CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

AGNEW VERSUS THE MEDIA:
A Symbolic Confrontation
on Constitutional Freedoms

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
Mass Communication
by
Paul William Kroll

January, 1975
The thesis of Paul William Kroll is approved:

California State University, Northridge
January, 1975
On November 13, 1969, Spiro T. Agnew rocked the world of television news. The Vice President openly attacked, on nationwide television, the practices of network news. He followed up with a barrage against newspapers one week later. And he kept at it, hammering away at the media throughout his tenure as Vice President. Agnew also blasted "impudent snob" intellectuals, "radiclib" Congressmen, dissidents on campus and "nattering nabobs of negativism" in general. Never had a Vice President been so vocal and in the public eye. Still more shocking, in 1973 Agnew was found to be something less than honest, resigning from his office in disgrace.

Agnew left many unanswered questions as a result of his continuing battle with print journalism and the electronic media. Agnew also gave birth to many studies which dealt with his opinions, his motivations and his psychological-political makeup. In 1973, this author, as part of the requirements for a Master's degree in Mass Communication decided to study the growing Agnewiana.

In the fall of 1973, two journalism professors at California State University, Northridge were planning to study whether the television networks presented news in nearly identical fashion or if there were noticeable dif-
ferences between the three major networks. Drs. Sam Feld-
man and Joseph M. Webb chose the resignation of Spiro T.
Agnew as the subject for study. The question was, how did
the three networks handle the story of Agnew's resignation?
Were there significant differences in presentation or was
it nearly identical as commonly believed?

They felt that a qualitative rather then a quanti-
tative content analysis would be more capable of pinpoint-
ing often subtle differences in presentation. Tapes of
evening news television broadcasts of the three networks
were obtained from the Vanderbilt University Television
News Archive in Nashville, Tennessee. These were viewed
and analyzed a number of times by the professors and a
group of graduate students who volunteered to assist in the
project. The author was one of those graduate students
working on the experiment.

As part of the assignment, he was given the job of
evaluating the coverage in the Los Angeles Times, Washing-
ton Post and New York Times. This was to be compared with
network television presentation of the story for possible
differences. Unfortunately, in the end, there was hardly
time to describe the differences in coverage as found on
the networks themselves. The research strongly indicated
that there were meaningful differences between the network
coverage of the news event.

One other aspect of the situation should be men-
tioned. Professors Feldman and Webb were quite interested
in the symbolic meaning of words. This paralleled their equally-held disinterest in simply tallying the number of times a word was used, as if a word had intrinsic and universal meaning. A good example of the problems which subjective meanings can cause researchers using the quantitative approach is the Edith Efron study, *The News Twisters.*\(^1\) Efron claimed that there was an overwhelming bias against Richard Nixon in the 1968 election campaign. Critics maintain the answer is not so clearcut and that it depends on how one decides what is or is not an "anti-Nixon" word. It is remarkable that two studies, the Efron analysis and one by Stevenson et al,\(^2\) used the same data but came to such remarkably differing conclusions.

Of course, there has been a lot of quibbling about methodology on both sides. But one suspects the problem is more in the minds of the researchers, rather than in the methods used. If a researcher was rather convinced that the media were biased against Richard Nixon, it may well have had something to do with how the research material was evaluated. On the other hand, if a researcher was a media supporter and believed in the "objective" as a fait accompli by national newscasters, the tendency would be to look for supportive material in that direction.

In any case, because of this author's close work with and study under professors Feldman and Webb, he became interested in the symbolic value of words in general and in the Spiro Agnew versus the media controversy specifically.
In fact, the Agnew-media controversy seemed to be a perfect example of the role which symbolic meanings attached to words play in our political process. (By "symbolic value" the following is meant: words do not have universal and intrinsic meanings but are given specific meanings by attitudes, experiences and cultural milieus of individuals.)

As a result of the study, and this author's interest in the subject, Dr. Feldman suggested that a content analysis of Agnew's media speeches would be an appropriate and useful Master's thesis. The suggestion went through several evolutionary stages. The final approach was to embody a two-pronged attack. On the one hand, media reaction to Agnew's criticism was studied. This was compared with Agnew's criticism of the media from his point of view as a duly elected political leader. The specific approach and methodology is further explained in the Introduction.

The author wishes to thank the Department of Journalism at California State University, Northridge, for the opportunity to gain the necessary insight into some fundamental problems faced by the media. In particular, he acknowledges his debt to Drs. Sam Feldman and Joseph M. Webb for their elucidation of concepts, writings and methodologies which made possible this study of Spiro T. Agnew's relationship with the media. Of course, the author bears full responsibility for the conclusions reached (or missed) in this paper.
One other obligation needs to be mentioned. This is a note of gratitude to the Dean of the Faculty of Ambassador College, Dr. Michael P. Germano, for his support and the time given to pursue further studies, of which this thesis is a part. I offer my condolences to my wife and children for the nights I kept them awake banging away on my typewriter and to Elaine Past, my secretary, who sometimes wished I had done less editing and more finished typing.
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ABSTRACT

AGNEW VERSUS THE MEDIA

A Symbolic Confrontation
on Constitutional Freedoms

by

Paul William Kroll

Master of Arts in Mass Communication

January, 1975

On November 13, 1969 then Vice President Spiro T. Agnew attacked network news commentary. His speech was carried nationally over the three networks. From that day, Agnew became embroiled in a media-government conflict that did not subside until his resignation. This thesis analyzes the thrust of the reaction to Agnew's criticism of the press by leading authors who wrote political biographies of Agnew, three leading American newspapers, the views of editorial writers from other American dailies, the thoughts contained in the more important magazines and the stance of electronic media executives and commentators.

Though, naturally, the emphasis is on the two media speeches given in November 1969, reaction from the entire span of Agnew's tenure as Vice President is included. The second section of the thesis is the more important one.
In effect, it is an analysis of a large number of speeches in which Agnew discussed the media in whole or in part.

First, a comparison is made between what Agnew said about the media and what media representatives thought he said about them. More importantly, the thesis is based upon a symbolic-interactionist foundation in which the interpretation of the conflict is seen from each of the protagonist's viewpoint.
In a desire to be heard, I have to throw them [the press] what people in America call a little red meat once in a while and hope that in spite of the damaging context in which these remarks are repeated, that other things which I think are very important will appear.

Spiro Agnew, on British television interview.
INTRODUCTION

The first question to answer is, why another analysis of Spiro Agnew's relationship with the press? To date, no less than ten books have been written scrutinizing the former Vice President's political life. Almost all the books spend many pages detailing, analyzing and pontificating about Agnew's criticism of the press. The latest book, _A Heartbeat Away_ by Richard M. Cohen and Jules Witcover was published in 1974.

In the academic world, at least three Master's theses and one doctoral dissertation have sought to unravel various aspects of Agnew's relationship with the press. This author also found over three hundred twenty-five articles written about Agnew in major news magazines, class-opinion journals, quality magazines and scholarly journals. Some of these dealt, in one form or another, with Agnew's relationship to the media. Most, of course, discussed various political events in which Agnew was embroiled.

Leading newspapers such as the _Washington Post_, _New York Times_ and the conservative _Chicago Tribune_ reported on, dissected and interviewed Agnew to the point of ad nauseam. Meanwhile, Agnew's speeches, interviews and major press conferences run into the hundreds. Many of his speeches are available to the researcher with only a modi-
cum of digging effort required. One book alone, by conservative John Coyne, Jr., contains approximately 100 major speeches given by Agnew between late 1968 and mid-1971. The book, The Impudent Snobs: Agnew vs. the Intellectual Establishment, was still in print at the time of writing. The Congressional Record contains dozens of Agnew speeches sprinkled throughout its massive tomes.

At the same time, almost every book on mass communication and the media such as William Rivers' The Adversaries: Politics and the Press or Edith Efron's controversial book, The News Twisters contains an analysis of Agnew's impact on the press. Meanwhile, over the years many statements were issued by leading commentators and executives of important media outlets such as CBS and the New York Times. These statements detailed the media view as Agnew's speeches have elaborated his viewpoint.

The inevitable question, then, in the light of this mountain of available material by knowledgeable commentators who knew and talked with the chief actors in the drama, is, What justifies another work based solely on existing records and by a person who has had no experience in the White House or in the hallowed studies of NBC or the Washington Post newsroom?

Weakness of Past Studies

The answer will take several pages to discuss. It is in two parts. First, the reader is asked to look at
several paradoxes. These paradoxes underscore the fact that words and situations do not possess intrinsic and in-violate meanings of themselves. Meanings are imposed on words and situations by the viewer. The importance of this understanding will be explained shortly.

However, it is important that the reader first take a look at how this paradoxical nature of meaning can radically alter what appears to be unchangeable reality. First, a brief look is necessary at Agnew's 1969, televised "media speech." The date was November 13, 1969. The place happened to be Des Moines, Iowa. The Vice President of the United States, Spiro T. Agnew, was about to make one of the most controversial speeches in American political history. Here are excerpts from that speech:

Tonight I want to discuss the importance of the television news medium to the American people.... No medium has a more profound influence over public opinion.... It must be recognized that the networks have made important contributions to the national knowledge--for news, documentaries and specials. They have often used their power constructively and creatively to awaken the public conscience to critical problems. The networks made hunger and black lung disease national issues overnight. The TV networks have done what no other medium could have done in terms of dramatizing the horrors of war. The networks have tackled our most difficult social problems with a directness and immediacy that's the gift of their medium. They focus the nation's attention on its environmental abuses--on pollution in the Great Lakes and the threatened ecology of the Everglades."

For those readers unfamiliar with the Agnew speech, it may appear that the quote above hardly illustrates a critical attitude. That evaluation would be absolutely correct. The material, of course, most certainly was a
part of the Des Moines speech. What has happened is that
this author selected out of the speech some statements
which would show that Agnew, in fact, supported the media.
Compare this with the more familiar lines quoted from the
same Des Moines speech:

The audience of seventy million Americans gathered
to hear the President... was inherited by a small
band of network commentators and self-appointed ana-
lysts... It was obvious that their minds were made
up in advance... Now what do Americans know of the
men who wield this power?... We do know that to a
man these commentators and producers live and work in
the geographical and intellectual confines of Washing-
ton, D.C. or New York City... Both communities
bask in their own provincialism, their own parochial-
ism... The views of the majority of this frater-
nity do not—and I repeat, not—represent the views of
America... Perhaps it is time the networks were
made more responsive to the views of the nation and
more responsible to the people they serve... I'm
asking whether a form of censorship already exists when
the news that 40 million Americans receive each night
is determined by a handful of men responsible only to
their corporate employers and is filtered through a
handful of commentators who admit to their own set of
biases.2

Obviously, depending upon one's own frame of refer-
ence it is a simple task to focus on those words which seem
to vindicate a particular view. The point is that frame of
reference is much more pervasive (if not totally so) than
intrinsic speech content in determining meaning for the
hearer. Humans interpret each others words and actions;
they do not necessarily accept some neutral, denotative
meaning. This is exactly what happened to Agnew's speeches
criticizing the media. They were interpreted by the hearer
and meaning was imposed on his words. (And, of course,
Agnew imposed his meaning on the words uttered by the media.)

This brings us to the second paradox. This time, the author presents impressions of the Agnew Des Moines speech by two media representatives. The first statement is from Julian Goodman, then president of NBC:

Vice President Agnew's attack on television news is an appeal to prejudice . . . Any fair-minded viewer knows that the television networks are not devoted to putting across a single point of view but present all significant views on issues of importance. It is regrettable that the Vice President of the United States would deny to television freedom of the press.3

For similar views this paper could (and will later) quote the Washington Post, New York Times or Newsweek magazine. Now for the paradoxical counterpoint to the above statement. The quote below is from a former reporter and writer on national affairs, John R. Coyne, Jr.

Is there a media monopoly, as Agnew charges, controlled "by a tiny and closed fraternity of privileged men" who enjoy a concentration of power they wouldn't allow in government? Of course there is . . . Is there a geographic centralization? Of course there is. And do the monopolists share a single view, which even Schlesinger warns us about? Of course they do.4

Coyne is a conservative which explains why he views the media as he does. Other "conservative" exponents would include the Chicago Tribune, National Review and U.S. News & World Report. All these will be discussed at the appropriate time. Obviously, in trying to understand what Spiro T. Agnew meant from his reference point is made difficult because individuals tend to substitute their meaning for his.
To compound the problem, many newspaper and magazine commentators and biographers were "motive hunters." One example comes from an author who attempted traditional objectivity. The author, Joseph Albright, wrote a political biography entitled, *What Makes Spiro Run: The Life and Times of Spiro Agnew*. Albright's contention was that reporters were spending too much time thinking about Agnew's rhetoric and were not dissecting the man himself.

As I mulled over the campaign [1970 Congressional election campaign], what occurred to me was that we were all thinking too much about what Agnew said and where he went. But we were not thinking too much about who he really was.5

It will be shown that most high-level media representatives, and possibly including reporters, were not really paying too much attention to Agnew's words as words --at least not when he criticized the media. Such media representatives were interpreting his words all along, and doing it from their reference frame. Some reporters, like Robert Marsh in his, *Agnew: The Unexamined Man* were blunt in demanding a Sherlock Holmes-type dissection of Agnew.

The nation accepts Agnew's statements on the press at face value as the thinking of a critic. . . . But that is because attention is on his words and his words are not a clue to the motive for his attack in the first place . . . The interesting aspect of Agnew's relationship with the press does not lie in the simplistic content of his speeches against it. It is not the what but the why that is revealing.6

Marsh, of course, was incorrect in saying that the nation accepted, say, Agnew's Des Moines speech at "face value." Each person in his television audience that night
was reading meaning into the speech from his point of view. It was only by a coincidental stroke of timing that Agnew's view happened to agree with the view of a majority (but by no means most) of Americans. This broader aspect of symbolic leadership will be discussed further in the conclusion. However, it is important to mention symbolic interaction here as it forms the methodological underpinning of the present study.

**Methodology and Purpose**

The purpose of this thesis, first of all, is to study the reaction of the press to government criticism as embodied in Vice President Spiro Agnew's remarks. Secondly, the objective is to analyze Agnew's criticism of the press from his point of view. The paper does not focus on motives, real or imagined, though these will be mentioned and discussed. It attempts to avoid extensive evaluation of either the media or Agnewian position. However, in the conclusion, the author will present his viewpoint on the interrelationships between media and government exposed by the study.

The methodological approach to the study is from a symbolic interactionist point of view. This viewpoint, already alluded to, has been best expounded by sociologists George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer. Blumer says:

The nature of an object [which can be a speech, situation, person] is constituted by the meaning it has for the person or persons for whom it is an object
... this meaning is not intrinsic to the object but arises from how the person is initially prepared to act toward it.7

This meaning creation is a problem to research. It tells us that the objects of research, in this case the media and Agnew, are both interpreting each other's actions. Thus, each party is creating meaning which is non-existent or irrelevant from the other party's point of view. Further, there is also the researcher's interaction. He, too, comes to his material with frames of reference. These, in turn, determine what it is he sees in his material. Roy P. Basler pointed out this problem in the historical research regarding Abraham Lincoln.

