efforts of previously marginalized sectors of the population to organize and press their demands, thereby creating an overload that prevents the democratic process from functioning properly. In earlier times, "Truman had been able

to govern the country with the cooperation of a relatively small number of Wall Street lawyers and bankers," so the American *rapporteur*, Samuel Huntington of Harvard University, reflected. In that period there was no crisis of democracy, but in the 1960s, the crisis developed and reached serious proportions. The study therefore urged more "moderation in democracy" to mitigate the excess of democracy and overcome the crisis.[4]

Putting it in plain terms, the general public must be reduced to its traditional apathy and obedience, and driven from the arena of political debate and action, if democracy is to survive.

The Trilateral Commission study reflects the perceptions and values of liberal elites from the United States, Europe, and Japan, including the leading figures of the Carter administration. On the right, the perception is that democracy is threatened by the organizing efforts of those called the "special interests," a concept of contemporary political rhetoric that refers to workers, farmers, women, youth, the elderly, the handicapped, ethnic minorities, and so on—in short, the general population. In the U.S. presidential campaigns of the 1980s, the Democrats were accused of being the instrument of these special interests and thus undermining "the national interest," tacitly assumed to be represented by the one sector notably omitted from the list of special interests: corporations, financial institutions, and other business elites.

The charge that the Democrats represent the special interests has little merit. Rather, they represent other elements of the "national interest," and participated with few qualms in the right turn of the post-Vietnam era among elite groups, including the dismantling of limited state programs designed to protect the poor and deprived; the transfer of resources to the wealthy; the conversion of the state, even more than before, to a welfare state for the privileged; and the expansion of state power and the protected state sector of the economy through the military system—domestically, a device for compelling the public to subsidize high-technology industry and provide a state-guaranteed market for its waste production. A related element of the right turn was a more "activist" foreign policy to extend U.S. power through subversion, international terrorism, and aggression: the Reagan Doctrine, which the media characterize as the vigorous defense of democracy worldwide, sometimes criticizing the Reaganites for their excesses in this noble cause. In general, the Democratic opposition offered qualified support to these programs of the Reagan administration, which, in fact, were largely an extrapolation of initia-

tives of the Carter years and, as polls clearly indicate, with few exceptions were strongly opposed by the general population.[5]

Challenging journalists at the Democratic Convention in July 1988 on the constant reference to Michael Dukakis as "too liberal" to win, the media watch organization Fairness and Accurary In Reporting (FAIR) cited a December 1987 *New York Times*/CBS poll showing overwhelming popular support for government guarantees of full employment, medical and day care, and a 3-to-1 margin in favor of reduction of military expenses among the 50 percent of the population who approve of a change. But the choice of a Reagan-style Democrat for vice president elicited only praise from the media for the pragmatism of the Democrats in resisting the left-wing extremists who called for policies supported by a large majority of the population. Popular attitudes, in fact, continued to move towards a kind of New Deal-style liberalism through the 1980s, while "liberal" became an unspeakable word in political rhetoric. Polls show that almost half the population believe that the U.S. Constitution—a sacred document—is the source of Marx's phrase "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need," so obviously right does the sentiment seem.[6]

One should not be misled by Reagan's "landslide" electoral victories. Reagan won the votes of less than a third of the electorate; of those who voted, a clear majority hoped that his legislative programs would not be enacted, while half the population continues to believe that the government is run "by a few big interests looking out for themselves."[7] Given a choice between the Reaganite program of damn-the-consequences Keynesian growth accompanied by jingoist flag-waving on the one hand, and the Democratic alternative of fiscal conservatism and "we approve of your goals but fear that the costs will be too high" on the other, those who took the trouble to vote preferred the former—not too surprisingly. Elite groups have the task of putting on a bold face and extolling the brilliant successes of our system: "a model democracy and a society that provides exceptionally well for the needs of its citizens," as Henry Kissinger and Cyrus Vance proclaim in outlining "Bipartisan Objectives for Foreign Policy" in the post-Reagan era. But apart from educated elites, much of the population appears to regard the government as an instrument of power beyond their influence and control; and if their experience does not suffice, a look at some comparative statistics will show how magnificently the richest society in the world, with incomparable advantages, "provides for the needs of its citizens."[8]

