

**METHODS OF MISREPRESENTATION**  
**from Michael Parenti, *Inventing Reality:***  
***The Politics of News Media***  
**(Wadsworth, 1992)**

No communication system can report everything that happens in public life. Some selectivity is inevitable, and, by its nature, selectivity is conducive to a measure of bias. But even if total objectivity is unattainable, we might still aspire to standards of fairness and accuracy in reporting and try to develop a critical analysis of how the news is distorted. What follows is a discussion of some journalistic methods of misrepresentation. Much of the pertinent illustrative material has been presented in preceding chapters.

**IS IT PROCESS OR PROPAGANDA?**

We have noted the media's tendency to favor personality over issue, event over content, official positions over popular grievances, the atypical and sensational over the modal and systemic. Supposedly these biases inhere in the nature of the media themselves, specifically the routine newsgathering practices of reporters, the visual nature of the camera, the limitations of media budgets, the limitations of broadcast time and print space, poor journalistic preparation, the market need to accentuate the sensational and eye-catching, and the need to reduce a complex happening to a concise story. Certainly these are real factors. But news production is not a purely autonomous process, responsive only to its own internal imperatives. As we have seen, many distortions are of a more political nature and reveal a pattern of bias that favors the dominant class ideology. If the selective factor is merely a need to be entertaining and sensational, why are so many dreary news items (for example, visiting dignitaries at the White House, vacuous official announcements, heat waves and cold spells in Europe) given consistently generous coverage, while many interesting and even sensational things are regularly suppressed. What is the principle of selectivity involved?

Why is the Tylenol poisoning of several people by a deranged individual (or individuals) big news, but the death of many more persons from unsafe drugs marketed by supposedly reputable companies not news? Why is a plane crash killing forty-three people headline news, while the far more sensational story of the industrial brown-lung poisoning of thousands of factory workers remains a suppressed story for years? Why

does the press rapturously report the pope's endless trips abroad while ignoring the involvement of his priests in the struggles of the world's poor- until the pope attacks them for such involvement? Why are unsubstantiated government charges about Soviet chemical warfare treated as top news while the telling refutations by scientists are suppressed or slighted? There is nothing in the inherent logic of media technology or in the nature of the newsgathering process that explains these disparities but there is much in the underlying structure of political and economic interest that does.

What is it about the dynamics of newsgathering and the foibles of reporters that obliges the press to treat capitalism as a benign system and socialism as a pernicious one? Not much. But there is plenty to explain that bias in the pattern of ownership and control, the vested class interests, the financial muscle of big advertisers, and the entire capitalist social and cultural order.

During the Watergate scandal, we heard a great deal about John Mitchell, H. R. Haldeman, John Dean, and John Erlichman; but Claude Wild, William Keeler, Orin Atkins, and some twenty other top business executives remained unknown to most of us even though they also were convicted of Watergate crimes. As top donors of dirty money, these businessmen were all given suspended sentences, light fines-and what amounts to media protection. The corporate financial underpinnings of Watergate, Andrew Kopkind noted, were never exposed by an American press that has seldom been ready to publicize big business influence over public policy.' Again, there was nothing in the nature of the media as such, but much in the nature of the politicoeconomic structure of which the media are an integral part that explains why one set of names in the Watergate cover-up was widely publicized while another set was hardly touched by the national media.

To continue: There is nothing in the limitations of time, space, and staff that oblige the media systematically to ignore third-party presidential candidates while assigning an army of journalists the agonizing task of having to file a "new" story every day of the campaign about major candidates who seldom say anything new. But there is something about progressive third-party candidates themselves, their attempts at raising questions about the desirability of the corporate capitalist system, that makes them politically unsafe for national media coverage.

The media's intermittent fascination with "international terrorism" might be seen by some as the press just doing its thing, seizing upon a sensational theme of political violence and villainy. But in fact, the press is doing the *government's* thing, reporting a "threat," then dropping it,

then resuscitating it again as a sensational new story; but the U.S.-sponsored state terrorism of many despotic Third World regimes, having a scope and ferocity far exceeding what the U.S. press and government normally define as terrorism, receives relatively little notice and even when mentioned is seldom linked to U.S. policies.