It can be shown from ample, if incomplete, evidence that Lincoln had great executive ability or that he had none; that he was a great judge of men or that he was a very poor judge of men; that he was handsome or that he was extremely ugly; that he was awkward or that he was graceful; that he was carefully dressed or that he was sloincily and poorly dressed; that he was very democratic or that he was very aloof; that he told questionable stories or that he did not tell them; that he was religious or that he was indifferent; that he loved his wife exceedingly well or that he could scarcely bear with her; that he was merely a drifter who waited until public opinion could not be denied or that he knew always the proper time to do the proper thing; that he preserved the Union or that the Union was preserved in spite of his countless deficiencies and errors; that he was the greatest general and strategist of the Union or that by meddling he prevented great generals from achieving victory; that he was soft-hearted or that he was iron-hearted; that he was a tyrant or that he was the best and most just ruler that ever lived; that he was the most popular and loved man in the North during his presidency or that he was the most unpopular and hated; that he was predominantly melancholy or that he was predominantly happy; that he was very much bent on freeing the slaves or that he was indifferent to their status; that he was a ludicrous and uninspiring figure or that he was all but majestic;
and so on.

Any and all of these conceptions are amply documented by biography and criticism without including the work of a single writer south of the Mason and Dixon Line... The biography of Lincoln has not yet appeared, and it is unlikely that it will ever appear. 8

The researcher is faced by the same dilemma when studying Agnew. Are the meanings, ostensibly generated by Agnew, really ones manufactured by a reviewer or the secondary author? This paper hopes to circumvent this problem, at least in part, by adopting the suggestion of Herbert Blumer:

On the methodological or research side the study of action [a speech represents an "action"] would have to be made from the position of the actor out of what he perceives, interprets and judges, one would have to see the operating situation as the actor sees it, perceive objects as the actor perceives them, ascertain their meaning in terms of the meaning they have for the actor, and follow the actor's line of conduct as the actor organizes it—in short, one would have to take the role of the actor and see his world from his standpoint. This methodological approach stands in contrast to the so-called objective approach so dominant today, namely, that of viewing the actor and his action from the perspective of an outside, detached observer. The "objective" approach holds the danger of the observer substituting his view of the field of action for the view held by the actor. It is unnecessary to add that the actor acts toward his world on the basis of how he sees it and not on the basis of how that world appears to the outside observer. 9

This thesis, then, will take the following approach. It will study the national media—several newspapers, magazines, books, television personalities and executives—as they reacted to Vice President Agnew. The author will attempt to present their meaning of the interaction and do it from their point of view. On the other hand, the paper will also do a content analysis of the
various media speeches which Agnew gave. The author will attempt to transfer his frame of reference from the media point of view to that of Agnew's. From this vantage point, the thesis will attempt to understand Agnew's view of the press.

The author, of course, realizes that the interaction process is formative in itself. The author's interpretation of what is meaningful for each party changed as the study progressed. So did his own viewpoint toward the two antagonists. It is also questionable whether one human can really take the other person's role and not intrude with his own meaning. However, it is hoped that the attempt will bring us closer to an understanding of the separate realities embodied in the press view of Agnew and the media concepts of Spiro T. Agnew himself. If the attempt has been successful in some fashion, the derived meanings attributed to the press and to Agnew will have resulted from a "discovery process." Those meanings will be based on ideas intrinsic to the research material as an expression of the interaction process rather than extrinsic, author-generated views forced unto the material.

The work is divided into two major parts, after the Introduction. The Introduction discusses the purpose of the thesis, research questions, general weakness of past studies and the material to be analyzed.

The first part of the thesis, in a sense, is a survey of the literature. Due to the nature of this study,
the literature search is an integral unit of the thesis. The following are examined for the media position vis a vis Agnew.

* Books which deal exclusively with the life and actions of Spiro T. Agnew. Their number is ten.

* Books on mass communication which devote some space to the Agnew-press controversy.

* Magazine articles which discuss the Agnew-press debate. This includes, as mentioned, reference to some of the three hundred twenty-five separate items found in the general magazines, class-opinion magazines, quality and news magazine, trade and academic journals.

* Discussion and comparison of articles and editorials from the "liberal" Washington Post, New York Times and the "conservative" Chicago Tribune.

* Discussion of statements by newscasters, television and newspaper executives as they relate to the Agnew criticism of the press.

The second part is a content analysis of relevant Agnew statements in speeches and interviews, dealing with his controversy with the press. The author read approximately 200 speeches and commentaries given by Agnew, almost all of them from mid-1968 to late 1973. It was a saturation approach with the author immersing himself in the material Agnew wrote in a chronological fashion from the earliest speeches in 1963 to his resignation. Out of that reading there emerged several consistent and important
themes that seemed to reflect a well-thought out philosophy of the role of the media in society. Naturally, Agnew viewed reality from a different vantage point than the press.

Interestingly enough, Agnew brought a lawyer's background to his job as many politicians and presidents do. Agnew's viewpoint was a lawyer's viewpoint, often at odds with a media representative's viewpoint. In any case, from this reading a pattern of criticism emerged as well as a philosophical-constitutional point of view. What is meant by "constitutional" must be seen from Agnew's point of view. In the same manner, the media's view of what is constitutional must be seen from its vantage point, a point often at odds with lawyers and judges, who are also interested in the preservation of American freedom. This cleavage in position will be fully analyzed in this thesis. By pointing out this philosophical divergence the author hopes to focus attention on each viewpoint and to impel the reader to ruminate over the implications.
FOOTNOTES FOR INTRODUCTION


2Ibid., pp. 98-100.


PART ONE

THE MEDIA VIEWS AGNEW'S VIEW OF THE MEDIA
CHAPTER I

POLITICAL BIOGRAPHERS VIEW AGNEW

In this chapter, the thesis zeros in on books and scholarly works which dealt either completely or in part with the Agnew-media controversy. By way of contrast, the first three works evaluated will present a strong anti-Agnew approach, an effusive pro-Agnew approach and an attempt to remain objective. However, in pointing out that there is a diversity of opinion regarding what Agnew said, one caution must be stated. As a group, the media representatives voiced a decided anti-government position, not necessarily, however, an anti-Agnew position. The distinction is important. Though many of the critics of Agnew's position were virulent in their denunciation of the Vice President, it was because he represented government. As will be pointed out presidents from Thomas Jefferson, to Abraham Lincoln, to Franklin Roosevelt to John Kennedy have also had their differences with the press.

The "Adversary" Concept

The central reason for this conflict is not so much that the press is "liberal" and the Nixon administration was "conservative." Rather, it stems--on the press' part--from a view which it has of itself. Thus, again we are
faced with the fundamental principle: symbolic viewpoint rather than "objective reality" determines how one reacts to a situation, word or person. The press in America, by and large, sees itself in an adversary role to government. And the more powerful the government, the more vociferous is the press' position. John C. Merrill, professor of Journalism at the University of Missouri, Columbia puts it in the following terms:

The third myth . . . is that the American press is somehow an unofficial, but very real, part of the governance of the country. Related to this are similar concepts of the press being a "watchdog," a "check" on governmental excesses, and an adversary of Government . . . . We live with the belief--fuzzy as it may be--that the press is a kind of fourth branch of government, checking on the other three branches--the Executive, Legislative and Judicial--as each of these supposedly check on one another.\

As is obvious, Merrill does not exactly agree with this role for journalism. Some of his objections to the adversary role of the press will be explored in the conclusion. Suffice it to say here that the "adversary concept" is a sort of prime journalistic symbol through which media representatives tend to view government. The thesis is not evaluating the usefulness of such a concept at this point. However, it is important that the reader understand this orientation in order to put the following material into perspective.

Three Views of Agnew

To begin our journey through the literature related to Agnew's media criticism, the thesis turns to James
Aronson. A newspaperman for more than a generation, Aronson takes a Machiavellian view of Nixon and Agnew. He makes no apology for considering the Nixon government as one wrapped in fraud and duplicity.

The Nixon package, which extends to controlled relationship with newspapers and magazines also, is a combination of duplicity, fraud and polarizing pressures, all disguised in the slick formula which carried Nixon to the Presidency and all as self-seeking—and as dangerous—as the man himself and the interests for which he speaks.²

Then Aronson gets down to the Agnew crisis. It was the "opening gun in the assault on the media." The barrage was directed at television "as the most vulnerable target of news management through intimidation."³ Now, as to Agnew's specific words, Aronson has the following comment to make:

Agnew's charges, of course, contained some truths, but the speeches were largely demagoguery. The reference to "instant analysis" of the President's "words and policies" was a case in point.⁴

Aronson sees the attacks only from a political viewpoint. The first was to "inhibit coverage of the November 15, 1969, antiwar mobilization in Washington and demonstrations for peace in general." There was also a long range purpose. "To achieve by pressure and threat of indirect control what the administration could not do by legislation." The Agnew speeches, were to Aronson, part of a broad White House plot to go one step beyond managing the news. Nixon, said Aronson, "may be recorded as the first to stage-manage the news."⁵
Agnew had complained that not enough conservative opinion was available on the national media. Aronson labeled this assertion as nonsense. "The conservative point of view is the dominant one available in much of the local media west of the Hudson and south of the Potomac rivers." In fact, Aronson informs us, there is really no difference between liberals and conservatives. Of course, Aronson agrees with Agnew that not all viewpoints are represented in the media. But Aronson argues for another political point of view. "That side is the radical point of view."6 By and large, however, Aronson was something less than a supporter of Agnew's positions.

The speeches written for Agnew abounded in alliterative excess and calumny of alleged intellectualism—the kind of polemic that brings howls and whoops from selected audiences who salivate on cue.7

One of those it is suspected Aronson would brand as "salivating on cue" is conservative John Coyne, Jr. Coyne was, for three years an Associate Editor of National Review. Coyne, of course, supported Agnew wholeheartedly. His book, however, is also politically oriented. It is one long defense of the conservative position and a general attack on the liberals, particularly the media. "The national media, in matters philosophical, function as the propaganda arm of the American intellectual establishment."

They spewed out, in Coyne's paraphrase of Howard K. Smith, "popularized bit-sized bits of prevailing liberal dogma." He calls it a kind of "secular absolutism."8 And all the
main commentators, according to him, are liberals.

The liberal position has long been the only position in the Northeast, where the media are headquartered, and many media people simply aren't aware that another exists.9

For Coyne, it matters not whether Agnew was a master politician or simply the man of destiny. "What is important is that he has aired important national questions which have long needed airing."10

Coyne's book, The Impudent Snobs: Agnew vs. the Intellectual Establishment is long on title, but short on pages as most books go. Much of the book also lapses into a liberal-conservative argument, with Coyne taking the conservative position. Unfortunately, much of the commentary on Agnew is from such a position. (There is that symbolic viewpoint, again!) However, Coyne does render two invaluable services. One is a 345 page Appendix which contains most of Spiro T. Agnew's speeches from August 4, 1968 to June 25, 1971. The 94 speeches contained therein are important for another reason besides their easy accessibility. According to the book jacket:

This is the only definitive edition of the speeches ever to appear in print. All previous printings have come from the official press handouts, and many of the Vice President's most trenchant remarks have been extemporaneous. This is the only edition to transcribe the important speeches directly from tape.11

There is a second value to the book. Being a conservative and defender of Agnew, Coyne did make more of an effort to see what Agnew was saying, from the viewpoint of the former Vice President. He does point out, what few
seemed to want to admit that "It is always an idea to which he [Agnew] responds." Continuing with this thought, Coyne says:

A good case could be argued for Agnew as intellectual, as Max Lerner, for instance, has recently done . . . . When he attacks the elitists in the media and in the universities, he does so because he finds their attitudes philosophically invalid, undemocratic. . . . All Agnew's best talks center on ideas, and as Max Lerner points out, Agnew may be the only politician on the American scene today of whom this can be said to be true. . . . What Agnew wants, in short, is a workable democracy. And a workable democracy is not possible when a nation's policy is set by elitists.

Coyne does not pursue his thought far enough, however. He fails to analyze Agnew's speeches to any degree (leaving it, apparently for the reader to do from the appendix) from that point of view. More specifically, Coyne fails to stress the ideas upon which Agnew's criticisms of the press were forged. Rather, Coyne lapses into an evaluation based on the traditional conservative-liberal controversy.

Witcover Analyzes Agnew

Jules Witcover was a national political writer in the Washington Bureau of the Los Angeles Times when he wrote his first book on Agnew, White Knight: The Rise of Spiro Agnew. It was a sort of everything-you-wanted-to-know-about-Spiro approach from a political viewpoint. This is not to deprecate the book. It is as the book jacket claims, "An exhaustive examination of an American politician of great impact in our turbulent times and a commen-
tary on the workings of the American political system in which such a figure can flourish."14

Witcover's is probably the best all-around political biography of Agnew attempted. Though dated slightly, Witcover has brought his work up to date with a second book co-authored with Richard M. Cohen in 1974. Witcover attempts a well-balanced view of Agnew, though it leans both to an opportunistic and doltish vantage point. The last two sentences in Witcover's book tend to summarize, though a bit too starkly, his view of Agnew:

Say something, Spiro T. Agnew certainly has. What he said, and the way he has said it, offer persuasive reasons for giving future Vice-Presidents of the United States something much more and better to do.15

Even more pointed is Witcover's analysis of Agnew in relationship to the Nixon administration:

Agnew became the personification of the Nixon administration, perhaps even more than the President in this sense: in an administration that used words without comprehending their impact, then cried "foul" when called to account for what the words had wrought, Spiro Agnew was the chief practitioner.... Like Agnew, the Nixon Administration systematically set up facades and smokescreens of words to obscure lack of program in some areas and foot dragging in others.16

The basic view of Agnew is somewhat on the opportunistic side with a dash of ineptitude thrown in. As usual, the analysis is based on Agnew's supposed political motivation. A statement on the facing page of Witcover's book summarizes fairly well his conception of the relationship between Agnew and the press. The quote is from an Agnew speech delivered at a Navy League dinner at the
It's time to take my gloves off. No more of this Mr. Nice Guy. Starting tomorrow I will try to switch off my low-key approach and start calling a spade a spade. Maybe then I can attract some attention.17

Basically, when Witcover discusses Agnew vis a vis the press it is from the point of view that Agnew was basically a headline hunter. Though not disagreeing that certainly this was a factor, the author's contention is that it puts the discussion in the wrong place. We are left constantly looking only for some diabolical political motive rather than seeing the conflict through his eyes and then discussing substantive issues raised by him.

This tendency of Witcover, to see only the grossly political Agnew is demonstrated in several places. On the April 11, 1968 speech that gave Agnew the image of a hard-line, law and order man, Witcover says:

In light of subsequent events, many of those who observed Agnew at close range in that twenty-one-day period are convinced that his transformation of image was more than coincidental. Clarence Mitchell later remarked concerning his performance at the April 11 meeting, "I... have a tendency now to believe it was politically inspired. It was calculated to create a conservative image for political purposes. After Rockefeller insulted him, I believe Agnew decided he had to cast his lot with the conservatives."18

In all fairness to Witcover, he does give alternate possibilities, which indicate that Agnew may have had other, less expedient motives. Disappointingly, Witcover makes almost no analysis of how Agnew viewed the press, or how he was viewed by the press during those tense years.
which began with Agnew's public humiliation at being snubbed by Rockefeller, the boycott of predominately black Bowie State College and the benchmark confrontation with one hundred black leaders in the legislative council chamber of the State Office Building in Baltimore.

Equally disappointing is the lack of analysis of Agnew-press relations in the early days of his tenure as Baltimore County Executive. Witcover does, however, quote a speech in full, given by Agnew in mid-November, 1963.

