PUBLIC OPINION

I. CONTENTS:
   A. How the media affect the public’s understanding of current events.
   B. Recent History
   C. Public opinion.

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF NEWS PRESENTATION:
   B. General proposition: the media are not politically biased nearly as much as they are biased against citizenship.
      1. This bias creates mass cynicism and apathy, which in turn favors some interest and groups.
   C. How the media package the news and present it to the public.
      1. Government point of view: official interpretations of events and issues are the primary source and topic of most news stories. One seldom finds independent accounts or analysis.
      2. Personalization: news stories are most frequently reported in personal terms. How individuals are affected by an event. Who won, who lost, who was hurt or helped, etc. Compare the number of statements about or by individuals with the number about policy content.
         i. Check this on your own by looking at a newspaper account of some congressional activity.
            1) Does it talk about the merits of the issue or who wins and who loses.
      3. Drama: Wherever possible the story's dramatic and emotional elements are emphasized. As the narrator talks what visual images are portrayed. What feelings does the story arouse? Are you angered, saddened, gladdened, etc. or are you "informed." Is coverage dispassionate or does it arouse your feelings?
         i. Listen to theme music on news casts.
         ii. What kinds of pictures dominate a typical night on the networks news broadcasts.
      4. Hostility to institutions and government:
         i. The media frequently dwell on corruption, waste, ineptitude, silliness, and the like when describing government and public officials.
            1) Stories of scandals, corruption, waste, ineptitude
      5. Fragmentation: stories are usually short, superficial, devoid of contextual explanation. They don’t show how events are interconnected
and skim on background information.

6. Politics over substance: the "political" aspects of news (who did what to whom) frequently overshadow the "why" parts of the matter.
   i. Horse racing and campaigns: Look at the coverage of election campaigns. What is stressed, who’s ahead, who’s behind or stands on issues? Who has raised the most money or what the candidates proposal really entail? Who endorsed whom or what the advantages and disadvantages of various platforms are?
      1) Usually, it’s the first.

III. HOW THE MEDIA AFFECT THE PUBLIC:
   A. The consequences:
      1. Remoteness: there is usually little effort to show the individual how a controversy relates to his or her personal life or interests.
      2. Mystification: reports usually do not explain issues or policies or controversies to the reader or viewer. Because emphasis is on personalities and drama, the substance is often left out.
      3. Disinterest and apathy.
         i. People are confused and frustrated so they become cynical and less inclined to care seriously enough to take politics as seriously as other activities.

IV. A BRIEF HISTORY LESSON:
   A. Thirty year history of Democrat and Republican attempts to understand the public.
         i. Hubert Humphrey (1968), George McGovern (1972) seen as too liberal
         ii. Jimmy Carter (1976), a non-ideological “outsider,” the exception that proved the rule.
      2. Reaction to Ronald Reagan
         i. Reagan’s victories interpreted as
            1) evidence that the country was becoming or had become “conservative.”
            2) Democrats were actually too “liberal” or “soft” on social issues.
         ii. The need to raise money.
      3. Democratic Leadership Council (DLC)
         i. Bill Clinton, chair
         iii. Moved Democrats to the “Center.”
         iv. See, for example, “New Democrats Online” at
4. 1992: Clinton wins the presidency.
   i. Tax increase and health care fiasco put Democrats on the defensive.
5. Newt Gingrich and the “Contract With America.”
   i. 1994 Republicans take control of both branches of Congress.
   ii. Contract promises peaceful “revolution.”
      1) See Readings below.
6. Democratic rebound
   i. Elections of 1996 and 1998 convinced Republican to tone down the
      rhetoric.
   ii. Impeachment
7. “Compassionate conservatism” and George W. Bush.

V. PUBLIC OPINION:
   A. So what is the state of public opinion.
   B. Difference between “door-step” opinions and considered views.
      1. Many have a small factual basis from which to work.
   C. Pragmatism over ideology.
      1. Americans are not generally ideological in the usual sense of the word.
      2. They oppose “big” government in the abstract but favor many, many big-
         ticket and expensive specific programs.
         i. They also support regulations aimed at preventing commonly
            perceived threats.
   D. Pragmatically “internationalist.”
      1. They are reluctant to get involved militarily abroad and dislike foreign aid.
      2. Support for war with Iraq is instructive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reactions to Weapons Inspections Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Military Force</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inspectors find ... %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq is hiding weapons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq is hiding ability to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>easily make weapons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No weapons, but Iraq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can’t prove otherwise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No weapons, but inspectors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can’t assure Iraq has none</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Support For War
3. People seem to want a coalition and are sensitive to costs.

![Table: War Support Contingent on Allies, Level of Casualties]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Favor or oppose</th>
<th>August 2002</th>
<th>Sept 2002</th>
<th>Oct 2002</th>
<th>Now</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>military action in Iraq</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favor</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even if allies won’t join</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only if allies agree</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Table: Favor or oppose even if U.S. suffered thousands of casualties]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Favor or oppose</th>
<th>August 2002</th>
<th>Sept 2002</th>
<th>Oct 2002</th>
<th>Now</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>military action in Iraq</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favor</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even if allies won’t join</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only if allies agree</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Support Depends On...

4. Many wonder if Bush has made the case.

![Table: Bush Hasn’t Made the Case on Iraq]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3: Doubt About the “Case”

5. Figures are from the Pew Research Center. (See below.)
VI. NEXT TIME:
A. Elections
B. Reading:
   1. Required: “Contract With America” in the Cyber Reserve Room.