An example of this might be the non-stories of Indonesia and East Timor. In 1965 the Indonesian army overthrew left-leaning President Achmed Sukarno and embarked upon a murderous campaign to eradicate the Indonesian Communist Party and the entire left; they slaughtered about a half million people (some estimates are as high as a million) in what was the greatest genocidal action since the Nazi Holocaust.<sup>1</sup> Here was a sensational story if ever there was one, but it was almost three months before it broke in the American press, in *Time* magazine, and a month after that before the *New York Times* carried a rather brief report.<sup>1</sup> This mass atrocity was treated, if at all, in a fatalistic tone, with a striking lack of indignation or critical editorial comment, as if the victims were just the unfortunate figures in some tragedy ordained by destiny.

Except for one or two passing and even congratulatory references, the press had nothing to say about the role of the CIA and the U.S. military in arming and assisting the Indonesian generals before, during, and after the bloody takeover. The press also had nothing of substance to say about the economic interests underlying the coup: the abolition of Sukarno's land reform program, the destruction of Communist Party libraries, clinics, cooperatives, and schools, the massive dispossession of peasants, the widening gap between village rich and poor, the post-coup influx of American, Dutch, and Japanese corporations, the power of the "Tokyo Club" of financiers who rescheduled Indonesia's debts in exchange for more exploitative investment terms, and the takeover of Indonesia's mineral resources by foreign firms.

The subsequent slaughter perpetrated by the Indonesian military in East Timor from 1976 onward is another sensational and terrible story suppressed or underplayed by the U.S. press. When East Timor, a Portuguese colony at the eastern edge of the Indonesian archipelago, was granted independence by Lisbon in 1975, a brief struggle ensued on the island between Timorese elites and a popular leftist organization called Fretilin, with the latter emerging triumphant. Soon after, the Indonesian military invaded East Timor, engaging in a murderous counterinsurgency campaign against the Timorese population which included the systematic destruction of whole villages, crop destruction and defoliation, and the creation of concentration camps in

which tens of thousands of victims perished.' The Indonesian policy of extermination destroyed about half of the Timorese people. As of 1985 the destruction of East Timor continued and the U.S. media continued to treat this remarkable, sensational story as nonexistent.

It could be argued that places like Indonesia and East Timor are just too remote and obscure to win the attention of an American press noted for its generally deficient foreign news coverage. But during the days of Sukarno's realm, when Indonesia was taking an openly anti-imperialistic stance, it was regularly-and negatively-covered by the U.S. press. And as for East Timor, Noam Chomsky observed that the *New York Times* index gave six full columns of citations to remote Timor in 1975 when Fretilin was emerging the victor and the situation was of great concern to the State Department and the CIA. In 1977, however, as the Indonesian army's war of annihilation reached awe-some proportions, the *Times* index gave Timor only five lines.<sup>6</sup> Politics rather than geography determined the amount of coverage.

For twenty years or more, successive famines in Ethiopia and other African nations were given only perfunctory media attention. The famine of 1984 and 1985, one of the severest, which gripped at least twelve nations in Africa was again afforded slight play, *except* for Ethiopia, which-now an avowedly Marxist-Leninist nation-became the focus of a news hype not seen since Polish Solidarity days. Here supposedly was a Communist regime that could not or would not feed its people, a favorite media theme. When famine can be turned into an anticommunist story, it becomes big news.

Favorable stories about socialist or emerging leftist revolutionary economies are not assigned by editors nor tolerated by media executives and owners. The suppression of positive news from socialist countries is so persistent and pervasive as to suggest that something more than insufficiencies in foreign coverage, lackadaisical journalists, and space limitations are at the heart of the matter. When we see that news selectivity is likely to be on the side of those who have power, position, and wealth, we move from a liberal complaint about the press's poor job to a radical analysis of how the press fulfills its system-supporting function.

