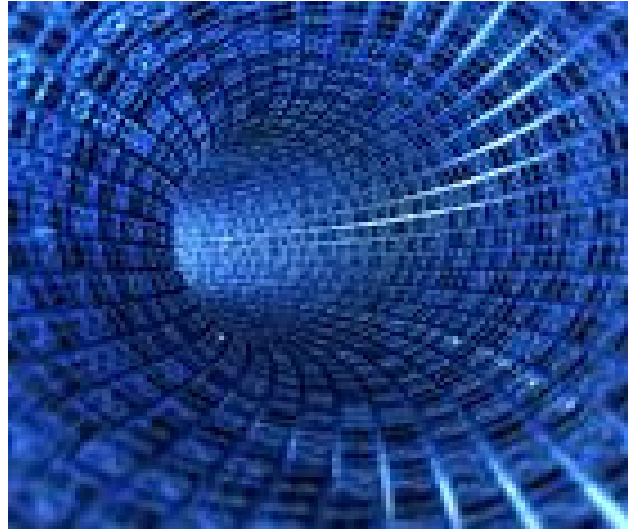


# The Outrage Industry



## **Working Paper**

Prepared for the conference on  
*Going to Extremes: The Fate of the Political Center in American Politics*  
Rockefeller Center for Public Policy and the Social Sciences  
Dartmouth College  
June 19-21, 2008

**Jeffrey M. Berry**

Department of Political Science  
Tufts University

**Sarah Sobieraj**

Department of Sociology  
Tufts University

## **The Outrage Industry**

Jeffrey M. Berry  
Dept. of Political Science  
Tufts University  
[jeffrey.berry@tufts.edu](mailto:jeffrey.berry@tufts.edu)

Sarah Sobieraj  
Dept. of Sociology  
Tufts University  
[sarah.sobieraj@tufts.edu](mailto:sarah.sobieraj@tufts.edu)

Paper prepared for the Conference on Going to Extremes: The Fate of the Political Center in American Politics, Rockefeller Center for Public Policy and the Social Sciences, Dartmouth College, June 19-21, 2008

**Abstract**  
**The Outrage Industry**

Jeffrey M. Berry and Sarah Sobieraj

We examine economic, regulatory, technological, and cultural changes that have led to the creation of what we term the “outrage industry.” The growth of certain kinds of advocacy organizations and media outlets, coupled with the development of cable TV and the Internet, has had a profound impact on our political system. The competition for viewers, listeners, readers, and donors among politically oriented organizations, media corporations, and web sites, leads many of them to promote a highly polarized view of American politics. This business model is built around the pursuit of narrow or niche audiences who must be engaged through entertaining, politically provocative analysis and commentary. We conclude that this as an effective, profitable business strategy, one quite likely to persist.

America has always been a politically combative nation. The tendency toward abrasive, discordant discourse portraying political opponents as irresponsible and dangerous is imprinted in our political DNA. It's hard to identify a period when polarization has not been high. The McCarthy era? The Nixon presidency and the antiwar divide? A cross of gold? The Palmer raids? Presidents Jackson or Buchanan or Reagan? Even the Founders were a partisan bunch whose eloquence was often overshadowed by their sheer nastiness. John Adams described Alexander Hamilton as having "a superabundance of secretions which he could not find whores enough to draw off" (Chernow 2004, 522).

Nevertheless, we believe that the current era of political venom is different. Political polemics have become a business, a business we term the *outrage industry*. Individual enterprises, ranging from enormous media empires to lone bloggers, collectively generate political mudslinging on a scale unprecedented in American history.

We use the term "business" literally, not metaphorically. Although the product differs from sector to sector, the goal is generally the same: to attract viewers, listeners readers, voters, members or donors and then to maintain their loyalty. Increasing profit comes with market penetration. Market penetration comes from providing the target audience with compelling political shows or stories. And what's the common denominator for "compelling"? In politics, it's what makes you angry.

#### Institutionalized Division

There are many sources of political outrage, including the evolution of our two parties into increasingly homogeneous ideological entities. The outrage industry has

benefited from this development but it has worked to harden ideological division within and outside of the two parties. The partisanship and polarization that we experience today is not just the consequence of short-sighted party leadership, incivility, or the explosion of wedge issues. Beyond these factors, polarization today is rooted in institutions that make it difficult to dispel. The United States is not just in a cyclical period of hyper political conflict, like a downturn in the stock market during a recession. There are too many organizations and individuals with a stake in promoting outrage for it to go away.

The term *outrage* is used frequently in this paper, in reference to a particular form of political discourse involving the mindful attempt to provoke an emotional response from the audience, usually in the form of anger, fear, or moral righteousness. Outrage is often, but not always, accomplished through the use of categorical statements, exaggerations, and partial truths about opponents which may take the form of individuals, organizations, or entire communities of interest (e.g., progressives or conservatives) or circumstance (e.g., immigrants). Outrage sidesteps the messy nuances of complex political issues in favor of ad hominem attacks, overgeneralizations, mockery, and dire forecasts of impending doom. Outrage is not so much a discussion as it is verbal competition, political conversation with a scorecard.

The prosperity of this industry has made extreme political rhetoric commonplace. It's everyday politics in America when popular radio talk show impresario Michael Savage says to listeners on 400 stations that Muslims should "take your religion and shove it up your behind" (Steinberg 2007); or Common Sense Issues pays for 1 million automated telephone calls during the South Carolina Primary, telling listeners that Sen. John McCain supports medical tests on aborted fetuses (Mosk 2008); or on MSNBC

Keith Olbermann says of Bill O'Reilly, "After all the shilling and ass-kissing you did for the administration before this phony war, you are more personally responsible for the 4,000 dead Americans in Iraq than all of America's corporations put together" (Schor 2008).

Let us be clear: we do not see the political sky falling. American politics has not descended into the abyss because the cable networks give air time to bomb throwers like Ann Coulter, or because 527s swift boat candidates with outrageous charges, or interest groups raise money by demonizing those on the other side of a hot-button issue. The nation will survive. But we do believe that the body politic pays a price because of the success of the outrage industry. American politics is surely more coarse than the norm; candidates for office have a strong incentive to ally themselves with sharply ideological groups; and bipartisanship in policymaking seems to have become more difficult to achieve.

The primary focus of this paper is to describe how and why the outrage industry emerged. The technological, regulatory, and economic changes that came together to nurture its growth will be detailed below. First we will amplify our concept of an industry devoted to marketing division and outrage. We'll also look back in time, contrasting this period of change with a period when the media and interest groups were more a source of stability than partisan acrimony.

### **A Burgeoning Industry**

What exactly is this industry? There are no precise boundaries but it is comprised of a variety of discrete, yet overlapping businesses, some of which have properties in more than one sector. Most visible are the "old" media entities, particularly cable

television networks, talk radio stations, and their political programs. Perhaps no other part of the industry is as recognizable as the celebrity provocateurs such as Bill O'Reilly, Rush Limbaugh, and Keith Olbermann. The appetite for controversial content by cable and radio outlets is voracious.