The Reagan phenomenon, in fact, may offer a foretaste of the directions in which capitalist democracy is heading, with the progressive elimination of labor unions, independent media, political associations, and, more generally, forms of popular organization that interfere with domination of the state by concentrated private power. Much of the outside world may have viewed Reagan as a "bizarre cowboy leader" who engaged in acts of "madness" in organizing a "band of cutthroats" to attack Nicaragua, among other exploits (in the words of Toronto *Globe and Mail* editorials),[9] but U.S. public opinion seemed to regard him as hardly more than a symbol of national unity, something like the flag, or the Queen of England. The Queen opens Parliament by reading a political program, but no one asks whether she believes it or even understands it. Correspondingly, the public seemed unconcerned over the evidence, difficult to suppress, that President Reagan had only the vaguest conception of the policies enacted in his name, or the fact that when not properly programmed by his staff, he regularly came out with statements so outlandish as to be an embarrassment, if one were to take them seriously.[10] The process of barring public interference with important matters takes a step forward when elections do not even enable the public to select among programs that originate elsewhere, but become merely a procedure for selecting a symbolic figure. It is therefore of some interest that the United States functioned virtually without a chief executive for eight years.

Returning to the media, which are charged with having fanned the ominous flames of "excess of democracy," the Trilateral Commission concluded that "broader interests of society and government" require that if journalists do not impose "standards of professionalism," "the alternative could well be regulation by the government" to the end of "restoring a balance between government and media." Reflecting similar concerns, the executive-director of Freedom House, Leonard Sussman, asked: "Must free institutions be overthrown because of the very freedom they sustain?" And John Roche, intellectual-in-residence during the Johnson administration, answered by calling for congressional investigation of "the workings of these private governments" which distorted the record so grossly in their "anti-Johnson mission," though he feared that Congress would be too "terrified of the media" to take on this urgent task.[11]

Sussman and Roche were commenting on Peter Braestrup's two-volume study, sponsored by Freedom House, of media coverage of the Tet Offensive of 1968.[12] This study was widely hailed as a

landmark contribution, offering definitive proof of the irresponsibility of this "notable new source of national power." Roche described it as "one of the major pieces of investigative reporting and first-rate scholarship of the past quarter century," a "meticulous case-study of media incompetence, if not malevolence." This classic of modern scholarship was alleged to have demonstrated that in their incompetent and biased coverage reflecting the "adversary culture" of the sixties, the media in effect lost the war in Vietnam, thus harming the cause of democracy and freedom for which the United States fought in vain. The Freedom House study concluded that these failures reflect "the more volatile journalistic style—spurred by managerial exhortation or complaisance—that has become so popular since the late 1960s." The new journalism is accompanied by "an often mindless readiness to seek out conflict, to believe the worst of the government or of authority in general, and on that basis to divide up the actors on any issue into the 'good' and the 'bad'." The "bad" actors included the U.S. forces in Vietnam, the "military-industrial complex," the CIA and the U.S. government generally; and the "good," in the eyes of the media, were presumably the Communists, who, the study alleged, were consistently overpraised and protected. The study envisioned "a continuation of the current volatile styles, always with the dark possibility that, if the managers do not themselves take action, then outsiders—the courts, the Federal Communications Commission, or Congress—will seek to apply remedies of their own."

It is by now an established truth that "we tend to flagellate ourselves as Americans about various aspects of our own policies and actions we disapprove of" and that, as revealed by the Vietnam experience, "it is almost inescapable that such broad coverage will undermine support for the war effort," particularly "the often-gory pictorial reportage by television" (Landrum Bolling, at a conference he directed on the question of whether there is indeed "no way to effect some kind of balance between the advantages a totalitarian government enjoys because of its ability to control or black out unfavorable news in warfare and the disadvantages for the free society of allowing open coverage of all the wartime events").[13] The Watergate affair, in which investigative reporting "helped force a President from office" (Anthony Lewis), reinforced these dire images of impending destruction of democracy by the free-wheeling, independent, and adversarial media, as did the Iran-contra scandal. Ringing defenses of freedom of the press, such as those of Judge Gurfein and Anthony Lewis, are a response to attempts to control media excesses and impose upon them standards of responsibility.