Agnew made statements like the following:

The greatest enemies of effective, intelligent government are opportunists who have learned that a measure of popularity can be cheaply purchased by boldly assuming oversimplified positions on highly complex, volatile issues . . . many turn to the oversimplified demi-truths of the lunatic fringes of any emotional dispute.19

Such statements, as we shall see in the second section, reveal much of Agnew's disillusionment with how the media were used and perhaps generated thoughts on how he, Agnew, might utilize the media. And the reader is urged to remember that Agnew's statement occurred five years prior to his election as Vice President. But Witcover makes no analysis of this seminal speech beyond the statement that the speech "warrants full presentation here for what it reveals about Agnew's thinking in that formative period."20

Witcover is often concerned with the concept of "political image." This would certainly be a valid area of study itself. That is, a research vantage point which would analyze the career of Spiro Agnew as a symbolic lead-
er. One quote should give the thrust of scattered Witcover allusions to Agnew as a public image and symbol of Middle America:

Agnew tried to be a man in the middle at a time when there was less and less middle ground. In the next three years of his county stewardship, however, other men and events were to intrude themselves in a way to make his moderation in a conservative environment seem liberal... It may be constructive, therefore, to examine the Spiro Agnew of the mid-1960's, and those events that helped shape his image—but not really his philosophy—as a liberal.21

Consistently, Witcover is interested in the interplay of attitudes between Agnew and members of the press, rather than in the nature of the ideas being expressed. In chapter twelve, where Witcover details the first months after Agnew's selection as Nixon's running mate, he observes that "The presidential nominee was somewhat surprised at the intensity of the negative press reaction to the man."22 The chapter, entitled "The Road to Ridicule" details the image of Agnew as a hard-liner. Chapter thirteen, titled "The 'Fat Jap' Flap" is self-explanatory. One quote puts us on the course of Witcover's analytical thrust.

The incident, whatever the details, was pivotal both for the press and for Agnew in their perception of each other. The reporters, whether they wrote about it or not, saw in the "fat jap" remark at the very least a political insensitivity, if not a personal insensitivity, on Agnew's part. The newsmen thought they saw a pattern emerging; some who had never considered writing about the "Polack" comment now did. They reached back, not only to that but to "squishy soft," and from then on they were attuned to anything that might appear to reveal Agnew's "insensitivity." Like the celebrated "brainwash" remark of George Romney became a kind of
shorthand expression that said he was a lightweight, "the fat jap" became a code phrase of sorts that said Spiro T. Agnew was a clod.23

On page 298 of Witcover's book, chapter 16 begins. Titled, "The Birth of Agnewism," it is of most interest in relationship to the thesis being developed by this author. The chapter begins with the events of the fall of 1969. It discusses the important media speeches given by Agnew in November. There is absolutely no analysis of the importance of Agnew's viewpoint in determining what he said and why he said what he did. Witcover is preoccupied with the inflammatory nature of his words:

He uttered some of the most inflammatory phrases ever recorded in the lexicon of American politics, but he uttered them under such a veneer of benignity, of personal placidity, that they did not sound or seem all that inflammatory to those who heard or saw him. It was mainly when the words were stripped of that oral and visual veneer and reduced to cold print—in newspaper headlines and stories—that their divisiveness, their hostility and often downright meanness emerged in fullest force.24

Witcover, of course, has slipped and his own "adversary" viewpoint has become evident. There is no concern with content. Rather Witcover worries about divisiveness, about hostility, about meanness. Not that this was necessarily missing from the speeches, of course.

Witcover was also concerned with Agnew the television personality. "In person, or on television, the look of the man has a kind of mesmerizing effect." He notes his smooth but cutting style. "Agnew administers a surgical scalpel, using fancy words never uttered on a streetcorner,
taking care to dispatch his victims without mussing a strand of hair." He even sees a bit of McLuhan in Agnew who "ideally combines the hot and the cool in terms of impact on the television generation." More space has been devoted to Witcover's book for two reasons. It is the most comprehensive of the political biographies. At the same time, it betrays two problems in mass communications research. First, it presents the media-Agnew controversy from the adversary's viewpoint. Secondly, Witcover has projected his personal viewpoint on the material, though less so than, say, an Aronson.

As a result, we never really catch a glimpse of the conflict from Agnew's viewpoint as an elected official. One case in point. On page 342, Witcover mentions the speech in which Agnew stated, "The press as a group regards the First Amendment as its own private preserve. . . . That happens to be my amendment too. It guarantees my free speech as much as it does their freedom of speech." Admittedly, this was a beautiful place to get into something substantive from Agnew's point of view, regardless whether one agreed with it or not. But Witcover misses his chance. He is too concerned with the political and social events then occuring--and what Agnew's impact would be emotionally, rather than intellectually.

Witcover's 1974 book, co-authored with Richard M. Cohen, is much more cynical, of course. It detailed the investigation and resignation of Agnew. Along the way, the
authors had some rather unpleasant things to say about Agnew from a credibility point of view.

Spiro Agnew was a slick snake-oil salesman. Not everyone bought his product, but just about everyone bought him. The accepted wisdom, among political friend and foe alike, was that you might not agree with Agnew, but he was honest. The measure of his fall was in that misconception: in his greed, he squandered finally the one prime source of his political wealth, the belief that he was the exception in politics--an honest man.27

Efron's Acceptance of Agnew's Position

Edith Efron's The News Twisters is a book which happens to agree with Agnew's claim of bias in the news. The thesis of Efron's book is based on the following contention:

Network coverage tends to be strongly biased in favor of the Democratic-liberal-left axis of opinion, and strongly biased against the Republican-conservative-right axis of opinion.28

Efron's book itself has been embroiled in heated controversy. The author has been accused of bias against the media and that her studies are unreliable. Accusations and counter accusations have been made regarding her specific findings that "the Presidential campaign of 1968 and its major issues were handled in a partisan fashion by all three networks."29 However, the intent here is not to evaluate the Efron book or methodology. Rather, interest centers around her view of Agnew's perceived view of the media. In one sense, Efron used Spiro Agnew's contention of bias in the media as a philosophical jumping off point for her specific research.
In 1969, Vice President Spiro Agnew delivered his famous speech charging the networks with biased political coverage of certain issues during the campaign of 1968, and with a continuation of this bias during the following year. . . . It is apparent that the findings of this study generally support Mr. Agnew's charges where they apply to the period of the study and that they support Mr. Agnew's other charges, in principle.

Though the results may be contested on methodological grounds, this is certainly an important area for study. Efron, however, almost completely limits her study to whether there is bias. She does not address herself to the constitutional and philosophical implications of the proper relationship of the media to government and the people.

Two Other Opinions

The Survey of Broadcast Journalism is a yearly endeavor published by the Alfred I. duPont Corporation and Columbia University. Its 1969-70 volume was subtitled, "Year of Challenge, Year of Crisis." And, in that year, according to its editor Marvin Barrett:

The Vice President's address, before a small regional party meeting in Des Moines, Iowa, was the most discussed speech from any source on any subject during the year under consideration. For broadcast journalism it was unquestionably the year's most significant event.

The Survey devoted an entire chapter to the speech, entitled "Agnew and the Tiny Fraternity of Privileged Men." The chapter is primarily concerned with the effects of Agnew's speech on orientation of coverage rather than what he said per se. Generally, the chapter is an objective and noncommittal blow-by-blow description of the speech and sub-

...
sequent events. At times, there is some low key editorializing:

With one clever thrust the Vice President had shifted the credibility gap, the bane of the previous and now the current administration, from the White House to the Manhattan offices of the television networks.32

Overall, however, the material does not concern itself with any higher-order implications of what Agnew said. In that case, it is of interest only as a helpful account of a historical event.

Meanwhile, William L. Rivers was writing his book, The Adversaries: Politics and the Press. Actually, the book had been written and the material was in the process of being set to type when Agnew unleashed his bombshell. The best Rivers could do was to insert an epilogue in his book which discussed the two November 1969 media speeches. In Rivers' view, "In all the furor over these speeches, the most interesting items were the speculations of commentators and reporters as to whether President Nixon had set Agnew on his course."33 One can, of course, understand the apprehension of the media involved in the controversy at the time. (Which sees itself facing a powerful adversary.) However, with the benefit of hindsight, it is questionable whether the threat was all that great.

Rivers, as most commentators and critics, did not address himself to the issue of press-government relationship in a technological age. He did make the usual (and some unusual) observations about the Agnew speeches. These
are worthy of a short summary because they reflected the particular thrust of comments on Agnew's speeches. Short excerpts from Rivers' epilogue will be spliced together to bring out the flavor of his evaluation.

The only reasonable speculation about Nixon's role in Agnew's attacks begins with Nixon's role in the Eisenhower administration. He was the Republican hatchet man. . . . Did Nixon instruct Agnew to attack the news media? The fact that one of Nixon's speechwriters worked on Agnew's speeches suggests the answer . . . it suggests that Nixon may have found a new way to tilt the balance in the adversary relationship . . . A consistent and detailed series of attacks on reporters and commentators (not, and the distinction is important, on the press or the broadcasting industry) is almost unknown.34

Technically, Rivers' statement is incomplete. Agnew did attack the structure of the broadcasting industry when he criticized commentators as "men responsible only to their corporate employers."35 Rivers scores Agnew's attacks as ironic. Rather than being too pointed in their criticism, the networks aren't critical enough, says Rivers. "Because cottage cheese blandness is the epitome of all broadcasting, television journalists are almost never hostile." According to Rivers, government shouldn't criticize the press. "If criticism is to be useful, it should not come from officials whose words may be fearsome."36 Rivers here reveals his philosophical stance: the press as the weak adversary of government may criticize government; but government must not criticize (read, intimidate) the press.

The solution is a "citizenry that understands mass
communication and how it works, and is prepared to criticize it, challenge it, and require that it live up to its best possibilities."37 That, of course, sounds good. But what does it mean? How does a citizen do all that? This, ironically, was exactly what many media critics including Agnew said citizens were powerless to do because of the way the media were controlled. Rivers, it seems, not only failed to discuss the substantive issues raised by Agnew but issued the kind of meaningless political statement (quoted above) that politicians are accused of.

Certainly one could defend Rivers on the basis that he had neither the time nor the space to develop a cogent analysis of Agnew's remarks. At this time, then, we can return to some full length books to see if some other authorities have addressed themselves to the problem.

**Albright's "Objective" Biography**

In *What Makes Spiro Run: The Life and Times of Spiro Agnew*, reporter Joseph Albright attempted a reportorial view of Spiro Agnew. In his 1971, hardcover edition preface, deleted in the paperback version, he said, "My approach to writing a book on Spiro Agnew had been simply to treat it as a job of investigative reporting: read all the clippings, interview everyone who will talk, find the official documents, put it all together."38

Most of Albright's book is a good but pedestrian account of Agnew's early life, his entrance into politics
and his tenure as governor of Maryland. There is an important section in Albright's book where he discusses the events of the spring of 1968. He sees these events as turning points in Agnew's personal philosophy and attitude toward the press. Agnew, according to Albright, became increasingly disappointed at the way black leaders responded to his criticism of such black militants as Rap Brown.

Agnew said later . . . "They were very protective of Rap Brown—they would say things like 'We don't agree with what he did but his motives were good.'" Out of his disappointment came a speech that would shatter and then recreate his image on race relations as though he had hired a plastic surgeon.39

This, according to Albright, helped trigger the April 11, 1968 stinging rebuke of moderate black leaders. There was also another incident that supposedly pushed Agnew into the speech.

The second external development in Agnew's equation was the stinging editorial that the Baltimore Evening Sun had carried after Bowie State. It called him "stiff-necked" for not meeting the student leaders and accused him of "trying to make problems go away by decree." To Agnew it was like a slap in the face.40

Albright's chapter thirteen is the most interesting from the perspective of this thesis. Entitled, "The Proper Usage of a Household Word" it has the most to say about Agnew's relationship with the press, from his vantage point.

The interplay between Spiro Agnew and the media forms one of the most arresting paradoxes of his life. Few politicians in American history have owed so much of their prominence to the media. And yet no national leader has ever devoted as much effort and prestige to castigating the electronic and pencil media.41
Albright discusses Agnew's appearance on British television in which he complained that the liberal media were out to get him and how he had to throw them a "little red meat" in order to be heard. This has been briefly discussed elsewhere in the paper. More important is Albright's assessment of Agnew's relationship with the Baltimore Sun papers. "In the early years of his political career," says Albright, "Agnew nurtured a symbiotic relationship with the venerable Baltimore Sun and its stepsister the Evening Sun." Agnew admitted his dependence on the papers, sometimes disposing of an idea if the editorial writers were opposed to it. He met with the editorial writers, giving them trial balloons of his latest proposals. Even then, however, Albright reports that Agnew had his problems with the press. He especially didn't like one Paul Morgan, owner of some small weeklies. Said Agnew:

It's not a personal vendetta. It's because he [Morgan] consistently goes beyond the bounds of correct reporting. He never carries our side of the story. He never will print our replies to charges he has aired.

In Albright's view, the honeymoon with the press began to fade six months after Agnew entered the governor's mansion. But he comes back to the Bowie State editorial as the pivotal one in Agnew's life. Albright quotes a friend of Agnew's named George White in a piquant statement summarizing the state of affairs after Agnew became irritated over the Evening Sun editorial.

That was the beginning of the end as far as his relations with the Sun papers went . . . I will always
claim it was like a lover's quarrel. Agnew was their boy, and then he disappointed them. Brad Jacobs [editor of the Evening Sun] was in love with Agnew before that. Afterward he was just like a jilted lover.44

This is basically the extent of Albright's analysis, or at least the particular slant of analysis. Most of the rest is standard fare. The view is political and biographical, not philosophical or constitutional. There is little discussion of the issues brought up by Agnew in his speeches, as valid issues if viewed from his vantage point.

Other Views of Agnew

Theo Lippman Jr.'s book, Spiro Agnew's America: The Vice President and the Politics of Suburbia is what the title suggests. Lippman's thesis was that Spiro Agnew was one of the first ideological representatives of a new power base in America: the more than one-third of Americans who live in suburbia. Lippman's is the typical string-of-pearls account of Agnew's political life. Lippman does touch, however, on the important "adversary" concept. If anyone, Lippman focused most clearly on the purpose of this thesis: to see the media-Agnew conflict as a clash of two diverse symbolic viewpoints, one lodged in the media, the other in politics. Of course, in Lippman's account this motif is a minor one. But it is there.

But personal grudges . . . constituted only one of the elements in his attitude toward the press. In 1968, he was also beginning to think differently of the press as a whole. He came to see it as an entity, an estate, with its own philosophy and an interest in government different from that of other estates.45
According to Lippman, there was at the time, "a growing feeling within journalism that it has an adversary responsibility in a free society.\textsuperscript{46} Meanwhile, the Nixon-Agnew view of the press was at the opposite pole. They felt, according to Lippman, that "the press must serve the government in some way." This has "been most eloquently and succinctly rejected by Tom Wicker," Lippman tells the reader. And then he quotes Wicker:

"We are even being told at exalted levels that the American press has something of a Marxist function—that it is our duty to serve the interests of the state—let's make it clear, and I believe we never have fully done so, that the press of America is not an adjunct of politics or an appendage of government, but an estate of its own, with its own responsibilities and its own communities."\textsuperscript{47}

This is about the closest that Lippman delves into the real guts symbolic confrontation between the media and government. If that indeed did reflect the viewpoint of the Nixon Administration, it reveals the underlying philosophical presupposition by which the Administration (including Agnew) would have viewed the press. Wicker, of course, seeing the administration view from his own class viewpoint, no doubt, distorts it. But somewhere in and around what Wicker has stated there was an important Administration-held philosophical viewpoint.

Now, of course, such a viewpoint has been amply trumped by advocates of a free society. What is less well-known is that the press' view of its own role can also be truncated by those who believe in a free society. John
Merrill, calling for complete journalistic autonomy on the one hand, severely criticized the concept of "the adversary role" for its own sake on the other:

Journalists in America think of themselves as individualists yet seem to need a sense of unity with other journalists; they worship specifics yet are the great generalizers; they see themselves as social critics yet accept criticism badly; they talk of objectivity while reflecting the world through a prism; they talk of news without really knowing what it is; they see themselves as adversaries of government without knowing just why they should be.