New media are also part of the industry. The Web is interlaced with political sites that aim to incite as well as inform. Everyone has their favorites (and the selection bias is surely severe) and sites vary from the respectable but still angry (like the Daily Kos) to scandal sheets (like the Drudge Report). For its part, YouTube is littered with political vitriol. And who doesn't have a blog these days? The concern here, however, is with those sites whose style leans more toward inciting than working. How much of an audience does any one blog have? There is tremendous variation, and many reach very few eyes, but collectively they generate an immense amount of traffic on the web. Not only do many mainstream journalists have blogs, but they cite them as well. From blogs associated with established citizen groups and mainstream publications to individual bloggers, there is enormous diversity in this sector.

Advocacy groups have the capacity to mobilize constituents to try to directly influence policymakers. There is an extensive array of citizen groups on the national level that have offices in Washington and directly lobby policymakers. They are a highly visible presence and draw impressive levels of attention from the press (Berry 1999). They vary in approach and some, like environmental groups, are relatively mainstream, incorporating inside lobbying tactics with efforts to influence public opinion. Many conservative citizen groups rely heavily on outrage outreach, using inflammatory appeals or fear-mongering to incite constituents and donors.

All these different entities have the potential to inform and inflame public opinion. Harriet Miers' nomination to the Supreme Court offers a rich illustration of the industry in action. President Bush announced his choice at 8:00 in the morning and by 9:00 the popular conservative radio host Laura Ingraham, who is carried by 340 stations, was on the air excoriating Miers. A few minutes after that William Kristol, editor of the *Weekly Standard*, was on Fox News criticizing the choice. An hour later former White House speech writer David Frum released a piece on the *National Review's* web site that took both the President and Miers to task. As Howard Kurtz in the *Washington Post* put it, "In the blink of a news cycle" the case for her nomination has been undermined (Kurtz 2005). The conservative attack then escalated through a torrent of cable and radio talk and web postings (Kurtz 2005; Fletcher and Babington 2005).

Prior to this age of wired outrage, other Supreme Court nominations have been defeated by interest group opposition. Two of President Nixon's nominees, Clement Haynsworth and G. Harrold Carswell, were rejected in the wake of bitter opposition from civil rights groups and other liberal lobbies. Was there anything fundamentally different in those cases than in the campaign that was mounted against Miers? In a word, yes. There was a full debate in the Congress over Haynsworth and Carswell and both went through hearings before their fate was ultimately determined by a floor vote in the Senate. The *blitzkrieg* against Miers was so fast and so broad that the nomination metastasized before any hearings could be held. The Bush White House, hardly an inept political operation, was outmatched. Ingraham said it best: "Without alternative media, the [White House] talking points would have carried the day" (Kurtz 2005).

The boundaries of different sectors of the outrage industry blur. Broadcast outlets have web sites and web sites often incorporate blogs. Advocacy groups spawn off other groups or web sites, possibly to run harsher attacks on opponents while keeping their own hands clean. The muddy boundaries suggest an important point. What emerges in the outrage industry can easily carry over into the mainstream. The businesses devoted to highly partisan opinion, journalism, and advocacy do not inhabit separate arenas. Mainstream journalists watch, listen, and read the work of some of those in the industry. Indeed, they prowl for potential stories—stories that haven't yet established a presence in the conventional media. Rush Limbaugh launches Operation Chaos, a call for Republicans to vote in Democratic primaries for Hillary Clinton so as to prolong the Democratic bloodletting in the 2008 primaries, and it may seem like just another example of political bile spewing forth from the right. But when the *Washington Post* picks it up and offers serious analysis of election results, searching for the Limbaugh effect, Limbaugh gets what he craves: attention, respect, and an incentive for his listeners to keep tuning in (MacGillis and Slevin 2008).

This boundary crossing is in of itself important as it surely reflects a democratization of the media, creating the opportunity for anyone who would like to be a journalist to try to uncover stories that are significant enough to migrate to the mainstream. Of concern is that the explosion of amateur journalism by bloggers may diminish the importance of professional standards and the vetting of stories by experienced editors.

Estimating the growing scope of the outrage industry is a challenge. It's easier to measure what's shrunk: newspaper readership and the over-the-air broadcast networks'

share of the TV audience have declined precipitously. And there seems to be no end in sight to their slide. What has grown from the conventional side of politics is mainstream interest groups. In a perverse way this explosion of mainstream advocacy has worked to the advantage of the outrage industry as the cacophony of voices in Washington trying to be heard puts a premium on skillfully exploiting opportunities for attention.

### **Moderation in Decline**

It's no small irony that both interest groups and the media used to be powerful forces of moderation in American politics. For different reasons each sector had a stake in a system that was not deeply polarized but, rather, guided by voices that if not consistently bipartisan, spoke within the boundaries of civil disagreement.

The earliest empirical researchers studying Washington lobbies found a dominant business sector that cared primarily about access, not which party controlled the House or the Senate (Milbrath 1963; Bauer, Pool, and Dexter 1963). The conservative coalition of Republicans and southern Democrats provided a consistent direction and both parties were business friendly. Labor preferred the Democrats, of course, but their differences with business while sharp, were not divisive enough to derail congressional policymaking. The art of compromise was still pretty good art.

Lobbying during this era was characterized by direct connections between lobbyists and both committee chairs and agency officials. It was not only the well known über-lobbyists like Tommy Corcoran and Charls Walker, but a broad range of experienced Washington hands who built up ongoing relationships with key staffers and policymakers. The governmental process in Washington was never quite as closed and consensual as depicted in the stereotypical iron triangles, a model that emerged not so

much from serious research as from journalistic impressions (Cater 1964). Still, this earlier era of interest group-government relations worked for most participants.

Bipartisan consensus building was common (though not ubiquitous) and business, labor, and agriculture all got some of what they wanted on a steady basis. In return, legislators and agency officials gained political support and legislators received a steady flow of campaign contributions and grateful constituents. Not insignificantly, open conflict was minimized—conflict which could make policymakers' jobs considerably more difficult.

For different reasons the media of this era was also a force for moderation. The leading media outlets (the three networks, the wire services, *Time* and *Newsweek*, and the handful of nationally important newspapers), all reflected centrist values. Day in, day out they conveyed a sense that consensus and compromise was the normal way of governing. When politics deviated from a moderate path it was viewed as anomalous, if not unhealthy. There were newspapers with highly partisan editorial pages and even partisan slanted coverage, such as that found in the *Los Angeles Times*, but increasingly the television network news, along with the major wire services, acted to homogenize the national news.

The large corporate interests controlling these dominant media outlets had a strong economic interest in maintaining the mainstream status of their properties. Leftist critics have always condemned such companies for what they see as a rightward bias, but these companies' greatest economic imperative was not to reinforce the values of capitalism but to gain market share and attract advertisers. To build market share across such a sizable target population meant finding ways of appealing to the political middle where most consumers were positioned. Media concerns targeting more ideological

consumers, such as magazines like the *Nation* and the *National Review*, were seen as fringe outlets and didn't hold much sway with the chattering class. For the large, mainstream media corporations the goal was to aggregate viewers and readers across a broad swath of the potential audience. It's a business model that worked exceedingly well until fairly recently.