Two kinds of questions arise in connection with these vigorous debates about the media and democracy: questions of fact and questions of value. The basic question of fact is whether the media have indeed adopted an adversarial stance, perhaps with excessive zeal; whether, in particular, they undermine the defense of freedom in wartime and threaten free institutions by "flagellating ourselves" and those in power. If so, we may then ask whether it would be proper to impose some external constraints to ensure that they keep to the bounds of responsibility, or whether we should adopt the principle expressed by Justice Holmes, in a classic dissent, that "the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market" through "free trade in ideas."[14]

The question of fact is rarely argued; the case is assumed to have been proven. Some, however, have held that the factual premises are simply false. Beginning with the broadest claims, let us consider the functioning of the free market of ideas. In his study of the mobilization of popular opinion to promote state power, Benjamin Ginsberg maintains that

> western governments have used market mechanisms to regulate popular perspectives and sentiments. The "marketplace of ideas," built during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, effectively disseminates the beliefs and ideas of the upper classes while subverting the ideological and cultural independence of the lower classes. Through the construction of this marketplace, western governments forged firm and enduring links between socioeconomic position and ideological power, permitting upper classes to use each to buttress the other ... In the United States, in particular, the ability of the upper and upper-middle classes to dominate the marketplace of ideas has generally allowed these strata to shape the entire society's perception of political reality and the range of realistic political and social possibilities. While westerners usually equate the marketplace with freedom of opinion, the hidden hand of the market can be almost as potent an instrument of control as the iron fist of the state.[15]

Ginsberg's conclusion has some initial plausibility, on assumptions about the functioning of a guided free market that are not particularly controversial. Those segments of the media that can reach a substantial audience are major corporations and are closely integrated with even larger conglomerates. Like other businesses,

they sell a product to buyers. Their market is advertisers, and the "product" is audiences, with a bias towards more wealthy audiences, which improve advertising rates.[16] Over a century ago, British Liberals observed that the market would promote those journals "enjoying the preference of the advertising public"; and today, Paul Johnson, noting the demise of a new journal of the left, blandly comments that it deserved its fate: "The market pronounced an accurate verdict at the start by declining to subscribe all the issue capital," and surely no right-thinking person could doubt that the market represents the public will.[17]

In short, the major media—particularly, the elite media that set the agenda that others generally follow—are corporations "selling" privileged audiences to other businesses. It would hardly come as a surprise if the picture of the world they present were to reflect the perspectives and interests of the sellers, the buyers, and the product. Concentration of ownership of the media is high and increasing.[18] Furthermore, those who occupy managerial positions in the media, or gain status within them as commentators, belong to the same privileged elites, and might be expected to share the perceptions, aspirations, and attitudes of their associates, reflecting their own class interests as well. Journalists entering the system are unlikely to make their way unless they conform to these ideological pressures, generally by internalizing the values; it is not easy to say one thing and believe another, and those who fail to conform will tend to be weeded out by familiar mechanisms.

The influence of advertisers is sometimes far more direct. "Projects unsuitable for corporate sponsorship tend to die on the vine," the London *Economist* observes, noting that "stations have learned to be sympathetic to the most delicate sympathies of corporations." The journal cites the case of public TV station WNET, which "lost its corporate underwriting from Gulf+Western as a result of a documentary called 'Hunger for Profit', about multinationals buying up huge tracts of land in the third world." These actions "had not been those of a friend," Gulf's chief executive wrote to the station, adding that the documentary was "virulently anti-business, if not anti-American." "Most people believe that WNET would not make the same mistake today," the *Economist* concludes.[19] Nor would others. The warning need only be implicit.

Many other factors induce the media to conform to the requirements of the state-corporate nexus.[20] To confront power is costly and difficult; high standards of evidence and argument are imposed, and

critical analysis is naturally not welcomed by those who are in a position to react vigorously and to determine the array of rewards and punishments. Conformity to a "patriotic agenda," in contrast, imposes no such costs. Charges against official enemies barely require substantiation; they are, furthermore, protected from correction, which can be dismissed as apologetics for the criminals or as missing the forest for the trees. The system protects itself with indignation against a challenge to the right of deceit in the service of power, and the very idea of subjecting the ideological system to rational inquiry elicits incomprehension or outrage, though it is often masked in other terms.[21] One who attributes the best intentions to the U.S. government, while perhaps deploring failure and ineptitude, requires no evidence for this stance, as when we ask why "success has continued to elude us" in the Middle East and Central America, why "a nation of such vast wealth, power and good intentions [cannot] accomplish its purposes more promptly and more effectively" (Landrum Bolling).[22] Standards are radically different when we observe that "good intentions" are not properties of states, and that the United States, like every other state past and present, pursues policies that reflect the interests of those who control the state by virtue of their domestic power, truisms that are hardly expressible in the mainstream, surprising as this fact may be.