In the same manner, government officials want the press to support their actions without really asking why they should. It is not the purpose of this thesis (at this point) to say either is right or wrong. Paradoxically, both can be right. But each must be developed on a sound philosophical basis. More about that in the conclusion. Rather, all the author wants to point out at this time is that people hold to differing symbolic viewpoints depending on where they find themselves in society. For each of them, their viewpoint seems valid. And if we are to do justice to any particular controversy, we must attempt to see the arguments each contender brings to the battlefield from each of those viewpoints.

In passing two earlier books on Agnew should be mentioned. One is by Robert Marsh, the other by Jim G. Lucas. Both cover the same events with little new insight to offer on the particular thrust of this thesis. In the interests of brevity, and the avoidance of repetition, only one point will be discussed. That is, the difference in
presentation of the two authors.

Lucas presents a benign Vice President. "There has been a continuing debate whether or not he [Agnew] speaks for President Nixon," says Lucas. He concludes that "there is no evidence of it." His position in regard to Agnew is exemplified by the following quote:

What many deplore as simplistic nonsense, most Americans regard as common sense. And if Agnew speaks that language, it is not the result of a contrived conspiracy, but because he believes as they do.

If Lucas is to be judged as somewhat naive, Marsh is cynical. According to Marsh, Agnew was a press manipulator, pure and simple. His campaign for county executive was devised around a shrewd analysis of the Baltimore press. "Agnew devised a platform," Marsh assures us, "to appeal specifically to newspapers." According to Marsh, Agnew used the press for political advantage. He quotes Scott Moore, Agnew's county solicitor on this point. Moore's evaluation:

The relationship with the media . . . I thought was just unbelievable . . . in the way he managed them. I think it is so ironic, looking back, the way the newspapers have turned against him, particularly the one he had eating out of his hands for years, and I am talking about specifically the Sun papers.

Marsh's evaluation is that Agnew simply never understood the role of the press in a free society. Quoting one reporter, this view is summarized in the following words, "He had, and still does, I think, a feeling that it was the function of the press to support the good guys. And if the good guys are in government, to support the gov-
ernment at whatever level." Marsh is particularly helpful in analyzing the early years of Agnew's political relationship with the press. However, as previously pointed out, it does not help as much with the substance of what Agnew said. The evaluation is dressed up with motives—why Agnew said this or the other.

The same is true for Spiro! by Paul Hoffmann, a political reporter. Hoffmann saw Agnew as not only a creature of the Administration's "get the press" campaign, but as created by the media. Though the concept was not original, it was put interestingly:

It struck me then that Agnew was a creation of the media he delights in denouncing. All most of America sees of its Vice President is a thirty-second snippet on Walter Cronkite or Huntley-Brinkley, a sentence or two about "effete snobs." If all America had to sit through every Agnew speech from start to finish, he'd last about as long as a political phenomenon as George Romney.

Hoffmann grasps the essence of symbolic leadership with his observation that "it's the appearance and not the substance that counts." This makes Agnew the "hottest political property around."

Obviously, any attempt at analyzing each of these full-length books on Agnew can only lead to gross oversimplification or reproduction of so much material that the thesis would become encyclopedic. The author hopes, however, that he has been able to give the reader an idea of the general thrust of the definitive books written on Agnew. They almost always focus their interest on the po-
itical implications of Agnew's attack on the media: Why did he do it? Who was behind the attack? What did the Administration hope to gain in terms of votes? Often the book writer attempted a psychological portrait of Agnew. What event turned him off to the press? Was he just a clever master of propaganda?

Scholarly Evaluations of Agnew

For the moment, then, let us turn our attention to some major thesis and dissertations written about Agnew and the media. Stephen Alan Vance wrote a Master's thesis entitled "What Did Agnew Really Say at Des Moines." According to Vance, his thesis "carefully examines the Des Moines speech and the questions it raises such as press control and freedom of the press."56 Vance takes the Des Moines speech, piece by piece, and attempts to either refute or downplay Agnew's charges. His conclusion is the following: "A careful reading of the Des Moines speech leaves one overall impression: the biggest complaint that the Nixon Administration has with television news is that it does not agree with the Nixon Administration."57

Leona J. Baxter's Master's thesis is entitled, "A Study of the Reactions to Vice President Agnew's November 13, 1969, Criticism of the Television Networks." Where Vance emphasized a sort of prove-him-wrong content analysis of the speech itself, Baxter emphasized the reactive criticisms of commentators. One of the conclusions of the study
was that the Agnew controversy helped exacerbate the already strained relations between government and the public and that the networks overreacted.58

The most recent thesis is Frederick Talbott's, "A Q-Analysis of Newsmen and Public Attitudes toward Agnew: Observations about the News Media." In his own words, Talbott, "Sought attitude clusters responding to seventy-seven statements Agnew issued concerning the news media."59 Talbott extracted the statements from an assortment of Agnew speeches. This thesis, as the one by Baxter, obviously was not structured to discuss in any depth, the issues which Agnew raised. Therefore, they were considered marginal to the thesis at hand. This was particularly true of Talbott's work.

Elbert E. Elliott's work, "The Rhetoric of Spiro T. Agnew: A Study of Political Controversy" is the lone doctoral dissertation which examines Spiro Agnew's speeches. Elliott's purpose was to "discover how (in what manner) and why (the probable causes) Spiro T. Agnew became one of the most controversial political figures in the United States during the years 1969 and 1970."60

Elliott examines the texts of fifty-eight speeches and critically analyzes fourteen of them. The time element is limited. It covers the time period from the nomination of Agnew for Vice President until the end of 1970. Elliott made his evaluation of Agnew's speeches based on the following questions:
What formative factors in Agnew's life influenced his ideas and contributed to his ability as a speaker? What issues did he deal with in his speaking? What social, political, and economic tensions were present in the national setting which influenced both Agnew and the general public? What did he ask men to do? What changes did he hope to effect? How did he seek to get responses to his propositions? What did he ultimately hope to achieve as a result of his total speaking endeavor?61

The dissertation is a rather disjointed and rambling conglomerate which includes the application of rhetorical criticism to Agnew's statements, biographical information on Agnew's life, the history of Agnew's rise to political prominence and a general discussion of Agnew's speeches. The dissertation is, in many respects, a carbon copy of the books published and cited above. Of course, being a dissertation it contains its own unique features. However, basically they do not deal with Agnew's speeches very much beyond the conventional method found in other books. Elliott's position seems to be that of the typical defender of the media.

One of the problems with the media speeches seemed to be that Agnew confused the role of the government and the role of the media. Freedom of the media exists for the protection of the public against the power of the government. Agnew seemed to reverse this order and indicated that the power of the media endangered the public's understanding of the government's policies.62

Ironically, that last statement is exactly the point of this thesis. Both the media and Agnew viewed the world from their own reference point. This reference point determined the what and why of criticism and counter-criticism. And that is why it is essential that the mate-
rial be viewed from each of the opposing standpoints. Elliott apparently was unable to reorient his thinking to see that he had put his finger on a crucial point.

Elliott evaluated Agnew from a conventional media viewpoint. It demonstrates the importance of an author's ability to get out of his own skin, so to speak, and into the mind of his subject. Otherwise, important issues are passed up without proper evaluation. For example, Elliott refers to Richard Rovere's observation that Agnew was raising a constitutional issue with a philosophical base different from the media's. Quoting Rovere:

He [Agnew] pointed out that the ideological base of the Des Moines speech was that the airwaves belong not simply to the commentators and the networks, but "they belong to the people." 63

This touches the crux observation that two polar viewpoints existed, with each contradicting the other and yet converging on a common claim (the media's and Agnew's) that each represented the "people." Elliott comments that "There was some truth in his [Agnew's] idea, because instant communications and the enormous size of some news companies had made it possible for a few men to teach the whole nation with their views." 64 Unfortunately, there are only scattered references to this important aspect of Agnew's argument in Elliott's thesis.

In the Aftermath of the Resignation

The author reluctantly closes this short section reviewing some of the major books and related works dealing
with Spiro Agnew and the press. He leaves this section as reluctantly as he approached it. For there is no justifiable way in which to summarize any of the important works mentioned above in a paragraph, page or even several pages. In closing, then, the author returns more fully to the Richard Cohen-Jules Witcover book, _A Heartbeat Away_. Written in the aftermath of Agnew's resignation, it reflects both the charisma Agnew held during his tenure of office and the odiousness with which he was regarded after his image collapsed. Cohen and Witcover make clear that Agnew possessed a symbolic aura that few politicians have in American history.

Not only was he set apart from the normal run-of-the-mill politicians Maryland had given the world but almost alone among the major figures of the Nixon Administration, he had been left untouched by Watergate. . . . Every trail, every incident of alleged impropriety gave out either from lack of evidence or from the strength of the denunciations that came from Agnew. Ted Agnew may not have been a liberal's idea of a hero, but then he was no whore either. More than most politicians, one had to concede, Agnew had integrity.65

But what in the aftermath of Agnew's resignation? There was his performance in press conferences—attacking and denying any wrongdoing. Witcover and Cohen point out that during the August 8, 1973 press conference, in which Agnew blasted accusers, listeners were, "Almost mesmerized, by the quality and technique of Agnew's press-conference performance."66 In the light of subsequent events, Agnew's dramatic stance appeared as a carefully contrived attack, hoping to intimidate his investigators. Witcover and Cohen
again point to the Agnewian penchant for using image power:

Finally, Agnew had another weapon—his old adversary, the press. He could command from it the headlines and air time needed to wage the kind of fight Ted Agnew had always fought best—brazening it out, making it so uncomfortable for his opposition that it would shrink from its duty. . . . He could rally his constituency, the Middle Americans who believed in him. . . . Whom would the people believe? Spiro T. Agnew, talking to them in their living rooms with the vice-presidential seal in full view, or a collection of corrupt engineers intent on survival.67

Another example of how Agnew's relationship was viewed is conveyed in the following Cohen-Witcover scenario. On August 21, 1973, Agnew had called a press conference to attack news leaks regarding his investigation for kickbacks. As Cohen and Witcover point out, "Agnew—amazingly enough—did not blame the press for the leaks, but the informants in the Department of Justice."68

One almost had to check the transcript to verify that Agnew had indeed spared the press another tirade. Suddenly, Agnew was an understanding and sophisticated critic of journalism—the press was merely doing its job in printing the leaks! This, after all, was the Carry Nation of American journalism. . . . Agnew had been an unrelenting—and uninformed—press critic. His scorn was aimed primarily at the television networks and the Washington Post and the New York Times, all of which had poured more effort, manpower, and financial resources into the gathering and reporting of news than any of those lethargic journalistic house organs of Middle America to which Agnew paid constant court and which indiscriminately parroted his self-serving line. Now all that had changed. Where the press had been wrong in printing the Pentagon Papers, it was now correct in printing the allegations against him. Agnew, who was to humble himself even more in the near future, was finally courting the press. Why? Because, obviously, now he needed it on his side.69

Cohen and Witcover point out, a "desperate man, a cold, pragmatic, unprincipled man who, for all his pride,
was willing to abandon it publicly to stay out of jail

... nothing, it seemed, was beyond possibility for him to say."70
FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER I


3 Ibid., p. 6.

4 Ibid., p. 7.

5 Ibid., pp. 8, 12.

6 Ibid., pp. 17, 18.

7 Ibid., p. 6.


9 Ibid., p. 12.

10 Ibid., p. 18.

11 Ibid., book jacket, inside back cover.

12 Ibid., p. 134.

13 Ibid., pp. 134-36.


15 Ibid., p. 453.

16 Ibid., p. 437.

17 Ibid., facing page.

18 Ibid., p. 28.

19 Spiro T. Agnew, speech in defense of open-

20Ibid.

21Ibid., p. 101.

22Ibid., p. 234.

23Ibid., p. 257.

24Ibid., pp. 298-99.

25Ibid., pp. 299-300.

26Ibid., p. 342.


29Ibid.


32Ibid., p. 32.


34Ibid., pp. 255-56.


36Rivers, Adversaries, p. 259.

37Ibid., p. 261.


39Ibid., p. 183.

40Ibid.
41 Ibid., p. 224.
42 Ibid., p. 225.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid., p. 227.


46 Ibid.
47 Ibid., p. 198.

48 John C. Merrill, The Imperative of Freedom, p. 17.


50 Ibid.


52 Ibid., p. 142.

53 Ibid., p. 145.


55 Ibid.


61 Ibid., p. 7.

62 Ibid., p. 129.

63 Ibid., p. 117.

64 Ibid., p. 129.

65 Cohen and Witcover, A Heartbeat Away, p. 81.

66 Ibid., p. 165.

67 Ibid., p. 169.

68 Ibid., p. 197.

69 Ibid., p. 198.

70 Ibid., p. 243.
CHAPTER II

THE MAGAZINES LOOK AT AGNEW

At least thirty magazines and periodicals carried one or more important articles dealing with Agnew, the media and politics. The range of publications spanned the opinion journals, quality magazines, news magazines, scholarly journals, general magazines and trade journals. Most of these periodicals published only a handful of articles on the subject. On the other hand, news magazines such as Time, Newsweek and U.S. News & World Report constantly reported and commented on Agnew and the media.

This chapter will zero in on the more important periodicals and articles of relevance. The most useful method of presentation, seemed to be a magazine by magazine survey, beginning with the opinion journals such as National Review, New Republic and the Nation.

Overall the coverage in the three major conservative or liberal opinion journals was disappointing. The author looked in vain—or almost in vain—for much beyond the usual criticism of Agnew speeches, extolling of the virtues of Agnew, morbid denunciations, reasonings as to whether and how Agnew was politically motivated, if and how censorship was just on the horizon and whether Agnew was a
saint or demagogue. These were not unimportant issues in themselves. But it was the endless repetition of the same lines of thought and the parallel lack of coming to grips with the main issues involved that produced ennui. There were some exceptions. But they were few and not well developed.

National Review Looks at Agnew

National Review. Opinion journal of the conservatives. Dominated by William F. Buckley. A sometime supporter of Agnew, "Mr. Agnew and Mr. Nixon may have something going between them. . . . I will be listening in night and day." Sometimes Buckley didn't like the Agnew rhetoric, "I wish Spiro Agnew hadn't said it. It was careless, silly, and analytically indefensible." However, Buckley was quick to point out, he still supported the Vice President. This was in November 1969.

My recent criticisms of Mr. Agnew's rhetoric have misled a number of readers, including the Vice President, to believing that I disapprove of the VP, or of the substance of his thought.

In that defense of Agnew, Buckley did get down to some cogent observations. "The Vice President reserves the right to protest the protestors." Naturally, Buckley is soft on any ulterior political motives. "I note Mr. Nixon's warm personal endorsement of Mr. Agnew. It is true that there are obvious organizational reasons to explain the official bear hug."
Four years later, Buckley preached Agnew's political graveside sermon before the New York Conservative Party Dinner. He pointed out something which is not often enough heeded. That is "this tendency to anthropomorphize our ideals." Americans "go to such lengths to identify positions with people that we find it hard to detach those positions from those people." He counseled his listeners, in a backdoor approach, to salvage the ideas Agnew had even as they disavowed Agnew the man. A good point. Reason is that the credibility chasm created by the disparity between Agnew the image and the reality, may cast cynical doubt on the ideas he delivered in his speeches.

The central issue was touched upon by an unsigned editorial in the National Review, "Say it Again, Spiro." It was in the May 25, 1973 issue—when investigation findings were coming to light. The short editorial was commenting on the Harding College speech, one of the latest Agnew "media" speeches, in which he defended the Des Moines speech.