### The Perfect Storm

The outrage industry was not created by one particular transformation, such as a change in party politics, but rather by a series of concurrent cultural and structural transformations that have converged to create an environment ripe for conflict-laden political communication. The coalescence of the changes we outline below produce economic and organizational incentives to showcase -- and attempt to generate -- outrage. These deeply entwined changes defy easy categorization and resist linear description, but in an effort to impose order, we have clustered a diverse array of economic, regulatory, technological and cultural changes into two broad and necessarily imperfect categories: changes in the media environment and changes in politics and in the political landscape.

#### **Changes in the Media Environment**

The media environment over the last 25 years has been marked by two divergent trends. First, we see a set of media industries that have moved away from a relative diversity of ownership toward industries that are overwhelmingly controlled by a handful of major media conglomerates (Bagdikian 2004, McChesney 2004, 2008).<sup>1</sup> In contrast, at the level of the media user, we see a space that is increasingly democratic as barriers to

---

<sup>1</sup> When Bagdikian wrote his first edition of his landmark book, *Media Monopoly* in 1983 he expressed concern of the consolidation of media into the hands of 50 owners, today the overwhelming majority of media properties are controlled by only 6 corporations: Viacom, Bertelsmann AG, News Corp, AOL Time/Warner, Disney, and General Electric (Bagdikian 2004).

entry at the lowest level have been dramatically reduced by the increase in computer ownership on the one hand and a series of sweeping technological changes on the other. While these trends are miles apart – at the largest and smallest ends of the production, content, and distribution spectrum – they each facilitate outrage politics, albeit in quite different ways. Let’s turn first to issues of ownership.

The Federal Communication Commission’s precursor, the Federal Radio Commission was established in 1927 and in its wake over 18,000 radio licenses were revoked, as the commission instituted a system favoring a smaller number of high powered radio stations at the expense of a greater number of low powered stations.<sup>2</sup> This is apropos of a regulatory history that has winnowed out smaller players, paving the way for consolidation and conglomeration of media holdings. Since the mid-1980s, mass media have been increasingly deregulated.<sup>3</sup> The Fairness Doctrine requiring the equitable and balanced presentation of controversial public issues was abolished in 1987. The financial interest and syndication (“fin-syn”) rules that attempted to foster broadcast diversity and limit television network control (by minimizing vertical integration of production, distribution, and exhibition of media content) were gradually relaxed beginning in 1983 and completely erased by 1995. Policies capping ownership of radio and television stations were gradually reduced, reaching a pinnacle in the Telecommunications Act of 1996 which dramatically expanded ownership limits in national and local television as well as national and local radio. In 2003, even the

---

<sup>2</sup> The Federal Radio Commission was established by the Radio Act of 1927. Before this point, the airwaves were unregulated terrain available for use by anyone with the necessary equipment. For more information see Albarran and Pitts’ text on the radio broadcasting industry (2000).

<sup>3</sup> See Croteau and Hoynes (2006) for a complete description of the changes in industry regulation and their subsequent fallout.

limitations on simultaneous newspaper and broadcast ownership (“cross-ownership”) were relaxed.

In terms of outrage, the elimination of the Fairness Doctrine is of particular significance. While references to balance and fairness may bring to mind newscasts in which opposing parties are given an opportunity to comment (or to refrain from doing so), the Fairness Doctrine defined balance more broadly – not referring necessarily to opposing viewpoints being presented in a particular broadcast, but including opposing views presented in different programs and segments. Today, an overall inventory of media content does not demonstrate balance, particularly in radio, where conservative talk radio programs dominate handily. Although outrage can and does exist in spaces where opposing views are presented side-by-side (think *Hannity & Colmes*), the removal of this requirement has promoted outrage in two ways. First, the Fairness Doctrine required licensees to devote a significant amount of time to controversial issues of public importance. In the wake of the Fairness Doctrine’s elimination, public affairs and news programming has declined significantly, reducing the coverage of substantive issues. Today, such coverage is remarkably thin. One study that examined a random sample of 112 commercial television stations, demonstrated that on average, the stations offered 3.59 hours of public affairs programming over the course of a two-week period (Napoli 2001). In its wake, radio and television have become less and less politically substantive, and increasingly oriented toward shock politics, as talk radio and political gossip become increasingly prominent. Second, the elimination of the “personal attack” and “political editorial” corollaries to the Fairness Doctrine in 2000, have created a space in which ad

hominem attacks flourish. Not only are things “unfair” but they can be downright ugly, with little threat of rebuke and with great potential for financial reward.

But the Fairness Doctrine is only one piece of a broader history of deregulation. It is difficult to overstate the impact of this extensive deregulation on the media industry, which fueled concentration of media ownership in virtually every sphere. The radio industry was most dramatically reformed. Consider the case of Clear Channel Communications, which owned 43 radio stations in 1995. Today, in 2008, they own over 1200 stations. Aufderheide (1999) documented this transformation, noting that in the year and a half following the Telecommunications Act of 1996, more than 25% of U.S. radio stations had been sold, and many more than once. Even industries historically marked by lower levels of concentration, such as the newspaper industry, have been reshaped as massive chains now own an increasing number of newspapers. Gannett for example now owns approximately 120 daily newspapers, in addition to a large number of news weeklies and over 20 television stations.<sup>4</sup> The overarching trend, as noted by the Project for Excellence in Journalism (2008), has been from local ownership to chain ownership, to publically traded company. The media landscape today is virtually unrecognizable when compared to the media industry of 25 years ago.

Of particular concern here is that political content has been reshaped by the transitions in news prompted by consolidation of ownership. Bennett (2007), Croteau and Hoynes (2006) and others have argued that changing ownership arrangements have transformed news into a consumer driven commodity, whose corporate overseers work

---

<sup>4</sup> For an exploration of media holdings, see the Columbia Journalism Review’s Who Owns What web tool. <http://www.cjr.org/resources/> This consolidation of newspapers has also meant that smaller operations have been forced out of business. Bagdikian (2004) details the thousands of cities that no longer have a daily newspaper, and shows that of those with dailies, the overwhelming majority are one-paper cities.

from a market-model in which success is assessed by profit margin, rather than a public interest model in which success is linked to information quality. During the Reagan administration television was reimagined as a generic commodity. This ethos was embodied in former FCC Chairman Mark Fowler's now infamous insistence that in terms of regulation, television is "just another appliance – just a toaster with pictures." This emphasis on the bottom line has had diverse manifestations in news organizations including a dramatic centralization of news production, in which nonessential bureaus (e.g., international, rural, etc.) are closed, news staff are dramatically reduced, and local communities are left relying on national news sources (Project for Excellence in Journalism 2008, Klinenberg 2007). Centralized news production, of course, also means fewer news sources.<sup>5</sup> As a result, networks offer essentially identical "product" in terms of news content, seeking to draw audiences in other ways: with infotainment and the recycling of financially successful formulas.