One needs no evidence to condemn the Soviet Union for aggression in Afghanistan and support for repression in Poland; it is quite a different matter when one turns to U.S. aggression in Indochina or its efforts to prevent a political settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict over many years, readily documented, but unwelcome and therefore a non-fact. No argument is demanded for a condemnation of Iran or Libya for state-supported terrorism; discussion of the prominent—arguably dominant—role of the United States and its clients in organizing and conducting this plague of the modern era elicits only horror and contempt for this view point; supporting evidence, however compelling, is dismissed as irrelevant. As a matter of course, the media and intellectual journals either praise the U.S. government for dedicating itself to the struggle for democracy in Nicaragua or criticize it for the means it has employed to pursue this laudable objective, offering no evidence that this is indeed the goal of policy. A challenge to the underlying patriotic assumption is virtually unthinkable within the mainstream and, if permitted expression, would be dismissed as a variety of ideological fanaticism, an absurdity, even if backed by overwhelming evidence—not a difficult task in this case.

Case by case, we find that conformity is the easy way, and the path to privilege and prestige; dissidence carries personal costs that may be severe, even in a society that lacks such means of control as death squads, psychiatric prisons, or extermination camps. The very structure of the media is designed to induce conformity to established doctrine. In a three-minute stretch between commercials, or in seven hundred words, it is impossible to present unfamiliar thoughts or surprising conclusions with the argument and evidence required to afford them some credibility. Regurgitation of welcome pieties faces no such problem.

It is a natural expectation, on uncontroversial assumptions, that the major media and other ideological institutions will generally reflect the perspectives and interests of established power. That this expectation is fulfilled has been argued by a number of analysts. Edward Herman and I have published extensive documentation, separately and jointly, to support a conception of how the media function that differs sharply from the standard version.[23] According to this "propaganda model"—which has prior plausibility for such reasons as those just briefly reviewed—the media serve the interests of state and corporate power, which are closely interlinked, framing their reporting and analysis in a manner supportive of established privilege and limiting debate and discussion accordingly. We have studied a wide range of examples, including those that provide the most severe test for a propaganda model, namely, the cases that critics of alleged anti-establishment excesses of the media offer as their strongest ground: the coverage of the Indochina wars, the Watergate affair, and others drawn from the period when the media are said to have overcome the conformism of the past and taken on a crusading role. To subject the model to a fair test, we have systematically selected examples that are as closely paired as history allows: crimes attributable to official enemies versus those for which the United States and its clients bear responsibility; good deeds, specifically elections conducted by official enemies versus those in U.S. client states. Other methods have also been pursued, yielding further confirmation.

There are, by now, thousands of pages of documentation supporting the conclusions of the propaganda model. By the standards of the social sciences, it is very well confirmed, and its predictions are often considerably surpassed. If there is a serious challenge to this conclusion, I am unaware of it. The nature of the arguments presented against it, on the rare occasions when the topic can even be

addressed in the mainstream, suggest that the model is indeed robust. The highly regarded Freedom House study, which is held to have provided the conclusive demonstration of the adversarial character of the media and its threat to democracy, collapses upon analysis, and when innumerable errors and misrepresentations are corrected, amounts to little more than a complaint that the media were too pessimistic in their pursuit of a righteous cause; I know of no other studies that fare better.[24]

There are, to be sure, other factors that influence the performance of social institutions as complex as the media, and one can find exceptions to the general pattern that the propaganda model predicts. Nevertheless, it has, I believe, been shown to provide a reasonably close first approximation, which captures essential properties of the media and the dominant intellectual culture more generally.

One prediction of the model is that it will be effectively excluded from discussion, for it questions a factual assumption that is most serviceable to the interests of established power: namely, that the media are adversarial and cantankerous, perhaps excessively so. However well-confirmed the model may be, then, it is inadmissible, and, the model predicts, should remain outside the spectrum of debate over the media. This conclusion too is empirically well-confirmed. Note that the model has a rather disconcerting feature. Plainly, it is either valid or invalid. If invalid, it may be dismissed; if valid, it *will* be dismissed. As in the case of eighteenth-century doctrine on seditious libel, truth is no defense; rather, it heightens the enormity of the crime of calling authority into disrepute.