He [Agnew] proceeded to remark on the tendency of newsmen (John Hart of CBS was a principal casualty of his analysis) to identify themselves, rather than elected officials, as "representative[s] of the public." And even more tellingly, the tendency of said newsmen to identify criticism of themselves with an assault on human liberty.

This, of course, is a critical question. Are not elected officials, no matter how viewed as to their motives, the representatives of the people in a democracy? No newsman or executive was elected to that post. It is a
challenging constitutional argument, one as we shall see in
the last section, to which Agnew often alluded. It was in-
timately tied to other social and constitutional questions
of importance raised by him.

Only one other article among the other twenty-odd
articles which dealt with Agnew, the media and politics of-
tered anything new to chew on. Here Buckley defended
Agnew's speech of November 13, 1969. "As a matter of fact," said Buckley, "Mr. Agnew wrote a very good speech. It was,
moreover, a balanced speech. He praised much of what the
networks have done as extravagantly as if he were nominat-
ing them for president." He also defended Edith Efron and
the Historical Research Foundation. Though not naming the
book that was to be forthcoming, The News Twisters. (The
book tried to ascertain if there really was network news
bias.) "It is far and away the most thorough and the most
nearly scientific of any that has ever been attempted,"
eulogized Buckley. Some other authorities disagree with
Mr. Buckley's evaluation of the book and research.

From the New Republic

The New Republic is the opinion journal of liberals.
In the articles examined, it repeated the typical anti-
Agnew stand. "It is his record as Governor that accounts
for the fervent prayers for the continued good health of
Mr. Nixon," mused Gerald W. Johnson. Johnson was a former
Baltimore Sun editorial writer. A regular in the pages of
Persons . . . who read his November 13 assault on the television news analysis, are convinced that Mr. Agnew has a new and better speech-writer. . . . But while the style of the speech was astonishingly improved, the content was entirely familiar. . . . [Agnew's] type of mind is chronically suspicious of anything smacking of scholarship because true scholarship is based on the free play of ideas. . . . For the very reason that he believes his own bunk Agnew is much more dangerous to freedom of speech than the cynical Joe McCarthy was.10

Interestingly enough, some other commentators--such as John Coyne, Jr. felt Agnew was the most intellectual of the politicians. Coyne, of course, was a conservative. So it seems many reporters as well as politicians frame their observations along partisan lines. Much of the New Republic commentary in the twenty-odd articles examined ran along the same lines.

The New Republic deserved one King Kong sized laurel for an article in the December 13, 1969 issue. The author, Bernard Hennessy actually dealt with the philosophical and practical issues raised by Agnew. Hennessy was not a newsman, and therefore, not bound to or by the viewpoint of the media. He was a visiting professor of political science at Stanford University. Still, that the New Republic would publish such an article says something for the breadth of its editors' judgment.

Hennessy began by imploring his reader, "Just because Spiro Agnew has been wrong about everything else doesn't mean he's going to be wrong always." In Hennessy's view, "Agnew did something right--and important--in Des
Moines." The Hennessy article emphasized four key points of the Agnew speech.

He told his Republican Party audience four things, as I read it. First, that Americans get most of their news and commentary on public issues from television. Second, that the decisions about what news and commentary to put out on TV are made by a small number of men who are not in any political sense responsible to the public. Third, that such irresponsible power is dangerous because it's a threat to the open, free, and unrestricted dialogue that democracy depends on. Fourth, that there should be a wide, self and public evaluation by, of and about the power and performance of American TV, and especially about the network triopoly, NBC, CBS, and ABC. I'd say that's a pretty liberal four-point mouthful.

It took a political scientist, not embroiled in the controversy as a media defender to see what Agnew was getting at from his viewpoint. Hennessy pointed out that Fred Friendly and the late Edward R. Murrow had spoken about "this unhealthy concentration of power" in the networks. Nicholas Johnson had been even more pointed and "for two years has been making Agnew's point about the danger of irresponsible power in the hands of network officials." Hennessy then asks why Agnew became an anti-private media power advocate.

The answer is simple. In the last few years network TV, and some of the larger TV independent chains, along with many of the prestige daily newspapers in America, have been liberalized on matters of public policy. That's also why lightheaded liberals are suddenly on the side of the big-media establishment. Agnew they're saying, is trying to gag the networks, denying first amendment freedoms, and threatening nice David Sarnoff with big bad Dean Burch.

Bullshit. To use a term campus radicals are currently fond of. As I read Spiro, his third and fourth points make a lot of sense. A concentration of private power at the heart of a nation's communication system
is bad news even when that power happens to be on my side.14

From Hennessy's evaluation, it is clear that the main antagonism stems not from a liberal vs. conservative standpoint. The question is really one of power, of institutionalization versus individuality. Looking down from his perspective, Agnew saw powerful networks and print establishments in a critical position between public and elected official. Agnew was not alone in this fear, a fear which made strange bedfellows between a conservative Vice President and a liberal Federal Communications Commissioner, Nicholas Johnson.

On the other side of the hill, stood the press. From its observation post, it too saw misused power. To the press that power lodged in the criticizers, the Nixon Administration. Meanwhile, Agnew claimed that the First Amendment was for the protection of the people, not for the broadcasters or the media barons. Nowhere, this argument would run, did the Constitution grant that the media was to become the guardian of the people's right to free speech. Conversely, the media position was the opposite. To its representatives, the media was the tool by which the public was informed; the press was to be the watchdog on government.

The Viewpoint of the Nation

The third member of the opinion journal triad is the Nation, another liberal publication. The author found
approximately fifteen articles which dealt with Agnew, the media and the surrounding political scene. As in the other two journals, many of the articles dealt with the investigation and resignation of Agnew. This is not germane, in most instances, to the main thrust of this thesis. Therefore, those articles have been disregarded. As with most of the books and articles in the New Republic or National Review, articles in the Nation tended to deal with the pedestrian aspects of Agnew's fight with the media.

In the article, "First Round to Agnew," M. L. Stein, chairman of the Department of Journalism at New York University, generally sided with the media, though his article was aimed at an analysis of the effects of Agnew's Des Moines speech. Stein began his article with these words:

Three of the awards handed out by the National Academy of Television and Sciences at the June 7 "Emmy" night ceremonies had little significance for most viewers, but for the broadcast industry they were of special importance. They went to the news presidents of the three major networks "for their leadership against forces which strike at journalism's duty to preserve the free flow of information." The citation was aimed directly at Spiro Agnew.15

It was a fairly objective article, but it discussed the effect rather than the implication of Agnew's comments. A December 1, 1969 editorial was less congenial, roasting Agnew with the following words:

His attempt to equate dissent with violence--in the face of the superb discipline shown in Washington on November 15 . . . is but another example of his almost total (indeed almost totalitarian) contempt for the truth. We have heard such charges before, including the conspiratorial references to "a gaggle of commentators," "a handful of men," and the rest of it. What
Agnew wants, what the President wants, is subservient media.16

The editors warned that "never before have we had the threat to the media stated with such unmistakable directness."17 Overall, however, the magazine had little (comparatively speaking) to say directly on Agnew and the media. But the Nation also had one article which dealt, at least partially, with an important issue raised by the Agnew rhetoric. The author was Stephen R. Barnett, and as was to be suspected, he was not a journalist. Barnett was acting professor of law at the University of California.

Vice President Agnew is a welcome recruit to the under-manned ranks of press critics. . . . The Vice President, in his speech at Montgomery, Ala., made front-page news across the nation by challenging the news judgments, editorial policies and the alleged monopoly power of certain newspapers . . . It would be unfortunate if the dialogue ended there; the subject of newspaper performance and newspaper monopoly is too important to be returned to its dark closet.18

Barnett zeroed in on Agnew's criticism of the trend towards monopolization of the great public information vehicles.19 He scored Agnew for not pointing out monopolization outside the great "Eastern Establishment" area. Though Barnett did point out that monopoly was not restricted to the so-called liberal media, he did endorse Agnew's claim that media monopoly was both a fact and a danger. Though the article discussed the problem of monopoly per se, it failed to see it in the context of the constitutional structure of the American republic, which the author feels is a fundamental but neglected question.
Newsweek is one of the three most influential news magazines in the United States. It is part of the Washington Post conglomerate condemned by Agnew. Incredibly enough, Newsweek rather infrequently discussed the media issues Agnew had raised. In fact, of the fifty plus articles which this author found on Agnew, including at least ten cover or major inside stories, few dealt with the media question. In fact, this author found only two important stories that dealt with Agnew and the media in the five years that Agnew was a prominent political leader.

Most of the Agnew coverage centered around strictly political aspects—with heavy writing focused on his investigation and resignation. This is to be expected. However, in the light of Newsweek being a prime source of printed information for Americans on newsworthy items, the coverage on media issues raised by Agnew was disappointing. This is especially true in view of the large number of speeches that Agnew gave in which he discussed the role of the media and related issues. It seemed as though Newsweek was neglecting the media issues Agnew was consistently hammering at. What Newsweek could not ignore was the two major addresses Agnew gave on November 13, 1969 and November 20, 1969.

In the November 24, 1969 issue, Newsweek featured a four-page article on the Des Moines speech which included a
statement by Lester Bernstein, the magazine's managing editor. The article rehashed Agnew's speech in a fairly even-handed manner, though the position of Newsweek slipped out in the following quote:

There seemed little doubt that the onslaught had been long in planning, carefully orchestrated and patently designed to force U.S. television news programs into a mold more clearly to the liking of the Administration of President Richard M. Nixon.20

No one, of course, denies the possible political motivations of the speech. The magazine also quoted Edwin James, executive editor of Broadcast magazine, which included the statement that "What Agnew was saying fundamentally is that the First Amendment is no damn good."21 The Newsweek editors added the thought that this was in reference to protection for broadcasters. Now that is not what Agnew said. He did ask the question as to whom the First Amendment pertains—the citizen or the broadcaster. There is a vital philosophical and practical difference between the two.

Bernstein characterized the Agnew speech as the "most disturbing performance yet by a man who may go down in a footnote of history as the Great Polarizer."22 However, the Newsweek managing editor did admit that Agnew was, in some ways right:

What disturbed me at first was that, though it was the wrong man saying the wrong things, he was partly right. As a sometime critic of TV news, I wish he would get off my side. Buried in Agnew's simplistic distortions and self-serving rhetoric is a nugget of truth: a relative handful of TV network newsmen wield vast influence as the stewards of the most vivid and
powerful medium in the land. They are elected by no one. . . . These are questions well worth gnawing by men of goodwill— but does Agnew qualify. 23

This approach to Agnew crops up often in media defenses. It is admitted that Agnew may, at least, be partially correct. It is admitted that others have made the same criticism. But when Agnew makes the criticism, it is the "wrong man at the wrong time." Why this is so, should be obvious at this time. Agnew represented the government in general and a powerful executive in particular. Therefore, based on the press' view of its role, and its view of what politicians are, for a government man to criticize the press is dangerous and downright unconstitutional.

In the December 1, 1969 issue of Newsweek, the article "Beat the Press, Round Two" appeared. It dealt with Agnew's second attack, this time on pencil journalism. The article was shorter and less vitriolic. There was no defensive editorial, though Kenneth Crawford wrote a thoughtful, two-column piece entitled "Government vs. Press."

The Newsweek article was basically another news rehash of the speech. It stressed Agnew's strong feelings about the press, citing his comment that "Time and Newsweek belonged at the bottom of birdcages." It scored the Administration for its "deep-seated suspicion of the press and hostility toward it felt over the years by some key figures in the current Administration." 24 (The same thing which, of course, could be said of the Washington press corps.) Also, Newsweek happily pointed out that FCC Chairman Dean
Burch, did not agree with Agnew's assessment of the press.

The weeks' most suggestive development, indeed, may have been the judgment of the Federal Communications Commission, headed by Mr. Nixon's new chairman, Dean Burch, who clearly contradicted the Veep's assertion that the TV network news analyses of Mr. Nixon's Nov. 3 speech were biased. Speaking for a unanimous commission, Burch concluded unequivocally that the networks' performance met the FCC's standard for 'fairness.'

In concluding this brief discussion of Newsweek, we should point out an important point discussed by Stewart Alsop and Theodore H. White after Agnew's resignation.

First, is Alsop's observation:

President Nixon has called for compassion in judging Agnew. It is easier to feel contempt. The man is a petty crook. Perhaps the harshness of this judgment derives from the fact that this writer was fooled by politicians. I have a certain weakness for Spiro Agnew (shared, to judge by what he has written, by James Reston of the New York Times). As a result of several interviews, Agnew seemed to me a likable, interesting, atypical figure.

And there was the Theodore White observation:

Spiro Agnew, as the ablest spokesman of the conservative cause, has now and for some time to come deprived the country of this choice. No one else in our time who again uses the honorable words that Agnew so slickly mastered can speak them without arousing instant suspicion. No one who challenges the institutions he made his enemies—the press, the television networks, the great foundations, the universities—will be able to examine reasonably their power and their manner of using it. Far more than the scoundrels of Watergate, he has warped the structure of our politics.

It is interesting that a number of other media representatives including Richard Salant, president of CBS News and Walter Cronkite have expressed the same predilection for Agnew. There did seem to be something different about Agnew as evidenced by the profound shock his resigna-
tion had. Agnew had transcended the common stereotype of the secretive politician. When Agnew felt something, he came right out and said it. He was good copy, someone even his antagonists in the media could identify with. More than just a symbol for Middle America, there is evidence to support the contention that Agnew was becoming a symbol for the media.

Time, Inc. Views the Agnew Phenomenon

Time magazine had an equally disappointing coverage of Agnew's joust with the media. Only one major article, "Agnew Demands Equal Time," and a sprinkling of a few, smaller articles handled the periphery of the Agnew-media battle.

The main article came in the wake of Agnew's 1969 Des Moines speech. It was a roundup of the points Agnew stressed in his speech. Naturally, the magazine took issue with Agnew's call for a more "objective" journalism.

Agnew's most dangerous point is that newscasters ought to reflect majority opinion, rather than their own best judgment, and that this somehow would make them objective. Almost to a man, broadcasters reject objectivity as a goal and insist that they are fair.28

Time, in particular, made a spirited defense against Agnew's charge that the national media constituted an unelected group of individuals who had monopolized the dissemination of opinion. Their rise, Time insisted "depends on intelligence, talent and merit."29 The magazine stressed that newscasters were there because they drew au-
diences, implying that this was in itself a sort of "election" mandate from the viewing electorate.

Thus, even though Agnew calls them "unelected," TV newscasters and commentators are more elected than any other newsmen in America. Every night the viewer votes with his channel selector.

Time pointed out that many voices echoed concern about the quality of television before Agnew spoke, citing several examples. "Agnew's implication that TV newscasting and commentary do not draw enough critical attention," Time pointed out, "belie the facts on every hand." The point of the criticism was that Agnew really had nothing new to say. Everyone knew the problems existed and many solutions had long ago been proposed.

There are many power centers in a free society--foundations, corporations, the print press--whose top executives are not "elected" and have no political constituency. Many people are legitimately concerned about the responsibility and power such men wield.

And then, addressing itself to the specific problem of broadcast journalism, the magazine stated,

Theoretically, at least, the agency to deal with these shortcomings already exists: the Federal Communications Commission. Its control of the broadcast industry would seem to be an infringement of the First Amendment guarantee of freedom of the press.

Overall, the Time article was a thoughtful and balanced one. Though the text was pointed in the direction of a countermove to Agnew's assertion, it did grapple with an issue, raised by Agnew--that the men who control the media are not "elected."