"Infotainment" utilizes principles of entertainment to attract audiences: titling of news segments (e.g., "The War on Terror"), adding musical scores to the news for dramatic effect, placing emphasis on drama and controversy, and focusing on political personalities and contests above substantive issues (Bennett 2007, Patterson 1993). This push to give news more charisma is driven by the desire to attract large audiences that are increasingly elusive. The multiplication of television and radio stations fundamentally altered the way in which executives and advertisers conceptualize the audience. In the early years of television, programming choices were predicated primarily on an interest in garnering the largest possible audiences and, as a result the most successful television

---

<sup>5</sup> In one striking example, in April 2008, the *New York Times* reported that CBS was considering outsourcing reporting to CNN (Arango 2008).

shows were those offering the least objectionable programming (“LOP”) (Gitlin 1987). (In short, those were programs that interested the broadest range of people while offending or distancing the fewest.) The expansion of cable channels has fragmented the audience and greatly reduced the expectations that networks have for the audience share that they will be able to attract, even with the bells and whistles they believe appeal to their target demographics.

The acceptance of necessarily smaller audiences on the one hand and improved market research information on the other has refocused programming choices on niche audiences, particularly on those audience members with disposable income.<sup>6</sup> This target marketing environment is one in which networks can afford to offend. Suddenly, objectionable isn’t so awful. Indeed, many generate revenue specifically through deploying the formerly avoided objectionable programming. MTV (Viacom) has done very well for itself by deploying bad taste, at least enough of it to allow its target audience to feel rebellious. The term used in the industry is “pop” – media producers strive to create pop to break through the clutter and draw the eyes and ears of the audience. Pop comes in many forms, the two most egregious being violence and sex, but carefully negotiated shock is not far behind.<sup>7</sup> In entertainment pop takes many forms from the fights on Jerry Springer to professional wrestling; its political equivalent takes the form of agent provocateurs. Politically, this means that ideologues, taboo in an LOP television framework, have a home.

---

<sup>6</sup> This is why, for example, there is such little programming directed toward Latinos and the elderly in spite of their significant numbers. This concern with attracting the right audience also explains why newspaper business sections generally contain information about mergers and acquisitions and the stock market, but rarely include stories on unionizing or finding affordable child care.

<sup>7</sup> Indeed, playing this edge isn’t without its challenges. Interpersonal conflict, when real, makes many uncomfortable and must be domesticated in order to retain viewers.

In addition, we have in news, as in entertainment media, a heavy reliance on formulas and a disincentive to innovate, in an effort to reduce risk. The proliferation of cable and radio channels creates an impression of increased choice in terms of political content and information (as well as in entertainment or educational programming), but in reality we have witnessed a *reduction* rather than an increase in content diversity<sup>8</sup> because of the heavy reliance on formulas. Broadcast news perhaps provides the best example, as network programs are virtually interchangeable from the content, to the pacing and placing of segments, to the appearance and demeanor of the on air personalities. Television networks are so risk averse that Mark Burnett, creator of *Survivor*, had to pre-sell the advertising (an unprecedented occurrence) to get CBS to agree to pick up the program (Madger 2003). Ironically, in many ways much television post-*Survivor* has simply been *Survivor* redone in myriad superficially different ways: reality-based contests to coronate the best singer, dancer, chef, model, fashion designer, entrepreneur, dieter, and so on. They are different programs, but the core elements are fixed, heavily derivative of their successful predecessors.

Local news is similarly formulaic, with a lower common denominator. Lance Bennett quips, “Unlike reality TV, it claims to be news, but like cheap entertainment fare, it has little agenda other than drawing audiences with scary and disgusting images of life gone wrong” (2007: 244). These violent and tragic images are local news’ interpretation of outrage – voyeuristic content not intended to accurately represent reality per se, but rather to reflect the most shocking elements of reality, to evoke emotional response: fear, indignation, outrage, or sadness. Similarly, news magazine programs (e.g., *20/20*,

---

<sup>8</sup> We recognize that debates about media diversity are extensive and contentious, and the answers vary based on the metrics used to assess diversity and the type of diversity assessed (e.g., diversity in production work, diversity in content form, diversity in viewpoint, diversity in audience, etc.).

*Dateline*, etc.) and news commentary (e.g., *Countdown with Keith Olbermann*, *The O'Reilly Factor*) have emerged around profitable templates grounded in outrage. In news and entertainment, audience members have *options*, but meaningful *choices*, even in an era of digital radio and triple-digit cable stations, are few and far between.

And ideologues have other outlets as well. The expansion of high speed Internet access and increase in mobile media use coupled with the emergence of more accessible user-generated content vehicles such as *Blogger* (and other blog platforms that eliminate the need for users to have a background in computer programming) and *YouTube* as well as social networking sites such as *Facebook* and *MySpace* have lowered the barrier for entry. Internet users who wish to share content need not even have their own web hosting space, as they can now create material and utilize other websites as free distribution networks such as *Indymedia* (in the case of citizen journalism) and *YouTube* (for video), in addition to the myriad social networking sites. Self-publishing, which was formerly an expensive endeavor presenting significant distribution challenges, now is possible not only for techies, but even for techie wannabes, without knowledge of programming or special equipment. Attention is often paid to political entrepreneurs on the web, such as Matt Drudge and Markos Moulitsas, who began as amateurs with a website and blog respectively, only to garner vast audiences (Daily Kos receives an estimated 1.4 million visitors per month, and Drudge attracts 5 million).<sup>9</sup> But beyond

---

<sup>9</sup> There are many ways to measure traffic (e.g., pageviews, unique visitors, hits, etc.) and a great deal of squabbling about such measures. Drudge, for example claims over 20 million visitors per day, but critics have argued this is an artifact of his automated page refresh that is embedded in site, which refreshes the page every 3 minutes. For examples of this discussion see <http://valleywag.com/tech/traffic-tricks/matt-drudges-spin-243614.php> and <http://www.personaldemocracy.com/node/1320> . Alexa rankings are becoming the standard, but mean less to outsiders as they are comparative, rather than absolute numbers. We have used [www.trafficestimate.com](http://www.trafficestimate.com) here for standardization and clarity. Accessed May 23, 2008.

these giants are countless small scale bloggers and website developers who also create and distribute political content.