If the conclusions drawn in the propaganda model are correct, then the criticisms of the media for their adversarial stance can only be understood as a demand that the media should not even reflect the range of debate over tactical questions among dominant elites, but should serve only those segments that happen to manage the state at a particular moment, and should do so with proper enthusiasm and optimism about the causes—noble by definition—in which state power is engaged. It would not have surprised George Orwell that this should be the import of the critique of the media by an organization that calls itself "Freedom House."[25]

Journalists often meet a high standard of professionalism in their work, exhibiting courage, integrity, and enterprise, including many of those who report for media that adhere closely to the predictions of the propaganda model. There is no contradiction here. What is at issue is not the honesty of the opinions expressed or the

integrity of those who seek the facts but rather the choice of topics and highlighting of issues, the range of opinion permitted expression, the unquestioned premises that guide reporting and commentary, and the general framework imposed for the presentation of a certain view of the world. We need not, incidentally, tarry over such statements as the following, emblazoned on the cover of the *New Republic* during Israel's invasion of Lebanon: "Much of what you have read in the newspapers and newsmagazines about the war in Lebanon—and even more of what you have seen and heard on television—is simply not true."[26] Such performances can be consigned to the dismal archives of apologetics for the atrocities of other favored states.

I will present examples to illustrate the workings of the propaganda model, but will assume the basic case to have been credibly established by the extensive material already in print. This work has elicited much outrage and falsification (some of which Herman and I review in *Manufacturing Consent*, some elsewhere), and also puzzlement and misunderstanding. But, to my knowledge, there is no serious effort to respond to these and other similar critiques. Rather, they are simply dismissed, in conformity to the predictions of the propaganda model.[27] Typically, debate over media performance within the mainstream includes criticism of the adversarial stance of the media and response by their defenders, but no critique of the media for adhering to the predictions of the propaganda model, or recognition that this might be a conceivable position. In the case of the Indochina wars, for example, U.S. public television presented a retrospective series in 1985 followed by a denunciation produced by the right-wing media-monitoring organization Accuracy in Media and a discussion limited to critics of the alleged adversarial excesses of the series and its defenders. No one argued that the series conforms to the expectations of the propaganda model—as it does. The study of media coverage of conflicts in the Third World mentioned earlier follows a similar pattern, which is quite consistent, though the public regards the media as too conformist.[28]

The media cheerfully publish condemnations of their "breathtaking lack of balance or even the appearance of fair-mindedness" and "the ills and dangers of today's wayward press."[29] But only when, as in this case, the critic is condemning the "media elite" for being "in thrall to liberal views of politics and human nature" and for the "evident difficulty most liberals have in using the word dictatorship to describe even the most flagrant dictatorships of the left"; surely one would never find Fidel Castro described as a dictator in the

mainstream press, always so soft on Communism and given to self-flagellation.[30] Such diatribes are not expected to meet even minimal standards of evidence; this one contains exactly one reference to what conceivably might be a fact, a vague allusion to alleged juggling of statistics by the *New York Times* "to obscure the decline of interest rates during Ronald Reagan's first term," as though the matter had not been fully reported. Charges of this nature are often not unwelcome, first, because response is simple or superfluous; and second, because debate over this issue helps entrench the belief that the media are either independent and objective, with high standards of professional integrity and openness to all reasonable views, or, alternatively, that they are biased towards stylishly leftish flouting of authority. Either conclusion is quite acceptable to established power and privilege—even to the media elites themselves, who are not averse to the charge that they may have gone too far in pursuing their cantankerous and obstreperous ways in defiance of orthodoxy and power. The spectrum of discussion reflects what a propaganda model would predict: condemnation of "liberal bias" and defense against this charge, but no recognition of the possibility that "liberal bias" might simply be an expression of one variant of the narrow state-corporate ideology—as, demonstrably, it is—and a particularly useful variant, bearing the implicit message: thus far, and no further.

Returning to the proposals of the Brazilian bishops, one reason they would appear superfluous or wrong-headed if raised in our political context is that the media are assumed to be dedicated to service to the public good, if not too extreme in their independence of authority. They are thus performing their proper social role, as explained by Supreme Court Justice Powell in words quoted by Anthony Lewis in his defense of freedom of the press: "No individual can obtain for himself the information needed for the intelligent discharge of his political responsibilities ... By enabling the public to assert meaningful control over the political process, the press performs a crucial function in effecting the societal purpose of the First Amendment."

An alternative view, which I believe is valid, is that the media indeed serve a "societal purpose," but quite a different one. It is the societal purpose served by state education as conceived by James Mill in the early days of the establishment of this system: to "train the minds of the people to a virtuous attachment to their government," and to the arrangements of the social, economic, and political order more generally.[31] Far from contributing to a "crisis of democracy" of

the sort feared by the liberal establishment, the media are vigilant guardians protecting privilege from the threat of public understanding and participation. If these conclusions are correct, the first objection to democratizing the media is based on factual and analytic error.