The third influential news magazine, the conserva-
tive-oriented U.S. News & World Report was generally non-commital regarding Agnew's sparring with the press. For example, it merely reproduced the two speeches Agnew gave on November 13 and 20 in 1969. On the other hand, U.S. News is an excellent source (mouthpiece, in some critics' view) of Agnewiana. Considered friendly to his views, Agnew granted the magazine a number of interviews. Also, U.S. News reproduced parts of or entire speeches which he gave. In that sense, the magazine can be considered a voice for Agnew's view. However, in terms of editorial position, U.S. News would have to be considered generally non-committal, any extensive commentary on Agnew's media views being almost non-existent.

Some Journalism Journals

Of all the Journalism trade journals such as Journalism Quarterly, Journal of Broadcasting, Journal of Communication, Columbia Journalism Review, only one covered the Agnew-media controversy in anything approaching depth. In this case, it was Seminar, a quarterly review for newspapermen by the Copley Newspaper chain. This does not, of course, mean that other journals and reviews such as Editor & Publisher, Quill or the ones mentioned above did not have any articles regarding the controversy. Many of them did. Broadcasting magazine, for example, carried many short news stories on the Agnew-media interaction. The author is talking about depth of coverage and attention to the main
issues raised by Agnew. Here is what the March 1970 issue of Seminar contained.

*Full text of the Des Moines and Montgomery speeches by Agnew
*Julian Goodman statement
*Leonard Goldenson statement
*Sigma Delta Chi resolution
*Katherine Graham statement
*Arthur Ochs Sulzberger statement
*Washington Post editorial
*New York Times editorial
*Frank Stanton article, "A Free Society and Communication"
*Art Buchwald article
*Norman E. Isaacs article, "Arrogance Has Many Faces"
*Article by Managing Editor of Arizona Republic, "The Editor Has the Right to Decide"
*Article, "Making of a Television News Show"

The June 1970 issue followed up with an equally in-depth look at the issues Agnew raised with the following articles:

*Edith Efron interview with Howard K. Smith
*Neil Hickey interview with Eric Sevaried
*Julian Goodman article, "Government Hazards to a Free Press"
*Arthur Motley's article, "The Free Flow of News"
*Article entitled, "Who's the Fairest One of All?"
*Edwin Roberts' article, "Those Thin-Skinned Journalists"
*John C. Merrill's article, "Reporting: Responsibility and Right"

There were also a number of other articles that dealt with the difficulty. Obviously, it would be impossible to discuss each of the articles even in a cursory way. Statements of broadcasters and newspaper editorials will be discussed at the proper time in this thesis. This chapter will briefly refer to several of the articles and concentrate on two which reflect the more important thesis being
discussed by this paper.

Seminar's editor, Lyle L. Erb defended Agnew on the basis that he was not the only one to raise objections to the media's handling of news.

One need turn only to the report of the year-long study of radio-television journalism sponsored by the Alfred I. duPont Awards Foundation and Columbia University. . . . One of the jurors, Sir William Haley, former editor of the Times of London and director of the British Broadcasting Corp., said the networks pay lip service to the ideal of news as the life-blood of democracy. "... there are serious differences between their principles and their practices," he observed.34

Of course, the same line of reasoning has been used to put down Agnew in the following manner. Since we, the television industry, engage in our own self-criticism, we do not need government officials intimidating us with what we already know. So it depends on one's viewpoint. The reason for quoting the above is that it addresses itself to this central argument as to whose view represents the proper constitutional function of the media. Does the institutionalized press of America really have the constitutional mandate of being the independent protectors of First Amendment freedom?

Among many others, Sigma Delta Chi gave a resounding "yes" to this question while it roundly blasted Agnew in no uncertain terms:

Therefore, be it resolved that Sigma Delta Chi, the nation's largest journalistic society, at its 60th anniversary convention rejects and condemns any efforts by the Vice President or other government officials to control or impede coverage and the flow of legitimate comment on and analysis of the news.35
Sigma Delta Chi flatly stated that Vice President Agnew's comments "can be construed as a threat to the American freedom to collect and comment on the news." Notice carefully the reference to Agnew or "other government officials." The symbolic stance of the media allows for little government criticism.

Norman E. Isaacs, Vice President and Executive Editor of the Courier-Journal and the Louisville Times unloaded on Agnew with equal vehemence. The newspapers and broadcasters, were, in the words of Isaacs:

The co-targets of what can only be described as an open campaign by the national administration to discredit them—and, more importantly, to seek to bring them under some form of covert control. . . . This new attack, however, is deeply disturbing. It is an attack not merely on our mistakes of judgment—and which many of us admit—but on the basic principle of free speech.37

Isaacs, in particular, was worried that Agnew's reference to a monopoly sanctioned by license, referring to the FCC, could be used to squelch the press' freedom.

When the Vice President of the United States and the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission deem it proper to co-relate their complaints about what they term "balance in the news" with FCC licensing, I cannot help but wonder what the substantive difference is between their position and that in practice in the Soviet Union.38

Interestingly, enough, Isaacs twice assured his listeners that "the men in communication are not in panic over the problem of criticism or self-examination." Later, Isaacs said, that

My third priority has to do with opening ourselves to examination of what it is we do. . . . In this con-
nection, all of us must be more alert to the need for swift and honorable correction of misstatements—and minus the defensiveness which is so much a curse of all the news media.39

The juxtaposition of the two views regarding fear of intimidation and a call for less paranoic defensiveness are amusing. No doubt, Isaacs and Edwin A. Roberts, Jr., senior editor of the National Observer would have gotten into an interesting dialogue. Roberts stated that,

If politicians were as sensitive to criticism as journalists often appear to be, one may fairly wonder if America's exercise in democracy would have survived this long. Members of the press will accept with good grace any comment from outside the profession as long as it is favorable. Unfavorable comments are generally received with indignation and sometimes with panic. . . . How ironic. The nation's journalists are the ladies and gentlemen who lead, provoke, encourage, and enjoy the choruses of criticism aimed at everybody in our society from the President to little theater groups . . . and if the target of criticism doesn't approve and says so, the target can look forward to a sound chiding for not realizing that the press is only doing its job.40

Many newsmen seem particularly disturbed that Agnew and other individuals are beginning to question the old cliches about a free and independent press. For example, J. Edward Murray, managing editor of the Arizona Republic addressed himself to "the problems facing today's editors as some segments of society try to rewrite the constitution."41

Interesting is Murray's contention that the new concepts of the role of the press involve "rewriting" the constitution. This is a partisan view of one who believes America had it right all along and now someone is putting
sand in the gasoline tank. Murray says that there is a "new, major threat to freedom of the press." According to him, "it involves a new concept of access and a new interpretation of the First Amendment."42

Murray scores respected legal scholar Jerome Barron's proposition that the Fairness Doctrine be extended to newspapers. Murray puts it in these terms:

Professor Barron contends that the First Amendment should be reinterpreted and used to force the media to give space and time to unpopular ideas, to unorthodox and minority points of view. . . . To me, this is simply pre-First Amendment thinking because it puts the government back in the saddle. It would make someone besides the trained editor the judge of the news.43

Murray bewails the fact that the Barron thesis is gaining acceptance. He refers to the Red Lion case, discussed elsewhere in this thesis as one of the Supreme Court decisions and legal/constitutional principles to which Agnew appealed in his media speeches. Murray's complaint is "Why do so many people, from Mr. Agnew and the Silent majority on the Right to Professor Barron and the liberal intelligensia on the Left, want to tell the editor what is news, and make him print it or broadcast it?"44

The reason many people from Agnew to Barron feel that press laissez faire needs to be discarded is not because of the editor per se. The weakness, they believe, is inherent in the configuration of the system. Barron's thesis is quoted by Murray from the Harvard Law Review.

Our constitutional theory is in the grip of a romantic conception of free expression, a belief that the marketplace of ideas is freely accessible. But if
there were a self-operating marketplace of ideas, it
has long ceased to exist. The mass media's development
of an antipathy to ideas requires legal intervention if
novel and unpopular ideas are to be assured a forum.45

At this point, it would be instructive to discuss
a bit more in detail, the thesis of Jerome Barron. It is
very germane to the discussion under way, and touches some
vital points raised by Agnew in his speeches.

Spiro Agnew has complained that network news people
are not elected. It is a radical idea, but an arguable
one. There ought to be some rational basis in a demo­
cratic order for influence when it is wielded by those
who are neither elected nor accountable. The public
sense of nonparticipation has bred a crisis of confi­
dence in the media. Increasingly, discussion in Ameri­
ca is considered free but unequal.46

Barron points out that, "However suspect Agnew's
motives for quarreling with the media may be, his basic
point deserves a good deal more thoughtful analysis and in­
telligent response than it has received."47 Agnew, of
course, claimed that a vast segment of opinion--in this
case Middle American--was not properly represented. Agnew
also claimed that an elected government was not getting
proper representation. As Barron points out, "The reality
which Agnew describes and the radical reaction to his re­
marks is also chilling."48

Agnew, as Barron points out, is not a very good ex­
ample of having been denied access to the media. After be­
coming a common citizen and with clear evidence of personal
hanky panky, the national media still cleared time for him
to give a farewell speech. But this is the point, as Bar­
ron states it, "Access only for the government in power and
the media in power is not access."\(^49\) For example, as Bar-
ron points out, Senatorial spokesmen for the Dove position
--after the Cambodian intervention--were denied equal time
on the networks to present a counter-argument to President
Nixon. But, paradoxically, these Senators were also elected officials representing what is supposed to be an equal
branch of government.

Not all media people, however, reacted paranoical-
ly. Some did try to look at Agnew's criticism from his
viewpoint, rather than from an attack-press posture or sup-
port-conservative stance. Arthur H. "Red" Motley, presi-
dent of Parade Publications was one:

I believe that Mr. Agnew's charges were not only
timely, and proper, but they are going to prove very
fruitful. I know that in our own case, and in the case
of the 93 newspapers that distribute Parade, there has
been some serious stocktaking going on, not only among
the so-called Liberal establishment newspapers, but
among the newspapers which are Conservative.\(^50\)

Motley brought up the two political poles which
seem to get themselves interspersed in the issues raised by
Agnew. Agnew, of course, criticized the "liberal" press,
and was silent on the conservatives. Many so-called liber-
als jumped on this as a sign that Agnew's remarks were
self-serving and thus of no importance. This may certainly
have been true in Agnew's position, though it was not nec-
essarily true in the issues involved. This is especially
so if we allow that government may have a valid and not
only a self-serving position. Or at least that its posi-
tion is no more self-serving than that of the media's.
Further, the reader should understand that Agnew's position, as critic, was the classical liberal one. John C. Merrill, of the University of Missouri, Columbia has pointed out clearly:

Quite strangely--almost paradoxically--Vice President Agnew in his comments on, and criticisms of, the mass media did not take the conservative position. In fact, he did not deviate one inch from the same basic flow of liberal criticism. . . . It has been the conservatives in the past who have reacted in a hostile way toward speeches such as Mr. Agnew gave. Now the conservatives are strangely quiet and uncritical, and the liberals are strangely vocal and critical. . . . All of which leads me to believe more strongly even thoughtful, intelligent, knowledgeable people react more to the person making a speech than to the words of the speech. Perhaps Marshall McLuhan is right when he says the "medium is the message." For it would appear Mr. Agnew is the message and not what he is saying.51

This, of course, parallels Bill Buckley's admonition to quit being so anthropomorphic in our beliefs, to separate issue from a man. As Merrill pointed out, Agnew had said pretty much what a lot of other liberals had said about the problems of the media. Meanwhile, Agnew intimated that some kind of control needs to be brought in on the media, either self-control or electorate control--though not government control per se. This in a sense is the liberal position. Conservatives, at least in theory, do not want to tamper with institutions.

Though, unfortunately, there is not room to discuss Merrill's thoughtful article in greater detail, his point should be borne in mind when evaluating Agnew's assertions regarding the media. Merrill, of course emphasized that he (Merrill) adhered "fundamentally to the conservative posi-
tion: media self-determination." He was against any "government interference with editorial decisions," and in regard to Agnew's position, he stated, "I do not believe this is what Mr. Agnew was suggesting." That is, Merrill felt Agnew, the conservative, was also counseling media self-determination.

From Saturday Review and the New Yorker

Robert Lewis Shayon, in *Saturday Review* did not have such a charitable view of Agnew. According to him, Agnew misapplied the meaning of the *Red Lion* decision.

They [Agnew's speech writers] also noted the Supreme Court's *Red Lion* decision, delivered six months ago, in which the right of the public in broadcasting is placed higher than that of the broadcasters. But they neglected to add exactly what the Court said the public has a right to hear and see—namely, the very thing that the Vice President decried: "the presentation of vigorous debate of controversial issues of importance and concern to the public . . ."53

From Agnew's viewpoint, he did not decry debate of important issues. He decried what he claimed was one-sided presentation of the issues. John Hohenberg, well-known journalist, blasted Agnew while admitting that a basic problem of communication does exist in our technological society. Of Agnew's attack, Hohenberg expressed nothing but fear and suspicion:

In his unprincipled political attack on the news media for criticism of President Nixon, Vice President Agnew tried to rally public opinion against the press because it was too independent to suit him. . . . His was a pernicious attempt at intimidation, that being so rare in the United States, was quickly recognized by the press as a dangerous course for government and news
media alike. True, the Spironic attack drew cheers from the unthinking who rejoiced because someone in government had struck out against a stiff-necked press.54

On the other hand, Hohenberg admitted that "The press . . . eventually will have to deal with the basic issue that Agnew and others in government have raised." Hohenberg's contention was that the newspaper "remains the only available medium that can provide news in sufficient volume and detail to make it understandable to the public every day." And, since the newspaper feels it has the position of being "the principal common medium for discourse between the American government and the American people" then it shouldn't be shocked at criticism.55

But, stressed Hohenberg, the "independent newspaper is the only available force" that can restore public confidence both in government and the media. To force newspapers by any method to perform their "proper duty" would be "just as much a violation of the rights of the free press as the scattered attempts that have been made, here and there, to license reporters or revive taxes on news and other levies on knowledge."56 A liberal with a conservative viewpoint--no government interference!

Richard L. Tobin, communications editor for Saturday Review agreed with this hands-off thesis. He quoted Herbert Brucker, a former president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors.

"This is just Big Brother wired for sound, and Big Brother has been around a long time. Kings and prime
ministers and priests and potentates of all kinds have from the beginning sought to have only their word reach the public." Where history departs from the Vice President, Mr. Brucker says, and indeed from the President himself, is on the need of a system for reporting that is independent of government, and upon occasion hostile to it. That the Administration has not read its American history, or its Constitution, any more than have the authoritarians in Rome or in Athens, is to belabor the point. 57

But Tobin did admit that Agnew had a point about information monopoly. "Let's face it, much of what he says about network commentators and stuffy monopoly newspapers is on target." Tobin admitted that Eastern Seaboard journalism was provincial, and not representative of America in general. "This is, in translation, what the Vice President tried clumsily to say when you cut through the Big Brother threats and overtones of his two controversial speeches." 58

In that sense, Tobin would agree with Agnew's specific criticism but reject the broad, more important issue of the role of the mass media in a free society. To Tobin, this questioning of an independent press was merely Big Brother talk, to be shouted down with vehemence.

Of course, Agnew did not help the situation by only attacking the so-called liberal media which disagreed with the Administration policy. Agnew should have attacked the Chicago Tribune and the New York Daily News for their own narrowness in presenting the issues. Later, this thesis will contrast the presentation offered by the Tribune and the Washington Post. The difference will often be striking. Unfortunately, the reader of the Tribune rarely sees
the Post viewpoint and vice versa.