Blogging, in particular, has exploded from a minor outpost of the Internet to over 112.8 million blogs tracked by Technorati,<sup>10</sup> up from 50 million in July 2006.<sup>11</sup> The blog explosion is one source of increasing advertiser anxiety as traditional advertising venues draw smaller and smaller audience shares. The introduction of DVRs such as TiVO have left advertisers skeptical about ratings and impact of traditional spots. This advertiser angst has lead to more creative advertising, including product integration, a variety of viral marketing techniques, and narrowcasting, in which advertisers target much smaller numbers of the most desirable consumers. Advertising on blogs provides such targeted marketing and ad networks like Google's Adsense and BlogHer have emerged to link advertisers and bloggers, creating a subset of the blogosphere made up of independent probloggers unaffiliated with a particular publication or corporation who support themselves exclusively – and sometimes quite lucratively - by blogging (e.g., Dooce, Daily Kos, Perez Hilton).<sup>12</sup> There are an even greater number of quasi-probloggers (e.g., Instapundit.com). Like ratings in the television industry or circulation in the magazine trade, traffic is what determines blog income. In fact, most advertising programs operate on a pay per click basis, although product placement is also on the rise. So, drawing an audience is salient in the blogosphere, just as it is in television, radio, or print journalism.

---

<sup>10</sup> This number does not include over 70 million Chinese blogs. For more information, see Helmond. (2008).

<sup>11</sup> As per Dave Silfry's State of the Blogosphere report on Technorati. <http://technorati.com/weblog/2006/11/161.html>

<sup>12</sup> Although once a blogger is successful, they are often brought on board by publications or businesses looking to capitalize on their success. Such is the case with Perez Hilton and VH1 or Dooce and Hewlett Packard.

Outrage politics thrives in this media environment. Large media companies and Internet entrepreneurs compete for an audience faced with 1) a multiplicity of media outlets (not only on television, but online, in print, and on the radio as well) and 2) extensive control over their choices (e.g., digital video recorders, MP3 players, etc.). This combines with infotainment, formulaic content, and a desire to court niche audiences such that Rush Limbaugh, Lou Dobbs, and Ann Coulter become perfect political programming. In this media environment, colorful commentators are attractive not in spite of their propensity for inflammatory speech, but because of it. There is a space for informed consideration of policy initiatives, but it is rarely on television and is pushed to the margins of radio, enclaved on low powered FM community stations and select segments of public radio. Bill O'Reilly and Keith Olbermann on television and Laura Ingraham and Lynn Samuels on radio are the logical outcome of political content decoupled from a public interest understanding of the mass media. And why would we expect otherwise? Policy is complex and investigative reporting is expensive.

What's more, these larger than life personalities are becoming easier to find. Bloggers and political commentators have financial incentive to adopt more polarized ways of speaking. In the era of pop, television appearances, book deals, newspaper and magazine columns, and radio programs come more easily to provocative political commentators than their more sober counterparts. Michelle Maklin has published four books, Ann Coulter has published six. Al Franken has authored or co-authored at least seven political books. Of course, outrage is not only about bomb-throwing, but even those commentators who avoid such theatrics are constrained by the norms of the industry. Guest appearances funnel not toward those who offer the most nuanced

unraveling of public policy, but to those who can best conform to the rigid templates used for political programming. Fifteen seconds for guest one, fifteen seconds for guest two, guest one rebuts, host redirects. These templates socialize those who wish to augment their careers with such appearances to engage in reductionist, sound bite ridden pseudo-debates over superficial details of political life, not the messy and unsatisfying ambiguities of actual policy proposals or their potential consequences.

### **Changes in the Political Landscape**

Although the changes in the media industry offer fertile ground for the distribution of outrage, significant changes in both political culture and political infrastructure have provided the raw material. In terms of political culture, we have seen a significant rise in postmaterialist values. This cultural transition is coupled with structural changes including the rise of citizen groups (wielding postmaterialist concerns), the related establishment of 527s (deployed more noticeably after the passage of the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act), and the dramatic expansion and professionalization of White House public relations efforts which have coalesced to provided the legal, professional, and ideological base for polemical political banter.

Political culture is not something that remains fixed over time, and the United States has witnessed a profound change in political priorities. Gradually but broadly, Americans have become increasingly concerned with quality of life issues. The affluence of our society has enabled middle class Americans to feel secure enough to focus on political matters beyond basic economic security. It's not that wages, pensions, health care, regulation, and macroeconomic performance have become unimportant to the average American—far from it. Still, ideological concerns centered around quality of life

issues have become more significant. Today citizens see “government as having a primary responsibility for enhancing equality, expanding rights, protecting the environment, supporting the traditional nuclear family, and policing corporations so that they are more socially responsible” (Berry 1999, 34-35).

As Ronald Inglehart (1977) has demonstrated, this trend is common in the advanced industrialized world. Postmaterialist attitudes are challenging to measure but the fundamental idea is far more than an abstraction. Consider how much of the nation’s collective attention turns to such issues as abortion, gay rights, and environmental protection. These issues are compelling to be sure, but we have the luxury of being concerned about them because so many Americans can afford not to be preoccupied with economic matters. Such value change is both cause and consequence of an enduring structural change that has emerged concomitantly: the sharp increase in the number of citizen groups. The growth of these organizations reflects not only the rise of postmaterial attitudes but the intensity of feelings—beliefs so strong that people defy the collective action problem and contribute the funds necessary for these organizations to operate. Inspiring people to overlook the “free-rider problem” isn’t an easy task, particularly in a cluttered organizational context, and citizen groups have increasingly turned to outrage tactics to mobilize public support for their efforts. Most readers have likely received email or direct mail solicitations from groups toward which they are sympathetic that come across rather blatantly as smarmy attempts to capitalize on missteps made by common enemies, and/or attempts to create the appearance of missteps when they do not readily present themselves. This is the very essence of the outrage industry – focused efforts to incite fear, anger, or moral indignation in hope of generating profit. In this

case, profit takes the form of support for voluntary organizations and their initiatives, rather than advertising revenue.

The most successful of the citizen groups are clearly the national environmental lobbies. The leading environmental organizations such as the National Wildlife Federation, the Audubon Society, and the Sierra Club have memberships in the hundreds of thousands and budgets in the tens of millions of dollars (Bosso 2005, 54-56). Conservative groups abound and over the years they have become forceful voices in debates over gay rights, abortion, illegal immigration, the teaching of evolution, and judicial appointments. Identity politics has propelled forward organizations working on behalf of women, racial and ethnic minorities, and gays and lesbians. Such groups work in both material (i.e., job discrimination) and postmaterial (i.e., respect and acceptance) spheres. As a cohort citizen groups have thrived. On the national level, for example, both Berry (1999) and Baumgartner and his associates (forthcoming 2009) calculated that citizen groups are vastly overrepresented in congressional lobbying. That is, the percentage of citizen groups playing a significant lobbying role in policy disputes is far greater than the percentage of citizen groups in the overall population of Washington lobbies.

Of course, this influence has not gone unnoticed. The Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act in 2002 was intended to regulate the use of soft money by special interests, but incorporated an exemption for 527 organizations. As a result, the unintended consequence has been an increase in the number of 527 organizations and a flood of money funneled toward them, escalating rather than reducing the both the influence of “special interests” in the election context and decreasing the transparency of

electioneering. In 2004 527 organizations produced a bevy of outrage-based campaign ads, as illustrated by the now infamous swift boat advertisements, whose donors become invisible in the process. While the advertisements are credited to previously unknown patriotic sounding organizations, the funders behind these 527s remain hidden (Munger 2006). This veil of anonymity, of course, lowers accountability, reducing the potential backlash from misleading information, half-truths, and caustic barbs.