A second basis for objection is more substantial, and not without warrant: the call for democratizing the media could mask highly unwelcome efforts to limit intellectual independence through popular pressures, a variant of concerns familiar in political theory. The problem is not easily dismissed, but it is not an inherent property of democratization of the media.[32]

The basic issue seems to me to be a different one. Our political culture has a conception of democracy that differs from that of the Brazilian bishops. For them, democracy means that citizens should have the opportunity to inform themselves, to take part in inquiry and discussion and policy formation, and to advance their programs through political action. For us, democracy is more narrowly conceived: the citizen is a consumer, an observer but not a participant. The public has the right to ratify policies that originate elsewhere, but if these limits are exceeded, we have not democracy, but a "crisis of democracy," which must somehow be resolved.

This concept is based on doctrines laid down by the Founding Fathers. The Federalists, historian Joyce Appleby writes, expected "that the new American political institutions would continue to function within the old assumptions about a politically active elite and a deferential, compliant electorate," and "George Washington had hoped that his enormous prestige would bring that great, sober, commonsensical citizenry politicians are always addressing to see the dangers of self-created societies."[33] Despite their electoral defeat, their conception prevailed, though in a different form as industrial capitalism took shape. It was expressed by John Jay, the president of the Continental Congress and the first chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, in what his biographer calls one of his favorite maxims: "The people who own the country ought to govern it." And they need not be too gentle in the mode of governance. Alluding to rising disaffection, Gouverneur Morris wrote in a dispatch to John Jay in 1783 that although "it is probable that much of Convulsion will ensue," there need be no real concern: "The People are well prepared" for the government to assume "that Power without which Government is but a Name ... Wearied with the War, their Acquiescence may be depended on with absolute Certainty, and you and I, my friend, know by Experience that when a few Men of sense and spirit get

together and declare that they are the Authority, such few as are of a different opinion may easily be convinced of their Mistake by that powerful Argument the Halter." By "the People," constitutional historian Richard Morris observes, "he meant a small nationalist elite, whom he was too cautious to name"—the white propertied males for whom the constitutional order was established. The "vast exodus of Loyalists and blacks" to Canada and elsewhere reflected in part their insight into these realities.[34]

Elsewhere, Morris observes that in the post-revolutionary society, "what one had in effect was a political democracy manipulated by an elite," and in states where "egalitarian democracy" might appear to have prevailed (as in Virginia), in reality "dominance of the aristocracy was implicitly accepted." The same is true of the dominance of the rising business classes in later periods that are held to reflect the triumph of popular democracy.[35]

John Jay's maxim is, in fact, the principle on which the Republic was founded and maintained, and in its very nature capitalist democracy cannot stray far from this pattern for reasons that are readily perceived.[36]

At home, this principle requires that politics reduce, in effect, to interactions among groups of investors who compete for control of the state, in accordance with what Thomas Ferguson calls the "investment theory of politics," which, he argues plausibly, explains a large part of U.S. political history.[37] For our dependencies, the same basic principle entails that democracy is achieved when the society is under the control of local oligarchies, business-based elements linked to U.S. investors, the military under our control, and professionals who can be trusted to follow orders and serve the interests of U.S. power and privilege. If there is any popular challenge to their rule, the United States is entitled to resort to violence to "restore democracy"—to adopt the term conventionally used in reference to the Reagan Doctrine in Nicaragua. The media contrast the "democrats" with the "Communists," the former being those who serve the interests of U.S. power, the latter those afflicted with the disease called "ultranationalism" in secret planning documents, which explain, forthrightly, that the threat to our interests is "nationalistic regimes" that respond to domestic pressures for improvement of living standards and social reform, with insufficient regard for the needs of U.S. investors.

The media are only following the rules of the game when they contrast the "fledgling democracies" of Central America, under mil-

itary and business control, with "Communist Nicaragua." And we can appreciate why they suppressed the 1987 polls in El Salvador that revealed that a mere 10 percent of the population "believe that there is a process of democracy and freedom in the country at present." The benighted Salvadorans doubtless fail to comprehend our concept of democracy. And the same must be true of the editors of Honduras's leading journal *El Tiempo*. They see in their country a "democracy" that offers "unemployment and repression" in a caricature of the democratic process, and write that there can be no democracy in a country under "occupation of North American troops and contras," where "vital national interests are abandoned in order to serve the objectives of foreigners," while repression and illegal arrests continue, and the death squads of the military lurk ominously in the background.[38]

