

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

Posc 105

THE MASS MEDIA AND PUBLIC OPINION

I. THIS MORNING:

- A. How news presentation affects and is affected by politics
 - 1. Example: network evening news
 - 2. Film “News: Illusion of Reality”
- B. Notes:
 - 1. The State of the Union speech will be delivered tonight.
 - a. Some extra credit available on the web site.
 - 2. Materials for the assignment on representation (see the syllabus) are available on the web site.
 - a. Go to “Do Something!” and click “Does Your Representative Represent You?”
 - 3. A good Internet source for impeachment is:
<http://jurist.law.pitt.edu/impeach.htm>

II. PUBLIC OPINION AND THE MEDIA - RECAP:

- A. Refer to Class 9 notes for the discussion of the “mirror metaphor” and “reality creation.”
- B. Public depends heavily (exclusively) on mass media
 - 1. A major source for:
 - a. Enlightened understanding
 - b. Accountability
- C. Media do not simply mirror reality
 - 1. Media can be considered lense through which news is filtered
- D. The filtering process:
 - 1. Selection of stories
 - 2. Choices regarding presentation (framing)
 - a. See the notes from Class 9.
- E. Here are some generalizations.
 - 1. Government point of view
 - 2. Personalization
 - 3. Fragmentation
 - 4. Drama
 - a. CBS example (if time and luck permit)
 - (1) Introduction is a “table of contents,” anchor setting, music
 - 5. Politics over substance
 - 6. Remoteness

-
-
- F. The coverage of elections
 - 1. Horse races and handicapping.
 - G. The consequences:
 - 1. Mystification, confusion
 - 2. Apathy and disinterest
 - 3. Quiescence
 - 4. More sterile coverage.
 - 5. The media do not misinform so much as not inform citizens; but lack of information becomes a variety of misinformation.
- III. THE MEDIA AS WATCHDOGS:
- A. How well do the media help citizens hold leaders accountable?
 - B. To an extent that might surprise the average person politicians are able to “coopt” the media.
 - 1. They can get news to carry stories the way they (the politicians) want.
 - 2. One consequence is that news isn’t news as commonly understood.
 - C. The film “News,” narrated by Bill Moyers illustrates many of these points.
- IV. NEXT TIME:
- A. Voting and elections
 - B. Reading:
 - 1. Patterson, *We the People*, Chapter 10.
 - a. This entire chapter is worth reading carefully, especially since Patterson is a very well respected authority on the media and politics.
 - b. Pay attention to the section on “partisan” and “objective” journalism.
 - c. Also, what roles can the media perform and which can’t they do?
 - 2. The “reserve” room of the course web page has materials on the media that illustrate and explain some of the topics discussed today.
 - a. See, for example, the paper on news presentation.