Another political change that has contributed to outrage based political discourse has been the expansion and transformation of the White House Communications Agency. Under President Reagan, the White House turned to public relations, developing a more strategic communications approach (Maltese 1994, Bennett 2007). The increased use of parajournalists such as spin doctors, public relations professionals, and speech writers to manage news and public opinion have oriented White House communications around a marketing mentality and pressed its communications toward pithy, polemical sound bites (and away from more cerebral substantive information). Florid vilification of enemies (e.g., “Axis of Evil”) and expressions of moral indignation and outrage has been a specialty of the Bush White House. In this case, outrage is incentivized not by an interest in gaining an audience to deliver to advertisers, but by an interest in building and maintaining political support in the form of approval ratings, support for policy initiatives, and votes for reelection.

### Business Model

The impressive scale and continuing growth of the outrage industry demonstrates that there is a business model that is easily implemented and provides significant

opportunities for profitability. And it's profitability, in all its different forms, that continues to generate growth and, thus, dims the chances for a decline in outrage.

The beginning point for outlining this model is the cost structure for outrage enterprises. Given the range of businesses in this industry there is, of course, no one modal configuration. At some level, the outrage industry is bifurcated, with differing business models applying to mainstream mass media corporations on the one hand and mezzo media and citizen groups on the other. At the higher cost end of the spectrum is corporate television and radio. Even though the destruction of the high barriers to entry for cable television networks and the introduction of satellite radio made a remarkable difference in the economics of these industries, start-up still requires significant investment. Yet hundreds of networks are now operative and the lower barrier to entry and the different delivery mechanism has led to a profitable and expanding business sector.

At the other end of the range, it can cost little to nothing to create a web site or blog. Of course, many web sites and blogs are launched with a larger influx of capital investment in marketing. Even citizen groups can be started with relatively low initial costs. The Internet not only allows for very inexpensive fundraising but it gives fledgling organizations a presence during their formative stage. MoveOn.org was started by a married couple circulating a petition. MomsRising.org claims 140,000 members after only two years in existence. Relatively few new groups enjoy this kind of success, but the trolling for donors by citizen group start-ups searching for a financial base is constant. Success can come gradually, though, because unless they're very sophisticated, those

outside of Washington may not recognize that a buoyant web presence may not be indicative of a strong lobbying operation.

In addition to the low barriers to entry, most of the outrage industry is characterized by relatively modest production costs. There are real costs to be sure, primarily labor, but common business expenses such as research and development, manufacturing, and product design may be minimal or nonexistent in the case of blogs, websites, and fledgling internet-based citizen groups. The intellectual property rights across the industry are also minimal. In plain English this means that good ideas used by one organization can usually be adopted by others without charge. Even marketing can be modest and ramped up only as resources warrant. Cable television and talk radio incur higher costs than other parts of the industry, but even here production costs for programming involving talking heads is relatively low. Celebrity hosts are costly, but one or two hosts cost far less than a room full of actors or investigative journalists working for years on end to generate small pockets of content, and many costs are saved as a result of norms around set design, limited writers' teams, and so on. The result is an unusually crowded marketplace of vendors. Because the costs of doing business are relatively modest, there is a low rate of exit from the industry.

Lower production costs also reflect the severe market segmentation within the outrage industry. For the most organizations in this industry, rational market behavior is to seek a niche and to exploit it. It is not that growth beyond the initial conception of the organization's market is not desirable. Rather, the common working assumption is that the easiest way to attract consumers and donors is to reach those who feel very strongly about a particular issue. For interest groups this incentive is clear. While political parties

are *vote maximizers*, interest groups are *policy maximizers* (Berry and Wilcox 2007, 61). Reaching out to a broad audience is not likely to be cost effective as burrowing deep into a niche. The Discovery Institute's promotion of intelligent design theory and its advocacy has been remarkably successful in defining it as the leading organization fighting against Darwinism. Aggressively casting forward an alternative view of the creation, one compatible with fundamentalist Christian theology, has made it the most visible player in this niche. And what great copy it provides to media outlets: the Scopes Monkey Trial played out with a more sophisticated script. There is, though, a downside for such a niche strategy as it's challenging for an organization so closely tied to an issue to ever escape that identification. If the issue loses salience, the organization's survival may be threatened.

A central consequence of an associational landscape characterized by low production costs and niche behavior is that it reduces the incentives for consolidation. Unlike the wave of mergers and acquisitions that we described taking place at the upper end of the media industry, consolidation is often irrational for citizen groups. Only infrequently do citizen groups combine as a broadening of the issue reach is not nearly as attractive to members or donors as single-minded devotion to the particular issue that moves that person the most. This is true for mezzo media as well. Combining political web sites may produce more confusion than light to the reliable visitors who frequent those sites. There seems to be limited value in being a superstore of opinion on all the issues of the day. Thus, no political website or interest group equivalent of Amazon.com has successfully emerged. The result is that the population of citizen groups, webs sites, and blogs fueling the outrage industry continues to grow. Unlike, say the conventional

network television industry, which through mergers and acquisitions was quickly transformed into a business with a very limited number of owners, economies of scale are modest to nonexistent in this arm of the outrage industry.

The lack of consolidation in the industry fosters a hypercompetitive climate as purveyors clamber to for attention. This central characteristic of the industry fosters a brawling, aggressive outreach by bloggers, organizations, and smaller publications to keep viewers, listeners, readers, and donors agitated to the degree they'll tune in or beam up the next day and the day after that. Whereas competition and high production costs in traditional broadcast television have pushed products toward homogenization with modest differences, competition on the web and in the associational sphere is too imprecise to reflect such behavior. In the marketing by outrage organizations, the competition is often political opponents rather than allies peddling largely the same product. While left and right groups need each other, Hewlett Packard and IBM would love to see the other disappear.

Profit levels in the private sector are easily measured and executives are held accountable by boards and shareholders. Profit in the outrage industry is conceived of in different ways by different sectors. Accountability varies widely too. For the few cable networks and the more plentiful talk radio stations and syndicated radio programs, profit is straightforward: earnings. For those companies that are incorporated, the standard metric is earnings per share. For interest groups the standard is quite different. For conventional business, labor, and professional lobbies, which stand largely outside of the outrage industry, profit can be defined as winning politically. Achieving policy objectives is the goal and doing well means wringing or resisting changes from government. Yet

measurement isn't terribly precise as the wheels of government turn rather slowly and political outcomes are often complicated compromises.