In accordance with the prevailing conceptions in the U.S., there is no infringement on democracy if a few corporations control the information system: in fact, that is the essence of democracy. In the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, the leading figure of the public relations industry, Edward Bernays, explains that "the very essence of the democratic process" is "the freedom to persuade and suggest," what he calls "the engineering of consent." "A leader," he continues, "frequently cannot wait for the people to arrive at even general understanding ... Democratic leaders must play their part in ... engineering ... consent to socially constructive goals and values," applying "scientific principles and tried practices to the task of getting people to support ideas and programs"; and although it remains unsaid, it is evident enough that those who control resources will be in a position to judge what is "socially constructive," to engineer consent through the media, and to implement policy through the mechanisms of the state. If the freedom to persuade happens to be concentrated in a few hands, we must recognize that such is the nature of a free society. The public relations industry expends vast resources "educating the American people about the economic facts of life" to ensure a favorable climate for business. Its task is to control "the public mind," which is "the only serious danger confronting the company," an AT&T executive observed eighty years ago.[39]

Similar ideas are standard across the political spectrum. The dean of U.S. journalists, Walter Lippmann, described a "revolution" in "the practice of democracy" as "the manufacture of consent" has become "a self-conscious art and a regular organ of popular government." This is a natural development when "the common interests very largely elude public opinion entirely, and can be managed only by a specialized class whose personal interests reach beyond the locality." He was writing shortly after World War I, when the liberal intellectual community was much impressed with its success in serving as "the faithful and helpful interpreters of what seems to be one of the greatest enterprises ever undertaken by an American president" (*New Republic*). The enterprise was Woodrow Wilson's interpretation of his electoral mandate for "peace without victory" as the occasion for pursuing victory without peace, with the assistance of the liberal intellectuals, who later praised themselves for having "impose[d] their will upon a reluctant or indifferent majority," with the aid of propaganda fabrications about Hun atrocities and other such devices.

Fifteen years later, Harold Lasswell explained in the *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* that we should not succumb to "democratic dogmatisms about men being the best judges of their own interests." They are not; the best judges are the elites, who must, therefore, be ensured the means to impose their will, for the common good. When social arrangements deny them the requisite force to compel obedience, it is necessary to turn to "a whole new technique of control, largely through propaganda" because of the "ignorance and superstition [of] ... the masses." In the same years, Reinhold Niebuhr argued that "rationality belongs to the cool observers," while "the proletarian" follows not reason but faith, based upon a crucial element of "necessary illusion." Without such illusion, the ordinary person will descend to "inertia." Then in his Marxist phase, Niebuhr urged that those he addressed—presumably, the cool observers—recognize "the stupidity of the average man" and provide the "emotionally potent oversimplifications" required to keep the proletarian on course to create a new society; the basic conceptions underwent little change as Niebuhr became "the official establishment theologian" (Richard Rovere), offering counsel to those who "face the responsibilities of power."[40]

After World War II, as the ignorant public reverted to their slothful pacifism at a time when elites understood the need to mobilize for renewed global conflict, historian Thomas Bailey observed that "because the masses are notoriously short-sighted and generally cannot see danger until it is at their throats, our statesmen are forced to deceive them into an awareness of their own long-run interests. Deception of the people may in fact become increasingly necessary,

unless we are willing to give our leaders in Washington a freer hand." Commenting on the same problem as a renewed crusade was being launched in 1981, Samuel Huntington made the point that "you may have to sell [intervention or other military action] in such a way as to create the misimpression that it is the Soviet Union that you are fighting. That is what the United States has done ever since the Truman Doctrine"—an acute observation, which explains one essential function of the Cold War.[41]

At another point on the spectrum, the conservative contempt for democracy is succinctly articulated by Sir Lewis Namier, who writes that "there is no free will in the thinking and actions of the masses, any more than in the revolutions of planets, in the migrations of birds, and in the plunging of hordes of lemmings into the sea."[42] Only disaster would ensue if the masses were permitted to enter the arena of decision-making in a meaningful way.

Some are admirably forthright in their defense of the doctrine: for example, the Dutch Minister of Defense writes that "whoever turns against manufacture of consent resists any form of effective authority."[43] Any commissar would nod his head in appreciation and understanding.