Sometimes omissions and suppressions are not enough and the press lends itself to the dissemination of outright lies. One way to lie is to accept at face value what are known to be lies, passing them on to the public without adequate countervailing response. *Face-value framing* has characterized the press's performance from the McCarthy era down to

more recent times, including most everything the government says about Nicaragua, the Soviets, yellow rain, Grenada, KGB "penetration," civil rights, labor disputes, or whatever. Without ever saying a particular story is true or not, but treating it at face value, the press engages in the propagation of misinformation-while maintaining the myth that they are merely noncommittal and objective. When challenged on this, some reporters will argue that they cannot inject their own personal judgments into their reports, an argument that overlooks the fact that they are not being asked to-and, in any case, often already do so. My criticism is that they (or their editors and owners) fail to do what they claim they do, give us a range of information and views that might allow us to form opinions contrary to the ones that permeate their news reports. Referring to a speech President Reagan made in March 1984, one critic notes:

The speech was filled with enough accusations of Communist subversion to make one wonder if the White House had hired Joe McCarthy's ghost as a speechwriter. It would seem important for Americans to realize that many of the things their president had just told them were at best unproved assertions or onesided interpretations and at worst demonstrably false statements. Yet not one of the network commentators pointed this out in the post-speech summary, and neither did, the next day's accounts in the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post*. To do so would have implied that the president was either a liar or a fool, hardly a politically neutral message. Instead objectivity prevailed over accuracy.<sup>7</sup>

More to the point, the *appearance* of objectivity, as achieved through face-value framing, prevailed over accuracy.

Untruths that are repeated again and again in every major national medium soon take on a life of their own, to be passed on sometimes with little conscious awareness that a fabrication has been disseminated. But along with the transformation of falsehood into unconscious "fact," there are still plenty of plain old deliberate lies. A report from Indonesia by Gerald Stone in the *London Times* (September 2, 1975) found that the Indonesian press was spreading false stories about widespread atrocities by the Timorese liberation force, Fretilin, as part of "a purposeful campaign to plant lies." But when *Newsweek* prepared Stone's story for an American audience, it had him reporting on the "devastation" and "bloodbath" caused by "the Marxist Fretilin party." *Newsweek* made it appear as if Stone had found the atrocity stories to be true when in fact he had found them to be lies! This was more than a case of sloppy inaccuracy; it was an instance of conscious deliberate misrepresentation.

## UNBALANCED TREATMENT

In accordance with the canons of good journalism, reporters are supposed to balance their stories, tapping competing sources to get both sides of a dispute. However, as we have seen, even when statements from both sides are presented, they often are not accorded equal space, positioning, and framing. Furthermore, the rule overlooks the fact that *both* sides may not be *all* sides, and that important but less visible interests, extending beyond the confines of the immediate issue, are habitually shut out of the news.

In any case, even this minimal rule of getting "both sides" often falls by the wayside, sometimes because of space limitations, the pressure of deadlines, careless reporting, and other such factors, but more often because of the political bias that dominates news production. Those who have power, position, and wealth are less likely to be slighted in news reports than those who have not. On the infrequent occasions when wealthy and powerful interests are attacked in the media, they are almost certain to be accorded adequate space to respond. But the media are less energetic in their search for a competing viewpoint if it must be elicited from labor leaders, student demonstrators, peace advocates, Black or Latino protesters, Communists, Third World insurgents, the poor, the oppressed, or other politically marginal and dissident interests (except dissidents from socialist countries who are accorded the kind of news coverage and favorable editorial comment that heads-of-state might envy). For example, observing press reports on Africa, one critic concludes: "Even when American newsmen take the trouble to visit Black Africa, they seem incapable of talking to ordinary people about what is happening to their country." *Time* and *Newsweek* articles on the struggles in Namibia, for instance, concentrated on the concerns and efforts of South African military commanders and officials in Pretoria, Geneva, and Washington, but offered no statements from the Namibian revolutionaries or other Namibians.'