For citizen lobbies profitability can be construed differently. They certainly want to gain policy victories but, perversely, they can also win by losing. Developments that are adverse can actually aid in fundraising. In the Terri Schiavo case, for example, organizations like RightMarch.Com and the Traditional Values Coalition, succeeded in focusing the nation's attention on the severely brain damaged woman. Even though Schiavo's feeding tube was eventually disconnected after a protracted legal struggle, those organizations gained donations, notoriety, and their leaders could take satisfaction that they had some influence on the process. During the fight in 2007 over immigration reform, Numbers USA, just one of the conservative groups that mobilized, says it generated 1 million faxes to the Senate. Not only did it help to sink the legislation, but the organization increased its membership 83 percent in the six months preceding the vote, to 447,000 (Pear 2007).

Organizations that are strictly web sites and/or blogs can exist on profits that are relatively small or realized only in emotional satisfaction. For many, fame (or notoriety), respect, or even a simple sounding board are rewarding in and of themselves. These outlets are frequently run by a devoted founder and while, individually, they cannot hope to influence the policy process by themselves, collectively they can still have an impact.

### Implications

The development of the outrage industry points toward a depressing conclusion: the industry is profitable, it's thriving, it's growing, and it is creating a political climate that creates the perception of extremism, enhances polarization, and erodes political trust.

But is the industry truly damaging our political system? To return to the example of John Adams and Alexander Hamilton raised at the very opening, isn't it true that despite the harshness of the founders' rhetoric, echoed repeatedly in essays signed under pseudonyms in papers and pamphlets, the fragile new nation addressed and solved a variety of serious problems? And Adams and Hamilton, leaders of opposing factions, were right at the center of that problem solving. Today, the ship of state sails on, problems are being addressed, and some are even resolved in a bipartisan manner.

Nevertheless, we strongly believe that the outrage industry is having a deleterious impact on the American political system and that it does represent something different than the normal amount of divisiveness that characterizes democratic polities. Division and acrimonious debate is a natural part of a free society, but in our minds the economic, associational, and technological contours of the industry have generated quantitative and qualitative changes in the way we talk about politics and policy. Much of what we hear and read today is not so much acrimonious debate as it is just acrimony.

The impact has been felt on both the macro (policymaking) and micro (individual behavior) levels. With all the outrage in the media and on the Internet, we wonder if it has become more difficult for policymakers to accurately assess opinion, or at least gauge the impact of constituency opinion on their re-election chances. It seems likely that as citizens become immersed in the outrage industry, their communication with government officials is affected. This is a familiar problem of democracy: weighing the manifested intensity of a minority versus the latent opinion of the majority.

One concern is that the impassioned opinion fueled by the various elements of the industry distorts the government's agenda. The evidence from recent years doesn't appear

to support such a contention as the major issues of the Bush years—9/11 and terrorism, the war in Iraq, social security reform, broad tax cuts, Katrina, the surge in oil prices, and the recession—were not pushed forward by the outrage industry. Interestingly, the Bush White House has made concerted efforts to mobilize their sympathizers in the industry, asking them to whip up public opinion in support of the administration's positions. Jeffrey Cohen (2008) suggests that the new media has led presidents to pay greater attention to what he calls "narrow constituencies."

If the major issues on the administration's agenda were not put forward by the industry, is there still reason to be apprehensive? The occasional distraction, like President Bush flying back from his Texas ranch to sign the utterly symbolic bill related to Terri Schiavo, hardly undermines good government. Nevertheless, the frenzy generated by the industry can and does affect the government's agenda in important ways. Again, consider the bipartisan immigration bill that emerged in the Senate in 2007. The agreement, forged by Senate heavyweights like Ted Kennedy, Harry Reid, John McCain, John Kyl, and Lindsay Graham and endorsed by President Bush, was voted down on the floor of the Senate in an embarrassing defeat for its authors and for the White House. CNN's Lou Dobbs and a constellation of organizations that successfully labeled the legislation as an "amnesty" bill, were clearly effective in dooming it. And then the issue disappeared from the congressional agenda as no one wanted to face the onslaught of criticism again. Yet public opinion polls indicated that the nation as a whole was moderate in its opinion on immigration. Surveys also showed that the minority that was opposed to immigration just prior to the vote was unusually intense, surely a reflection in part of the passions inflamed by outrage media programs and intense

Internet mobilization (Gallup 2006; 2007a; 2007b; 2007c). And the problem continues on with no legislative solution in the works and both presidential candidates avoiding the issue.

Morris Fiorina (2005) argues that polarization appears far greater than it really is, due to a serious misreading of public opinion. Despite polls that demonstrate moderation on the part of the public, democracy says Fiorina has been “hijacked” by vocal minorities with extreme views. It’s ironic that in this day and age of constant polling and sophisticated analysts, that public opinion can be so easily muddied by the intense advocacy of elites and organizations.

The impact of the industry on partisanship—the ideological distance between the parties, party line voting, and the unwillingness of the parties to work together in the Congress—is far from clear. There are many reasons why partisanship may be increasing. We’ve always had ideologues who engage in what Gary Jacobson calls “partisan priming” (2006, 90). Direct, concerted involvement in primary fights intended to purify a party of its apostates, such as those conducted by the conservative Club for Growth, are still relatively uncommon. Yet it would hardly be surprising if, increasingly, outrage channels were used to diminish moderate candidates in primary fights with a left or right ideologue.

A growing body of empirical work devoted to individual-level behavior is relevant to the argument here. The proclivity for compelling news programming is demonstrated by Markus Prior (2007). In his study of patterns of media choice, Prior finds that the greater selection afforded by the introduction of cable TV generated a strong movement by viewers away from news programming and toward entertainment.

When viewers were limited to the three major broadcast networks, they watched the news shows, not because they were interested in them but because the TV was on continually in their homes and at designated times, only news was available to watch. With less news watching, there's less consumption of current affairs-related information. Not surprisingly, political shows have gravitated toward infotainment with analysis often playing a subsidiary role to exhibitions of political gladiators arguing. Diana Mutz and Byron Reeves (2005) offer a disturbing corollary to this finding: although incivility increases the very appeal of political shows, it has a negative impact on political trust. It's quite possible that outrage programming increases political voyeurism – captivating audiences in ways perhaps earlier formats failed to do, yet also increasing our skepticism and creating a context in which we are less interested in actually participating. Eliasoph (1998) terms the cache around political disgust, “cynicism chic.”

The ever-expanding choice for political consumers reflects a movement toward niche marketing and narrowcasting. Blogs and political web sites, with their constant vilification and mockery of others, are particularly egregious in their efforts to produce an “us vs. them” mentality. One wonders if there is an increasing individuation of news and opinion consumption; for example, individuals drawn to a particular blog where they participate in discussion with members of a like-minded community. There is a higher comfort level in engaging with those who agree than with a more heterogeneous group of discussants (Eliasoph 1998; Mutz 2006).