The editors of the New Yorker argued for a sort of First Amendment absolutism, "The press is simply free, and its freedom, like any other freedom, has to be absolute in order to be freedom." 59

In Conclusion

Most of the important points raised in various kinds of periodicals have been briefly discussed. Although the author has read hundreds of articles in magazines and journals, most deal primarily with other Agnew-inspired issues: his investigation and resignation, the 1970 political "hatchet-man" circuit ride, his apparent ineptitude both political and verbal ("that fat jap," "squishy soft," "polack," "seen one slum, you've seen them all").

When articles dealt with Agnew and the media they centered around the real or imagined political motivations of Agnew, a recounting of the history of Agnew's bout with the press and other purely political aspects of his denunciations of the media. In editorial type articles, the stress was often on a defense of the criticisms of Agnew's points and a call to combat "intimidation" from the White House. Many of these articles will be cited in the bibliography so that the interested reader can find them. Though, 95 per cent of the material is off the main point of the thesis, nonetheless it has provided the necessary background. In like manner, 98 to 99 per cent of each book
that deals with Agnew's political career does not touch on the main stress of this thesis. Still, the material is helpful as a contextual backdrop and for seeing the varying, often contradictory views of Agnew held by various commentators and critics.
FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER II


3Ibid., p. 1183.

4Ibid.


8Ibid.


12Ibid.


14Ibid.


17Ibid.

18Stephen R. Barnett, "Press Monopoly: Mr. Agnew's

19 Ibid.


21 Ibid., p. 90.


23 Ibid.


25 Ibid.


29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid., p. 22.


36 Ibid.


38 Ibid., p. 19.

39 Ibid., pp. 21, 22.

40 Edwin A. Roberts, Jr., "Those Thin-Skinned Jour-


42 Ibid., p. 24.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.


47 Ibid., p. 88.

48 Ibid., p. 89.

49 Ibid., p. 93.


52 Ibid., p. 20.


55 Ibid.

56 Ibid., p. 110.


58 Ibid., p. 60.

CHAPTER III

THREE NEWSPAPERS AND AGNEW

Three newspapers will be analyzed as to their view of Agnew's attacks on the media. The two so-called Eastern "liberal" newspaper giants, the Washington Post and the New York Times will represent one end of the spectrum. For the purpose of ideological juxtaposition, the view of the conservative Chicago Tribune will also be discussed.

Two problems exist in evaluating newspaper content and views. One is the tremendous quantity of material that stretches over a long time period. The other difficulty is inherent in the newspaper's configuration. What is written is done so for a deadline. This means reporters and editors must get news and opinion into print quickly and without any long-term reflection. Thus, newspaper coverage will tend to lack the in-depth analysis and coverage which may be available in other print media. For a newspaper, an issue or news item manifests itself with suddenness, is then covered and becomes dead. There is nothing staler, goes an old saying, than yesterday's news.

As a result, one does not often see newspapers that grappled with the intricate issues raised by Agnew's media speeches. Newspapers tended to address themselves to the
factual, blow-by-blow account of the event created by Agnew or presented a visceral and hasty editorial reaction. The same problem is inherent in television. TV news departments could attempt to sidestep this lack by running documentaries, specials or present various talk show configurations such as Meet the Press or Face the Nation. Overall, however, there was an unfortunate dearth of the kind of in-depth and broadbased attention to issues such as the ones raised by Agnew. Certainly, media executives and commentators addressed themselves to Agnew's speeches in journals and other specialized outlets. But when it is realized that most Americans rely on television and newspapers for their information, the lack becomes quite apparent.

In the interests of brevity, the analysis of newspaper coverage will focus mainly on one time period (when Agnew presented his two November, 1969 media speeches) with scattered, but important, allusions to other times and situations.

The Chicago Tribune View

It is instructive to view the Chicago Tribune position on the October, 1968 New York Times attack regarding Agnew's fitness to hold office. The Tribune, which endorsed the Nixon Administration answered the attack on Agnew by pointing out alleged improper dealings involving Hubert Humphrey, the Democratic candidate for President. Of course, the Tribune took the "nice-guy" role in the
matter under discussion. But the Tribune made its point by the following editorial statement:

We don't intend to sew a vest onto this button, but will mention that three times in five days the New York Times has raised its editorial squirt gun on some piddling financial deals of Gov. Agnew, Richard Nixon's running mate, to show, to the satisfaction of the Times, which is easily pleased with itself, that Mr. Agnew is not fit to be Vice President.1

More specifically, Tribune Washington correspondent, Walter Trohan, defended Agnew's rhetoric. In particular, Trohan was referring to the "spirit of national masochism" speech, delivered shortly before the Des Moines attack on the media.

And what is Agnew's crime? It is political hyperbole, which afflicts all politicians but in his case is being represented as some dreadful foot-in-mouth disease that is placing the nation in deadly peril.2

The Chicago Tribune's defense of Agnew's "media speeches" in November, 1969 was direct and decidedly favorable. One editorial, for example, revealed the effusive support of the former Vice President's position. There was no analysis of the underlying issue; simply total agreement with Agnew's objections.

Vice President Agnew's temperate and reasoned appraisal of some lopsided emphasis by network news reporters and commentators challenged the electronic media to engage in self-examination. . . . Mr. Agnew quoted effectively from members of this fraternity, and he developed his case with references from the writings of observers not ordinarily sympathetic to his viewpoint.3

Much of the editorial was a rehash of the speech, with a point-by-point description of Agnew's attack. Near the end of the editorial, the Tribune gave the media a lau-
rel for carrying the speech and a dart for their reaction to its content. Finally, the paper went on record as being opposed to any kind of government control of media.

It is to the credit of the networks that they gave the Vice President full exposure while he delivered his critique, and that stations reporting audience response conceded that Mr. Agnew won approval by margins as high as 2 or 3 to 1. . . . Less reassuring was the conditioned reflex of executives of the three national networks, who formed a defensive phalanx to accuse Mr. Agnew of trying to "intimidate" them. . . . This newspaper is as adamant as is Mr. Agnew in opposition to any form of censorship, but we believe Mr. Agnew's point is well taken when he says that a monopoly electronic medium has the responsibility to ask itself whether it is properly exercising a concentration of power which the people would not tolerate even in their government. 4

Trohan came back with another supportive editorial two days later. "The Vice President dared to say something many Americans have been concerned about." According to Trohan, Agnew made it clear "he is not proposing TV censorship. . . . He asked the people to make their views known in order to help the industry police itself." 5

When Agnew blasted pencil journalism the next week, the Chicago Tribune was supportive but less effusive. The second Agnew speech, while not naming the Tribune, nonetheless struck a little closer home. The paper felt it necessary to state clearly its antagonism to any form of censorship. The Tribune seemed to be shifting slightly from a favorable, politically partisan stance to a cautionary, class position.

His criticism of broadcasting contained much that was true and pertinent. The same can be said of his critique on his newspaper targets. He said some things
that needed to be said. The Tribune was not included in his indictment, so, from the vantage of the sidelines, we can offer this comment: Newspapers from their earliest beginnings have been subject to criticism. For our part we see no harm in this and probably has resulted in improved performance. . . . As long as it is just talk, we say to Mr. Agnew and to all other newspaper critics, including some of our own readers: Go, Tiger! If the criticism turns toward controls or legislation, we'll be in there fighting for freedom with all the artillery we can muster.6

One wonders what the position of the Tribune might have been if Agnew's attack had centered around the "Chicago conservative newspaper monopoly." The editorial, however, pointed out one important aspect of the relationship of information control to government. TV newscasters and newspaper editorialists have great power, the editorial in the Tribune asserted:

If they choose to exercise that power in dissent or in the promotion of candidates for public office, they should nourish dissent from their positions. It used to be that members of the media gloried in the designation of Fourth Estate, a group above the three estates, the lords temporal, the lords spiritual and the commons. Now too many commentators and too many newsmen have joined forces with the rulers and would-be rulers to exert power behind the throne.7

The thrust of the criticism was obvious: the press was not being critical of government per se, but had banded together with politicians against the conservative position. Regarding Agnew specifically, the Tribune asserted that a Vice President had the right to criticize the media, including newspapers.

When Vice President Agnew accused the television networks and certain newspapers of a left-wing bias in their broadcasts and reportage, the target of his broadside squealed like a pig stuck in a gate. Now Mr. Agnew has received support from one of the most improb-
able and most authoritative sources. Howard K. Smith, Washington-based anchor man for the American Broadcasting Company's news department, asserts in an interview with TV Guide that most reporters, for television and other news media, have a "strong leftward bias."8

Apparently, the Tribune was more concerned with a liberal-conservative conflict than with the questions and issues regarding the media voiced by Agnew. Still, the paper did continue its support of Agnew's criticism. In 1971, when Agnew criticized the CBS documentary, "The Selling of the Pentagon," the Chicago Tribune, in its reprint of a Boston Herald Traveler editorial, stated, "The media are no more immune from criticism than Mr. Agnew, and it is surely no surprise that a man who has been on the receiving end so often has learned to dish it out."9

Less than two years later, Agnew was in trouble himself, for kickbacks. The scandal led to his resignation. Chicago Tribune editors felt a deep sense of shock and outrage at the turn of events. One editorial used these scathing words:

Spiro Agnew concluded his letter of resignation to President Nixon by saying, "May I express to the American people, thru you, my deep gratitude for their confidence in twice electing me to be Vice President." Mr. Agnew is not and was not worthy of that confidence. He betrayed the American people. He betrayed his high office, his President, and his party. He betrayed everyone who believed in him and the noble principles he professed to stand for. . . . Mr. Agnew lied time and again, at almost every opportunity. He deserves the worst that will happen to him. The law saw fit to deal with him mercifully. The judgment of the American people will not be that generous.10

That was a deceived lover writing. The next day, the Tribune carried an editorial entitled, "After Agnew: A
Hurt Loss of Faith." Anderson, a Tribune columnist, admitted he had been taken in by Agnew. "My notion had been that Agnew was financially straight and certainly provocative when it came to talking about political conservatism and criticism of journalists."11

Though some of the Tribune writers felt a kind of left-handed sympathy for Agnew (a "he'll-suffer-for-life" type of commiseration), the general approach was to come down quite heavily on Agnew. The Vice President, they felt and expressed, had betrayed them. Tribune Washington correspondent Harry Kelly scored Agnew for trying to manage the press by the use of candor as an image-building device.

What had happened to honest, square-shooting Spiro Agnew, who in complete candor had told a news conference that the accusations against him were "damned lies," who a couple of weeks later was insisting on his innocence and portraying himself as the victim of Justice Department smears and head hunting, telling cheering Republican women he would not resign even if indicted? It was the same erect, sleek, well-barbered politician who stood in front of the judge in Baltimore and admitted his guilt to taking kickbacks and evading taxes. Spiro Agnew really wasn't different than the others after all.12

The Washington Post View

If the Chicago Tribune reacted like a jilted lover, which had assiduously courted Agnew, the Washington Post was an unwilling suitor, refusing to cast any come-hither glances toward the Vice President. The Post was generally critical of Agnew almost from the start. In the first weeks of the 1968 Presidential campaign, the Post printed its infamous "Caligula's Horse" editorial, guaranteed to
lose political friends and make some White House enemies. The oft-repeated editorial bears the telling here for it is an example of how dirty the adversary system could become. The tone of the criticism partially explains why Agnew was somewhat less than fond of the Post. The editorial began by quoting Nixon:

"I know Ted Agnew well. We have had long and tough discussions. We have examined each other's ideas, debated issues and tested each other. . . . Having watched his performance as Governor of Maryland for two years, I was deeply impressed by his tremendous brain power, great courage and unprejudiced legal mind. He has vigor, imagination and above all he acts. . . ."

Well, there is no doubt that Ted Agnew . . . acts. The Governor's performance over the past month leaves little doubt about anything else, except perhaps his capacity for imagination. Given enough time, Nixon's decision ("I seriously considered more than a dozen able men") to name Agnew as his running mate may come to be regarded as perhaps the most eccentric political appointment since the Roman emperor Caligula named his horse a consul.13

The Post continued this kind of blast throughout the campaign. In a November, 1968 editorial the paper stated that "Agnew's campaign has been distinguished by smear and innuendo, by misstatements of fact and grotesque failures of judgment." The Post editorial stated flatly that Agnew simply was not qualified to be Nixon's running mate. "There has been nothing in the Agnew campaign," the editorial claimed, "to reassure a reasonable voter that the Governor, either by knowledge, experience or temperament, is qualified to be President." Its verdict was, "The evidence indicates the reverse."14

Surprisingly, the day before the stinging editorial
quoted above, the Post actually took up for Agnew. Approximately a week had elapsed since the New York Times had claimed Agnew was involved in some Maryland hanky-panky. Nixon had accused the Times of the "lowest kind of gutter politics." In a show of support, if that term can be used, the Post said:

It is unfortunate that these charges against Governor Agnew have been raised so late in the campaign. The facts concerning them have been known for many months. . . . They may only serve to divert attention from other aspects of Governor Agnew's public record which have a far greater bearing on his fitness to be Vice President.15

Not exactly a ringing affirmation of support. In fact, more of a squabble between soul brothers and a fear on the Post's part that Agnew could use the hazy charges to benefit his campaign. Which, of course, is exactly what happened. Overall, then, the Post tended to be antagonistic to Agnew. Though the original antagonism was basically unrelated to Agnew's criticism of the media, this background will give the reader an idea of the kind of environment in which Agnew and the Post moved against each other.

It was no surprise, then, given the natural adversary relationship between the media and government in general -- and the special knock-down-drag-out, Agnew-Post battle -- that when Agnew condemned the media on November 13, 1969, the Post should have little to say in his favor. The Post accused Agnew of not being accurate or even-handed in his criticism. "Never use a scalpel when a meat ax can do the job," the Post said of Agnew.16
The Post took the opportunity to snipe at both television news and Agnew in the same breath. After scoring Agnew on facts relating to W. Averell Harriman, the Post said, "Much of the rest of what Mr. Agnew had to say was either trivial or churlish or both." Regarding the more critical matter of the power which television news has or is supposed to have in terms of its potential opinion-moulding, the Post observed that, "Mr. Agnew isn't prepared to go into it intelligently." Meanwhile, the Post hurled some brickbats at television.

There is a decent and respectable case to be made that a "tiny and closed fraternity of privileged men" represent "a concentration in power over American public opinion unknown in history. . . ." Although it is not true that the commentators are responsible to no one; they are in a final sense responsible to the viewers, who can switch them off and we assume often do. Still, an offended party in a two-minute film clip has little means of redress. Is it a good thing for 20 million Americans to assemble their impression of what is happening from Mr. Huntley and Mr. Brinkley? Cartoonist Herblock wasn't quite as charitable to Agnew as the editorial writer above. That "master of sick invective" pictured Nixon waving an American flag and smashing a hapless individual titled "Differing Views" with a right-hand upper cut. The glove was the face of Spiro Agnew. The implication was clear: Nixon was behind the attack and doing it in the name of Mom, apple pie and hamburgers.

On the next day, November 15, the Post again scorched Agnew. This time the heat came in an editorial entitled, "For the Record. . . ." The Post devoted the ed-
itorial to debunking Agnew's criticism of W. Averell Harriman. Post cartoons also excoriated Agnew. Oliphant showed Nixon holding Agnew by the tie. Agnew was wrapped in an American flag. The title screamed, "I may not agree with his views but I defend his right to express them. Tell the un-American, Pinko, Commie-sympathizing-pawn of-Hanoi that." Oliphant saw a politically motivated Agnew, a mouthpiece of the Nixon Administration, denouncing those who were demonstrating against the war.