In an earlier chapter, I noted how the McCarthy model predominates. A high official, usually the president or a cabinet secretary, makes an outlandish charge about "Soviet terrorism" or "KGB penetration" and the press dutifully runs the story-again and again- without presenting an alternative view. Twice in three minutes, NBC news reported President Reagan's charge that the airport being built by revolutionary Grenada was for "Soviet and `Cuban military purposes." Not once did NBC ask the president to explain how he knew the airport was intended for military purposes rather than for tourism as the Grenadians maintained. Not once

did NBC allow a Grenadian representative or American critic of the president's policy to offer evidence to the contrary."

Regarding the Geneva arms talks of 1985, President Reagan described himself as optimistic because "this is the first time [the Soviets] have ever publicly stated a desire to reduce the number of their weapons." CBS carried this incredible comment without bothering to point out that the Soviets have made repeated overtures to reduce nuclear weapons, including the previous year's unilateral offer to decrease their intermediate range missiles in Europe from 800 to 162. When dealing with the Soviets or other Communists, the press feels no need for balance.

What the press lacks in balance, it sometimes makes up for in *false* balancing, as when it tries to create an impression of evenhandedness by placing equal blame on parties that are not equally culpable. Thus, for years the news media ascribed the killings in Guatemala and El Salvador to "extremists of both the left and right" when in fact almost all the killings were done by rightist death squads linked to the military. The false balancing created a false impression: A massive state terrorism against popular organizations was reduced to a gang war between leftist and rightist outlaws. False balancing also allows journalists to adopt a condemnatory view of all sides, both those who are fighting for and those fighting against, social justice. In this way the press manages to keep an equal distance from both falsehood and the truth.

Another way to stack the deck with false balancing is to employ a double standard in interviews. For instance, Ted Koppel, friend and admirer of conservatives like George Will and Henry Kissinger (and who in 1984 earned \$750,000 as host of ABC's *Nightline*), has gained a reputation for asking probing inquiries. Indeed he does, except that he challenges viewpoints that veer somewhat leftward far more vigorously than those that stay snugly mainstream. Hostile probes can sometimes give a respondent the opportunity to offer clarifying arguments, assuming the person is up to the task and is allowed enough time. But the overall impression left by an antagonistic interview is that there is something highly questionable about the interviewee. Conversely, the effect of a friendly interview is to send a cue to the audience that the respondent is to be trusted and believed.

## **FRAMING**

The most effective propaganda is that which relies on framing rather than on falsehood. By bending the truth rather than breaking it, using emphasis, nuance, innuendo, and peripheral embellishments, communicators can create a desired impression without resorting to explicit advocacy and without departing too far from the appearance of objectivity. Framing is achieved in the way the news is packaged, the amount of exposure, the placement (front page or back, lead story or last), the tone of presentation (sympathetic or slighting), the accompanying headlines and visual effects, and the labeling and vocabulary. Just short of lying, the media can mislead us in a variety of ways, telling us what to think about a story before we have had a chance to think about it for ourselves.

One common framing method is to select labels and other vocabulary designed to convey politically loaded images. These labels and phrases, like the masks in a Greek drama, convey positive or negative cues regarding events and persons, often without benefit of- and usually as a substitute for- supportive information. Thus, on CBS television news Dan Rather referred retrospectively to the Black civil rights movement and student antiwar movement as "the civil disturbances of the sixties. How different an impression would have been created had he labeled them "movements for peace and justice," or "movements against military intervention and for racial equality." Other examples of labeling:

A news story in the *Los Angeles Times* described Nicaraguan leader Daniel Ortega's denunciation of U.S. policy as being "as strident as ever," implying that Ortega was given to excessive and unjustified attacks." The report said nothing about U.S. policy itself or about the content of Ortega's criticism-which readers might not have found "strident."

