

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
Posc 150**

**THE MASS MEDIA AND POLITICS
(Part I)**

- I. CONTENTS:
 - A. Finish discussing the constitutional context of American politics
 - B. Film, "Illusion of News" that starts the discussion of the media.

- II. WHAT THE CONSTITUTION DOES:
 - A. Creates a **republic**.
 - B. Tries to control political power and social power exerted through government.
 - C. Creates a **presidential** system
 - 1. Ours differs from a parliamentary or unified government.
 - D. A "moat" around "representatives"
 - 1. The electoral college and the indirect election of the president.
 - E. ***Fragmentation of power** and the **shattered sword**:
 - 1. Separation of powers: three semi-autonomous branches
 - i. Article 1: The Congress
 - 1) Bicameral legislature - two houses of Congress
 - ii. Article 2: The President
 - iii. Article 3: An independent judiciary
 - 1) **Judicial review**
 - a) The Supreme Court has extraordinary power.
 - b) Marbury Vs Madison
 - 2. Checks and balances (e.g., veto, advise and consent, tax legislation, etc.)
 - i. Impeachment
 - 3. Federalism
 - i. National and state governments.
 - ii. Enumeration of specific powers; others left to the states.
 - iii. The Bill of Rights: restraints on national government.
 - 1) Incorporation controversy
 - 2) Recall the discussion of the Fourth Amendment.
 - 4. Independent constituencies
 - i. Members of different branches have different "bosses" they need to listen to.
 - 5. Geographical representation
 - F. Madison's extended republic
 - 1. Pit interest against interest
 - 2. See Federalist Paper No. 10
 - G. Assessment:
 - 1. Advantages

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- i. Gradual change.
 - ii. Protection of rights.
 - iii. Flexibility: it has adapted to changing circumstances, maybe.
 2. Disadvantages
 - i. *Hinders accountability
 - ii. Delays, even prevents collective action.
 - iii. Thwarts majority rule.
 - iv. *Rewards or gives advantage to those with most resources.
 - v. May not be adaptable.

III. A VIEWERS GUIDE TO “ILLUSIONS OF NEWS”:

- A. Read on your own.
- B. Overview:
 1. The film illustrates how politicians “coopt” (form unholy alliances) with the people they cover.
 - i. It shows, for example, how candidates *use* the media to their (the candidates) advantage.
 2. Lots of important events and problems occur and persist.
 3. But surprisingly many are hardly mentioned in election campaigns and the mass media.
 4. Worse yet, according to this documentary, how the media covers elections is heavily influenced by candidates and their campaign staffs.
 - i. We see and hear what campaign managers, public relations experts, pollsters, and others want us to see and hear.
 5. Ronald Reagan’s team was not the first or only group to exercise this influence; it was just better than most.
 6. Many feel President Clinton’s team has take it to new heights.
 7. If you have been following the news this semester, you can see how the Bush administration uses the media—it stages events in various states and localities—to build support for its policies.
 - i. Bush is following exactly in Clinton’s footsteps.
 8. Drew’s book provides a number of examples.
 - i. Look, for instance, in the first chapter where she describes the Democrats charge of “partisan politics” to deflect attention away from the embarrassment of fund raising scandals. The party’s leaders knew the press would run with that line and in effect bury the committee’s substantive work.
 9. The media treat campaigns in particular and politics in general as sporting events and entertainment.
 - i. News people can “always be bought with a good visual.”
 - ii. “The eye wins every time.”
 - iii. The result: superficial, trivial, confusing, disorienting coverage.
- C. Some names and incidents to keep in mind:
 1. Note: Michael Dukakis was the Democratic nominee for president in 1988.

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2. Bush, of course, is George W.'s father.
 3. Michael Deaver
 4. Lesley Stahl CBS reporter
 - i. What was the Reagan administration's reaction to her critical report?
 5. Reagan and the Daytona 500
 - i. Why was this a news event?
 6. Reagan at a Boston pub and a construction site in Texas
 - i. Ditto?
 7. Dukakis riding in a tank.
 - i. Polls indicated that Dukakis was perceived as "soft on the military" so his handlers tried to make him look like a warrior.
 - ii. This publicity stunt backfired because everyone thought Governor Dukakis looked like the cartoon character Snoopy.
 8. Dukakis and Bush and flags
 - i. Media attention to Bush and Dukakis saluting the flag and reciting the pledge of allegiance served whose interests?
 9. Bush jogging in the rain.
 - i. Is it really news to discover that when a president runs in the rain he will get wet?
- D. What do all of these images suggest about the relationship of the media and government?

IV. NEXT TIME:

- A. First test
- B. Reading: finish Drew, Chapters 1 through 9, plus the required readings listed on the notes.