At its root, the logic is that of the Grand Inquisitor, who bitterly assailed Christ for offering people freedom and thus condemning them to misery. The Church must correct the evil work of Christ by offering the miserable mass of humanity the gift they most desire and need: absolute submission. It must "vanquish freedom" so as "to make men happy" and provide the total "community of worship" that they avidly seek. In the modern secular age, this means worship of the state religion, which in the Western democracies incorporates the doctrine of submission to the masters of the system of public subsidy, private profit, called free enterprise. The people must be kept in ignorance, reduced to jingoist incantations, for their own good. And like the Grand Inquisitor, who employs the forces of miracle, mystery, and authority "to conquer and hold captive for ever the conscience of these impotent rebels for their happiness" and to deny them the freedom of choice they so fear and despise, so the "cool observers" must create the "necessary illusions" and "emotionally potent oversimplifications" that keep the ignorant and stupid masses disciplined and content.[44]

Despite the frank acknowledgment of the need to deceive the public, it would be an error to suppose that practitioners of the art are typically engaged in *conscious* deceit; few reach the level of

sophistication of the Grand Inquisitor or maintain such insights for long. On the contrary, as the intellectuals pursue their grim and demanding vocation, they readily adopt beliefs that serve institutional needs; those who do not will have to seek employment elsewhere. The chairman of the board may sincerely believe that his every waking moment is dedicated to serving human needs. Were he to act on these delusions instead of pursuing profit and market share, he would no longer be chairman of the board. It is probable that the most inhuman monsters, even the Himmlers and the Mengeles, convince themselves that they are engaged in noble and courageous acts. The psychology of leaders is a topic of little interest. The institutional factors that constrain their actions and beliefs are what merit attention.

Across a broad spectrum of articulate opinion, the fact that the voice of the people is heard in democratic societies is considered a problem to be overcome by ensuring that the public voice speaks the right words. The general conception is that leaders control us, not that we control them. If the population is out of control and propaganda doesn't work, then the state is forced underground, to clandestine operations and secret wars; the scale of covert operations is often a good measure of popular dissidence, as it was during the Reagan period. Among this group of self-styled "conservatives," the commitment to untrammeled executive power and the contempt for democracy reached unusual heights. Accordingly, so did the resort to propaganda campaigns targeting the media and the general population: for example, the establishment of the State Department Office of Latin American Public Diplomacy dedicated to such projects as Operation Truth, which one high government official described as "a huge psychological operation of the kind the military conducts to influence a population in denied or enemy territory."[45] The terms express lucidly the attitude towards the errant public: enemy territory, which must be conquered and subdued.

In its dependencies, the United States must often turn to violence to "restore democracy." At home, more subtle means are required: the manufacture of consent, deceiving the stupid masses with "necessary illusions," covert operations that the media and Congress pretend not to see until it all becomes too obvious to be suppressed. We then shift to the phase of damage control to ensure that public attention is diverted to overzealous patriots or to the personality defects of leaders who have strayed from our noble commitments, but not to the institutional factors that determine the persistent and

substantive content of these commitments. The task of the Free Press, in such circumstances, is to take the proceedings seriously and to describe them as a tribute to the soundness of our self-correcting institutions, which they carefully protect from public scrutiny.

More generally, the media and the educated classes must fulfill their "societal purpose," carrying out their necessary tasks in accord with the prevailing conception of democracy.

2

Containing the Enemy

In the first chapter, I mentioned three models of media orga zation: (1) corporate oligopoly; (2) state-controlled; (3) a democra communications policy as advanced by the Brazilian bishops. T first model reduces democratic participation in the media to zero, ju as other corporations are, in principle, exempt from popular cont by work force or community. In the case of state-controlled med democratic participation might vary, depending on how the politi system functions; in practice, the state media are generally kept line by the forces that have the power to dominate the state, and an apparatus of cultural managers who cannot stray far from t bounds these forces set. The third model is largely untried in practi just as a sociopolitical system with significant popular engageme remains a concern for the future: a hope or a fear, depending on on evaluation of the right of the public to shape its own affairs.

The model of media as corporate oligopoly is the natural syst for capitalist democracy. It has, accordingly, reached its highest fo in the most advanced of these societies, particularly the United Stat where media concentration is high, public radio and television a limited in scope, and elements of the radical democratic model ex only at the margins, in such phenomena as listener-supported co munity radio and the alternative or local press, often with a notew thy effect on the social and political culture and the sense empowerment in the communities that benefit from these optior In this respect, the United States represents the form towards whi capitalist democracy is tending; related tendencies include the pr gressive elimination of unions and other popular organizations th interfere with private power, an electoral system that is increasing stage-managed as a public relations exercise, avoidance of welfa measures such as national health insurance that also impinge on t prerogatives of the privileged, and so on. From this perspective, it reasonable for Cyrus Vance and Henry Kissinger to describe t United States as "a model democracy," democracy being understo