A report in the *Washington Post* described a province in El Salvador as "guerrilla infested," rather than "guerrilla controlled" or "prorevolutionary," thereby reducing the insurgent populace to a kind of lice.<sup>16</sup>

In a *Washington Post* story filed from Paris, we read that "many French political commentators, as well as the Kremlin's propagandists" were complaining about the course of French foreign policy. The French have "commentators," the Soviets have "propagandists."

\*Throughout the 1984 press coverage of the Lebanon crisis, the press incessantly referred to the "Soviet-made" anti aircraft missiles and other



arms possessed by the Syrians and Lebanese. But at no time were the Israeli arms described as "U.S.-made"- which they were. The impression left was that the Soviets were somehow the instigators in what was actually an Israeli invasion of Lebanon.

During the Geneva arms negotiations of 1982 and 1983, the news media repeatedly referred to "offers" made by the United States regarding the deployment of its intermediate range missiles, and "demands" made by the Soviets. Thus a headline in the *Washington Post* read, "SOVIET DEMANDS SEEN IMPERILING TALKS IN GENEVA,"<sup>18</sup> (seen by U.S. officials, that is).

On CBS evening news, Dan Rather framed a Soviet proposal as follows: "The Soviet Union today made another propaganda peace pitch designed to enhance its image in Western Europe," calling for the "mutual nonuse of military force" in Europe. Rather's only other comment was that "the West rejected" the suggestion as "not negotiable." No lie was uttered here. The Soviets indeed did make the proposal, and the United States did reject it. But by labeling the Soviet move as "another propaganda peace pitch," Rather let us know that the U.S. rejection was the only sensible move-without giving us an explanation as to why this was so.

CBS' television news, on another occasion, referred to the U.S. cruise and Pershing missiles being placed in Europe as "necessary" for the defense of Western Europe. But CBS did not say a word about their strategic first strike capacity and their destabilizing effect in reducing the U.S. attack time to a few minutes, which minimizes or even obliterates the Soviet capacity for deterrence." Soviet intermediate range missiles, however, were described by CBS as "growing in numbers" and "an increasing menace to Western Europe." By labeling Soviet intermediate missiles (which in fact were not destabilizing-having no strategic capacity to reach U.S. strategic missiles) as a threat, and U.S. missiles as purely defensive, CBS and the other national media could present a simple but misleading picture, in accordance with the Reagan administration's nuclear arms policy.

\*At one time or another, President Reagan labeled the Soviets as "those monsters," "our adversaries," and "the enemy." Taking such terms at face value the press gave them wide circulation and unchallenged credibility. The endless negative stereotypes, unburdened by *any* factual particulars, *assume* that we and the Soviets are locked in some

inexorable adversarial relation against which all other policy considerations must be measured.

"Disinformation" may not always be the right word for this kind of media message, for disinformation implies that false and fabricated evidence has been disseminated. But in such instances, *no evidence of any kind*, no matter how false, has been offered. Given the anti-Soviet orthodoxy of the U.S. press, there is no need even for the appearance of evidence. One can pass off the most blatant and sweeping assertions as incontrovertible fact.

### **THE GREYING OF REALITY**

Much news media framing is designed not to excite or incite but to neutralize. While we think of the press as geared to crisis and sensationalism, often its task is just the opposite, dedicated to the greying of reality, blurring popular grievances and social inequities. In this muted media reality, those who raise their voices too strongly against social and class injustices can be made to sound quite shrill.

Instead of neutralizing themselves as observers, reporters and editors are more likely to neutralize their subject matter, giving it an innocence it may not deserve. One way to do this is by applying gloss-over euphemisms and passive phrases. We have already noted how the *New York Times*-years after the fact-reported that President Salvador Allende of Chile "died" in the Moneda Palace when actually he had been murdered there by the military." The *Times* demonstrated how it could turn the 1973 Chilean coup-in which tens of thousands were victimized into a neutral event by using muted phrases like "the armed forces took power," and telling us the "chaos" caused by the Communists "brought in the military."