There are obviously some positive developments associated with the emergence of expanded media choices and political discussion on the Internet. Although some worry that the harshness of outrage rhetoric can turn people off to politics and cause them to

disengage, the broadened opportunities for participation have surely facilitated engagement for some. Those who would never go to a political meeting in person may comfortably participate in discussions through the Internet. There are many instances of bloggers uncovering an important story that the mainstream press missed or seriously underplayed. The diversity of programming and the ever-expanding universe of web sites allows people to find debates on issues that matter intensely to them but may have little resonance with media outlets that must appeal to broad, general audiences. The expanded set of channels for political communication also facilitates the expression of a broader range of political opinion

In the last analysis, though, the outrage industry is a cause for concern. We seem hurtling toward a political system where vilification is the norm. We worry about “compromise” becoming a dirty word, with legislators savaged for developing bipartisan agreements with the other side. And we worry about a transformation of the public sphere from a space of discourse to one of shouting, mockery, and polarization. There are thoughtful pleas and recommendations for diminishing partisanship but we remain skeptical (Nivola and Galston 2008). The outrage industry stands in the way and, unfortunately, it works well for too many people and too many organizations.

## Works Cited

- Albarran, Alan B. and Gregory G. Pitts. 2000. *The Radio Broadcasting Industry*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Arango, Tim. 2008. "CBS Said to Consider Use of CNN in Reporting." *The New York Times*, April 8.
- Aufderheide, Patricia A. 1999. *Communications Policy and the Public Interest: The Telecommunications Act of 1996*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Bagdikian, Ben H. 2004. *The New Media Monopoly*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Bauer, Raymond A., Ithiel de Sola Pool, and Lewis Anthony Dexter. 1963. *American Business and Public Policy*. New York: Atherton.
- Baumgartner, Frank A., Jeffrey M. Berry, Marie Hojnacki, David C. Kimball, Beth L. Leech. Forthcoming. *Advocacy and Policy Change*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bennett, W. Lance. 2007. *News: The Politics of Illusion*. New York, NY: Pearson Longman.
- Berry, Jeffrey M. 1999. *The New Liberalism*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.
- Berry, Jeffrey M., and Clyde Wilcox. 2007. *The Interest Group Society*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Pearson Longman.
- Bosso, Christopher. 2005. *Environment, Inc.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.
- Cater, Douglass. 1964. *Power in Washington*. New York: Vintage.
- Chernow, Ron. 2004. *Alexander Hamilton*. New York: Penguin.
- Cohen, Jeffrey E. 2008. *The Presidency in the Era of 24-Hour News*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Croteau, David and William Hoynes. 2006. *The Business of Media: Corporate Media and the Public Interest*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
- Eliasoph, Nina. 1998. *Avoiding Politics: How Americans Produce Apathy in Everyday Life*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Fiorina, Morris P., with Samuel J. Abrams and Jeremy C. Pope. 2005. *Culture War*. New York: Pearson Longman.

Fletcher, Michael A., and Charles Babington. 2005. "Conservatives Escalate Opposition to Miers." *Washington Post*. October 25.

Gallup Poll. 2006. "Americans' Views of Immigration Growing More Positive." July 10. Accessed at [www.gallup.com](http://www.gallup.com) on May 29, 2008.

Gallup Poll. 2007a. "While Majority Unsure About Immigration Bill, Those With Opinion Are Strongly Opposed." June 6. Accessed at [www.gallup.com](http://www.gallup.com) on May 29, 2008.

Gallup Poll. 2007b. "Hispanics' Views on Immigration Unchanged From Last Year." June 28. Accessed at [www.gallup.com](http://www.gallup.com) on May 29, 2008.

Gallup Poll. 2007c. "Americans Divided on Need for New Immigration Laws." July 16. Accessed at [www.gallup.com](http://www.gallup.com) on May 29, 2008.

Gitlin, Todd. 1987. "Television's Screens: Hegemony in Transition." In Donald Lazere, (Ed.), *American Media and Mass Culture* (pp. 240-265). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Helmond, Anne. 2008. "How Many Blogs Are There? Is Someone Still Counting?" *Blog Herald*, February 11. <http://www.blogherald.com/2008/02/11/how-many-blogs-are-there-is-someone-still-counting/> Accessed May 20, 2008.

Inglehart, Ronald. 1977. *The Silent Revolution*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Jacobson, Gary C. 2006. "Comments: Disconnected, or Joined at the Hip." In Pietro S. Nivola and David W. Brady, eds. *Red and Blue Nation*, Vol. 1. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.

Klinenberg, Eric. 2007. *Fighting for Air: The Battle to Control America's Media*. New York, NY: Metropolitan Books.

Kurtz, Howard. 2005. "Conservative Pundits Packed a Real Punch." *Washington Post*, October 28.

MacGillis, Alec, and Peter Slevin. 2008. "Did Rush Limbaugh Tilt Result in Indiana?" *Washington Post*. May 8.

Magder, Ted. 2004. "The End of TV 101: Reality Television, Formats and the New Business of TV." Laurie Ouellette and Susan Murray, eds. *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture* (pp. 137-155). New York, NY: NYU Press.

- Maltese, John Anthony. 1994. *Spin Control: The White House Office of Communications and the Management of Presidential News*. Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press.
- McChesney, Robert. 2004. *The Problem of the Media: US Communication Politics in the Twenty-First Century*. New York, NY: Monthly Review Press.
- McChesney, Robert. 2004. *The Political Economy of Media: Enduring Issues, Emerging Dilemmas*. New York, NY: Monthly Review Press.
- Milbrath, Lester W. 1963. *The Washington Lobbyists*. Chicago: Rand McNally.
- Mosk, Matthew. 2008. "McCain Takes the Fight to Negative Opponents." *Washington Post*. January 17.
- Mutz, Diana C., and Byron Reeves. 2005. "The New Videomalaise: Effects of Televised Incivility on Political Trust." *American Political Science Review*. 99(1), 1-15.
- Mutz, Diana C. 2006. *Hearing the Other Side*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Napoli, Philip M. 2001. "Market Conditions and Public Affairs Programming: Implications for Digital Television Policy." *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 6(2), 15-29.
- Nivola, Pietro S., and William A. Galston. 2008. "Toward Depolarization." In Pietro S. Nivola and David W. Brady, eds.. *Red and Blue Nation*, Vol. 2. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.
- Patterson, Thomas E. 1993. *Out of Order*. New York, NY: Knopf.
- Pear, Robert. 2007. "A Million Faxes Later, a Little-Known Group Claims a Victory on Immigration." *New York Times*. July 15.
- Prior, Markus. 2007. *Post-Broadcast Democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Project for Excellence in Journalism. 2008. *State of the News Media: 2008*. <http://www.stateofthenewsmedia.com/2008/> Accessed May 15, 2008.
- Schor, Elana. 2008. "Murdoch Intervenes in Olbermann-O'Reilly Row." *The Guardian*. May 19.
- Sifry, Dave. 2006. *State of the Blogosphere, August 2006*. <http://www.sifry.com/alerts/archives/000436.html> Accessed May 15, 2008.
- Steinberg, Jacques. 2007. "Boycotted Radio Host Remains Unbowed." *New York Times*. December 17.