When men, women, and children in the villages of Morazan province were massacred by the El Salvadoran army, the *Times* described it as "a military operation in which some 500 civilians reportedly died in El Mozote." The *Washington Post* treated the Morazan massacre with sentences like "[A survivor] broke down only when speaking of what she said were the deaths of her children" and "Like so much else in the civil war that is wracking this tiny country, these conflicting accounts are impossible to verify." The *Christian Science Monitor* wrote, "Death and destruction, still loom high in the saddle in El Salvador," a metaphor that conveniently avoided telling us who the homicidal horsemen really were."

The acts of repression in Turkey by a fascist military regime, involving mass imprisonment, murder, torture, and the destruction of trade unions and other popular organizations, were described in the *Washington Post* as "controversial measures," and as a "drive to restrict political dissent." We learn that General Kenan Evren, the military despot of Turkey, has a "down-to-earth approach" and involves himself in "the rough and tumble of everyday politics," and that his "current crackdown" leading to the imprisonment of "29,940 men" has "all but stamped out terrorism" as if all these victims were terrorists and the Evren regime itself was not engaging in massive terrorism.

Faced with a genocide in East Timor perpetrated by the Indonesian military, complete with widespread burning of crops and intensive aerial bombings of the countryside to starve out and destroy the population that supports the guerrillas, the *Washington Post* could neutralize as follows: "More than 100,000 islanders-one sixth of the population- died in the famine and disease brought on by the hostilities." And "the warfare between the Indonesians and Fretilin forces further disrupted the fragile agrarian economy and caused heavy casualties." Again, the Indonesians did not starve out and massacre multitudes; the Timorese just "died," when the "warfare" impersonally "caused heavy casualties."

Another way to neutralize the news is by scanting its content. We noted how the media are able to reduce political campaigns to a string of issueless, trivial pseudo events, and feed us stories about labor-management conflicts, political protests, and revolutionary and socialist countries without ever telling us much about their substance, about the interests and goals motivating the event makers. When political struggles are deprived of their content, as for instance when positions taken by the Soviets in opposition to U.S. policy are never explained in their substance, we are left with the presumption that the conflict is caused by an innately hostile adversary. By slighting content and dwelling on surface details, the media are able to neutralize the truth while giving an appearance of having thoroughly treated the subject.

### **AUXILIARY EMBELLISHMENTS**

Through the use of various peripheral framing devices, a story can be packaged so as to influence our perception of its content. The most common accoutrement in the print media is, of course, the headline. Not only can headlines mislead anyone who skims a page without reading the story, they can create the dominant slant on a story, establishing a mind set that influences how we do read the story's text. Thus, it takes a careful reading of a front-page *Washington Post* report,

headlined "U.S. SEEKS NICARAGUAN SOLUTION," before one realizes that the "solution" sought is not a peaceful settlement of hostilities but a way of continuing military aid to the contras and expanding economic sanctions against Nicaragua in the face of congressional opposition." The headline editorializes the story, inviting us to see Reagan's policies toward Nicaragua the same way Reagan does, as a search for a solution rather than as a cause of the problem.

Political cartoons and caricatures also are common embellishments, time-honored forms of editorial comment and readily recognized as such. Less easily detected might be the illustrations that appear in the news and commentary sections. The hammer and sickle symbol has been so frequently used as a sinister embellishment (sometimes adorning a menacing bear) in newspaper illustrations and as a visual backdrop in television news reports that it now evokes a feeling of distaste and alarm in many Americans—even as it remains a symbol of hope and betterment to millions of others in various parts of the world.

Photographs play a similar role, sending us a cue about what to think of a story before we get a chance to read it. Acts of violence during antiwar protests or labor disputes are more certain to get photographed and appear in the news than less damning shots showing large disciplined crowds making their point. Individual demonstrators who convey a kooky appearance will more likely catch the camera's eye than those of more conventional deportment, the purpose of such photographs being not only to highlight the unusual but to delegitimize the protesters, making *them* the issue rather than the thing they are protesting.

Photographs of political leaders can be very political. The president of the United States enjoys almost daily favorable pictorial treatment in the major print and electronic media and is only rarely pictured unsympathetically. However, favorable photoplay is less likely to be accorded heads of state who have been defined as adversaries.

A long *New York Times Magazine* article by David Shieler, entitled "Russia, A People Without Heroes," was accompanied by no less than ten photographs all of which were unusually muted, grainy, and gray, with thick ragged black borders and with captions like "Russians have become so amorphous, so dispersed, because there are no roots, no foundations. .." (accompanying a picture of Russians going down an escalator). The photographs accompanying this article conveyed an impression of glumness, oppression, and joylessness, and were clearly meant to do <sup>So</sup>.<sup>32</sup>

A *60 Minutes* report (August 1, 1982) on U.S. intelligence work during World War II turned into a cold war message and a plug for government secrecy. As Harry Reasoner announced, "Today as we rush to disclose everything ... we must remember that some secrets are worth keeping secret- not to make war but to keep the peace," the screen showed Nazi troops marching past Hitler, then a quick cut to Soviet troops marching past a large image of Lenin in Red Square. Thus the camera invited us to equate the Soviet Union with Hitlerian world conquest. Whether one agreed with the equation or not, the point is, it was made quite effectively and evocatively through a visual effect that evaded rather than encouraged the viewer's conscious judgment.

As anyone who has sat through a Hollywood romance or adventure film might know, music is another evocative media embellishment that can play on our feelings. Television news reports on the Soviet Union are often accompanied with tunes that are either mournful or menacing. In the spring of 1984, National Public Radio's "All Things Considered" did a report on the kinds of music it used as background to its news (spritely tunes for amusing stories, serious ones for serious reports, wry ones for satirical purposes, and so forth). An especially dirgelike theme was identified by Noah Adams as used for "sad stories, especially from Eastern Europe." That Adams saw nothing politically manipulative about using music in this way testifies to the unexamined and unchallenged nature of the political orthodoxy so fostered. Such use of thematic background music is designed to "set the mood," eliciting receptive feelings and deterring resistant thoughts.

Newscasters use themselves as auxiliary embellishments. They cultivate a smooth delivery, have trained voices and restrained demeanors, and try to convey an impression of objective detachment that places them above the rough and tumble of their subject matter. Newscasters and, in a different way, newspaper editorialists and columnists affect a knowing, authoritative style and tone designed to foster credibility and an aura of certitude. One recalls A. J. Liebling's caustic observation, "The reluctance to admit ignorance... is with most of the press as strong as the refusal to accept reality." So what we sometimes end up with is *authoritative ignorance* as emphatically expressed in remarks like, "How will this situation end? No one can say for sure." Or, "Only time will tell." Or, "That remains to be seen." (better translated as, "I don't know and if I don't, then no one else does because I am the most knowing.") Sometimes the aura of credibility is preserved by palming off trite truisms as penetrating truths. So newspeople learn to fashion sentences like "Unless the strike is settled soon, the two sides will be in for a long and bitter struggle." And "The space launching will take place as scheduled if no unexpected problems arise."

And "Because of heightened voter interest, election-day turnout is expected to be heavy." And "Unless Congress acts soon, this bill is not likely to go anywhere."

In sum, as highly skilled specialists, news manufacturers are more than merely conduits for official and moneyed interests. They help create, embellish, and give life to the news, with an array of stereotyped, often misleading, but well-executed images, tones, evasions, nuances, suppressions, and fabrications that lend confirmation to the ruling class viewpoint in a process that is not immediately recognized as being the propaganda it is. Their authoritative voices on radio and television, their decisive wrap-ups and reassuring appearances before the camera, and their endless columns of system-sustaining stories and commentaries help make us believe "that's the way it is." At the same time, this media message preempts the public agenda and crowds out genuine public discourse on what the world might really be like and how we might want to change it.