Herblock came back with another spiffy Agnew cartoon on November 20. Nixon and Agnew were pictured sitting in front of a battered television set. A sign in the tube says, "No TV from the Moon; Camera on Blink." Agnew is in an easy chair, brandishing a hammer. A smiling Nixon is saying, "Spiro, I really didn't mean for you to go this far."

A little more positive stance was exhibited by a Richard Harwood/Lawrence Stern article. The theme was summed up by the title: "Sneers at Vice President Won't Dispel Doubts About Media's Performance." The reason for the media outcry, said the authors, was because there is a "theory in the industry that people shouldn't bite back at their dogs." But, the authors claimed, this will not make media inadequacies disappear.

The issue of media performance is not going to evaporate in this country simply because publishers and network presidents wrap themselves in the First Amendment and sneer at Spiro Agnew. For the facts are that the media are as blemished as any other institution in
this society and that there is growing public concern over their performance.  

On November 20, 1969, Agnew lashed out at the descendants of Gutenberg, the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, in particular. Now, the fire was in the home kitchen. Katharine Graham, president of the Washington Post Company felt constrained to issue a statement debunking the Agnew criticism.

Vice President Agnew's remarks about the Washington Post Company are not supported by the facts. The Washington Post, Newsweek, WTOP-TV and WTOP Radio decidedly do not "grind out the same editorial line." It is a longstanding policy of the Post Company to enlist in each of its enterprises the best professional journalists we can find and to give them a maximum of freedom in which to work. Each branch is operated autonomously. They compete vigorously with one another. They disagree on many issues. We think that the result is journalism of a high caliber that is notable for a diversity of voices on a wide range of public issues. As to the voices of public opinion in the Washington community at large, they are plentiful and diverse. It is one of the most competitive communications cities in America by any objective standard. Washington is one of only three cities left with three major newspapers under separate ownership, all of them first rate. In addition to the four major television stations, there are three UHF stations, including one of the nation's leading educational stations. Radio is even more competitive in the area, with some 35 outlets.

That was the full statement which appeared in the *Post*. It zeroed in on specific allegations, as perhaps it should have. Still, it is disappointing that in a position statement there should be no mention of basic problems or press role in mass culture America. On the next day, an editorial followed up on Graham's position statement. It went into greater detail, showing that the various elements of the Washington Post Company, are not always in
agreement; there is no monolithic wall of opinion to be found there or feared.

As for a common editorial line, you will note our view, above, that Judge Haynsworth, while not a first rate choice, ought to be confirmed by the Senate today. You will note to the right of it the opinion by Herblock. How's that for harkening?27

The editorial appeared to be purposely flighty, as though the writer was trying to maintain a "we're-not-ruffled-or-intimidated" posture. "Our typewriter isn't smoking, Mr. Vice President," said the editorial. "There's nothing here to get 'polarized' about."28 The Post admitted that there some honest questions about monopolization to be asked and answered.

No harm will come if people think about the implications of "the growing monopolization of the voices of public opinion on which we all depend," as the Vice President suggested. We think about it a good deal ourselves, worry about the trend, and oppose, for one example, efforts in Congress to favor newspapers with special considerations under the antitrust laws.29

One of the most interesting and unusual analyses of Agnew's Des Moines and Montgomery speeches came from Washington Post editorial page staff writer, Meg Greenfield. She saw a "bizarre kinship" between Agnew and the Marxist philosopher, Herbert Marcuse.30 Greenfield began her article by quoting Joe McGinnis (of Selling of the President: 1968 fame) who refers to a statement attributed to Frank Shakespeare, USIA chief during Nixon's Administration. The quote breaks into the Shakespeare statement regarding television news coverage of Nixon during the 1968 election campaign:
"Here are the instances we feel you've been guilty of bias in your coverage of Nixon. We are going to monitor every minute of your broadcast news, and if this kind of bias continues, and if we are elected, then you might find yourself in Washington next year answering a few questions. And you just might find yourself having a little trouble getting some of your licenses renewed." Shakespeare paused and smiled, "I'm not going to do it because I'm afraid of the reaction. The press would band together and clobber us. But god-dammit, I'd love to."31

According to Meg Greenfield, this episode provided a "bit of historical background to the grudge that Mr. Agnew has brought into public view."32 This, Greenfield felt, gave some substance to those who claimed Agnew and the Administration were bent on intimidation. But there was a flip side to the coin, according to the author.

Because some of the outrages that led Mr. Shakespeare and others into temptation were genuine, it brings us head to head with the disagreeable fact that network news coverage often is biased and that the networks as an institution could doubtless profit from some soul-searching and internal reform.33

But this was still not the heart of the Greenfield thesis. She came to that later. "What struck me as formative and decisive in the speech," she observed, was "its imagery, assumptions and tone."34 This is where Marcuse come in. What gave Agnew's Des Moines speech its bizarre distinction, according to Greenfield, was:

(1) His Herbert Marcuse-like perception of the Other -- of "them," (2) his horrific (and also Marcussian) reading of what "they" are about and what "they" have already achieved, (3) his confusion of influence, on the one hand, and authority, on the other, with power, and (4) his mobe-ish, avanti, popoli-type solution.35

Greenfield then performed a word content analysis
of the points. The "they-them: turn out to be dangerous classes of men at large, or as faceless oligarchs -- 'power elites,' in the phrase of the late C. Wright Mills."\textsuperscript{36} Agnew now comes out as a New Leftist. The fourth point of Greenfield's article is of major interest to this thesis. It concerns the idea of "power to the people," as the author put it. "He /Agnew/ would come back to the more familiar 'demand' -- a la Berkeley and Harvard and elsewhere -- that the people participate in the decision-making . . . reclaim the power that is theirs."\textsuperscript{37}

Of course, Agnew's basic thesis was a call for power to the people. Des Moines, as many of the other media speeches given by Agnew, formed his own Free Speech movement. From this perspective, Agnew was merely a radical populist. Joseph Kraft zeroed in on this Agnewian emphasis from a traditional approach.

From its earliest years, the United States has been a Populist country with a strong bias against any kind of privilege. And the recent doings of Spiro Agnew fit squarely into this classic American tradition.\textsuperscript{38}

But, Kraft quips, "With good sense, courage and luck, it should be possible to contain Agnewism, too" -- the latest Populist fad. Perhaps the most telling Kraft remark is that Agnew "comes on as a man of the people." The attack on media is merely a part of the Populist dogma. "The attack on the networks and on The New York Times and The Washington Post echo previous assaults by McCarthy and Long and Bryan on the Eastern press." Agnew's new element
in his Populist cause, was according to Kraft, "The cutting edge of Agnewism -- what sets the Vice President apart from all his predecessors -- is the emphasis on young people. He made his first big splash in response to the Moratorium." 39

David S. Broder and Spiro Agnew

Because of his status as a political observer, the views of Washington Post correspondent Broder are of special interest to this thesis. Overall, Broder reflected the general media reaction to Agnew. He admitted that Agnew had valid criticisms -- but they were said to be, in Broder's critique, "wrongheaded."

Mr. Agnew is on the right track. Where he goes wrong -- and seriously wrong -- is in arguing that the television commentators should either be quiet or "get with it." His suggestion that "perhaps it is time the networks were made more responsive to the views of the nation" is either a threat of intimidation to a regulated industry or it is a proposal for individual acts of cowardice. 40

At this point, the thesis will discuss three other Broder articles in the Post. These skip ahead to 1973 and relate to various aspects of the Agnew-media struggle in that year. As it is quite clear from the above article, Broder took a somewhat antagonistic attitude toward Agnew. Interestingly enough, Broder seemed to soften somewhat in 1973. Broder changed his tune as Agnew seemed to have altered the tone of his criticism. A benchmark Agnew speech on this is the Harding College address of April, 1973. Agnew, of course, had talked about his view of the
press and its relationship to government. But as we shall
see later, it was a mellow Agnew. Broder's view of that
speech ran along the following lines:

What comes through most strikingly is the sense
that reasonable judgments are being applied to issues
that, over the last few years, have almost been dema­
goged to death. Agnew's speech at Harding College on
"responsibilities of the news media in a free society"
was explicitly cast as an invitation to the press to
join in a "reasoned debate" on the subject.⁴¹

Agnew had advised his listeners that information
must flow freely to the American public. Broder quoted a
portion of the speech which he particularly liked: "The
government and the media must put aside their visceral re-
actions and engage in a productive, intelligent discussion
of their differences." Broder could relate to this ap-
proach more easily than to Agnew's previous battering ram
method, labelling individuals as composing an "effete corps
of impudent snobs."⁴²

A week later, Broder took up where he left off. He
complimented Agnew on his thoughtful speech. However, Bro-
der apparently felt it necessary to criticize what he felt
was Agnew's central point that "it is advocacy journalism
more than any other factor" that caused a media-government
rift. Broder disagreed. Advocacy journalism was not the
problem. "That conflict results from the inevitable desire
of men in power to conduct their business under maximum
conditions of privacy." Though it can be rationalized "in
the interests of national security" such secrecy can "be
used to deny the public the information it needs to partic-
ipate in democratic decision-making." Broder's conclusion was that, "There is and should be a built-in conflict between the press and the government, no matter which party or which individual is in office." In a sort of ironic twist, Broder defended journalists as the good guys concerned only with the public weal.

Reporters do not "go after" stories in order to prove preconceived conclusions; they seek to lay out for public view those actions and decisions by government officials which have large public consequences, in order that the public can evaluate what is being done in its name.

And then came the Agnew scandal. The image had been shattered. Broder had also been partially "taken in by Agnew." He, too, felt disillusionment and some bitterness. Here was Broder's reaction to Agnew's resignation:

So it is over, prematurely, for Spiro T. Agnew. From beginning to end he eluded us, concealing his true character behind that oddly mixed facade of hot rhetoric and cool, correct appearance. He treated public office not primarily as a place of decision-making but as a platform for pronouncing judgment on the actions of others. And now the judgment of the law has come down hard on him.

Broder, of course, was not that much of an Agnew admirer and he certainly was not of Agnew's political persuasion. Broder's final advice was to "perhaps... convey our sympathy with their/the conservatives/ plight by buttoning our lips and resisting any temptation to indulge in smug self satisfaction."

To summarize the Post position regarding Agnew, one statement from an editorial will yet be mentioned. In mid-1971, the "Selling of the Pentagon" controversy heated up.
Agnew layed aside his Populist image and went to the defense of an often not-so-popular American institution, the Pentagon. The Post, while agreeing with some of Agnew's criticism of the CBS documentary, refused to accept him as a valid critic.

The serialized dispute between CBS news, the Pentagon, Congressman Hebert and Vice President Agnew now shows every sign of enjoying the longest airwave run since "One Man's Family". . . . That some of the criticism of the documentary -- in terms of production techniques and occasional inaccuracies -- is valid, seems to be evident to us. It also seems evident that Vice President Agnew, as is his custom, has once again managed to obfuscate and all but wreck that part of the case against CBS that was (and is) based on serious and legitimate questions. . . . However, even where he was able to raise valid objections to aspects of each production, he so overstated and slanted his case as to render it pointless.47

The New York Times Stance

From the point of view of the New York Times, the Agnew-press argument in 1968 was simply one about competency. The Times did not feel Agnew was qualified to be Vice President. This attitude led to the editorial characterized by Nixon as the "lowest kind of gutter politics." The controversy, though not dealing directly with the major thrust of this paper, does serve as an important backdrop to the later battles of 1969.

The strong Times position may have been partly responsible for the paranoid antipathy of the Administration for the so-called "Eastern liberal press." From that vantage point, it deserves a brief analysis. Though there was no "Caligula's Horse" editorial in the Times, its position
regarding the selection of Agnew as Vice Presidential candidate was no less negative.

Nixon's... choice of Gov. Spiro T. Agnew of Maryland as Vice-Presidential running mate is another triumph of the old politics -- but one which is much less comprehensible or defensible.... There is nothing in his record or background which suggests that if elected, he would be prepared at a moment's notice to assume the burdens of the Presidency of the United States.... The man nominated for second place on the ticket has to be virtually as well qualified for the top office as the Presidential candidate himself. Governor Agnew, despite his attractive personal qualities, does not measure up to that standard.48

The editorial was published on August 9, 1968 -- the day after Agnew was selected as candidate. The Times would record its opposition to Agnew throughout the entire campaign period, creating a bitter adversary in the Vice Presidential candidate. Richard Nixon was also slammed in the process. Obviously, if Nixon picked the wrong man for the job, his own political wisdom was in question. Agnew was being set up as Nixon's political Achilles heel. This was especially so since Nixon went to the wall for Agnew with some of the following words:

You can look him in the eye and you know he's got it. This guy has got it.... Under pressure he is one of the best. He has a good heart. He's an old-fashioned patriot, highly controlled.... If a guy's got it, he'll make it. If not, Nixon's made a bad choice.49

Nixon, of course, was politically committed to defend his running mate against the continuing New York Times barrage. Even James Reston, to become something of an Agnew admirer, was antagonistic. To Reston, Agnew was "one Greek bearing no gifts for anybody." Referring to Henry
Cabot Lodge, Nixon's running mate in 1960, Reston said Lodge "had a mind of his own and sometimes made the voters wish he had been the nominee rather than Mr. Nixon." Continued Reston, "There will obviously be no such problem with the Governor of Maryland."50

Meanwhile, the editorials hammered away. On August 11, 1968, the Times opined, "Governor Agnew. . . has few visible qualifications to be one step away from the presidency."51 It should be pointed out, however, that it was the editorial page which was antagonistic. But most, if not all, news articles (and there were far more of them than editorials) merely reported on what Agnew was doing or saying.

From this point of view, most of the Times material could be construed as "favorable" or "neutral." One example was an article entitled, "A Coatless Agnew Greets Crowds in Initial Campaign Swing."52 The tenor of the article ran along in this manner: "He /Agnew/ frequently complains, one said, that whenever he gets a train of thought started 'someone wants him to stop and glorify National Pickle Week.'"53 What is often not stressed in evaluating a newspaper's coverage is that most of it is merely reporting of what a candidate said and did. The point to be borne in mind is that one can get a wrong impression of the overall coverage a candidate is getting by focusing solely on his treatment on the editorial page.

Unfortunately, we cannot easily tell a newspaper's
position regarding a candidate from the news pages. In order to evaluate this, one is forced to turn to the editorial pages and commentary-type features. From this view, Times evaluation of Agnew was decidedly negative. But it was not all darts. On September 14, the Times actually praised Agnew on his retraction of the "squishy soft on communism" accusation he had hurled against Humphrey.

Rarely if ever has a Presidential or Vice-Presidential candidate honestly admitted error in the heat of a campaign. Now it has happened, and the political road is a little straighter for it. . . . Even if this is not a full-fledged apology, it is a retraction and the Republican Vice-Presidential candidate deserves praise for making it.54

But such praise was the exception. More typical of Times comments were those found in an October 20, 1968 editorial:

Governor Agnew has shown himself to be rash, maladroite, insensitive to the deeper problems afflicting the nation and quick to exploit public prejudices for political gain. . . . Senator Muskie, in contrast, has emerged as a leader of moderation. . . . As a Vice-Presidential candidate, Mr. Muskie has demonstrated he has what it takes to be President, Mr. Agnew has not.55

Two days later the bombshell hit. It was Ben A. Franklin's article, "Old Issues Revived as Investigators Study Agnew Past."56 Reporters were in Maryland digging up Agnew's back financial dealings and they thought they had stumbled onto some improper transactions. Franklin was reporting on what had been found. There wasn't much new material. The search focused on old conflict of interest allegations. In retrospect, the Times almost had the story that would not break until early 1973. Strangely,
the Times backed off, but not until this strong, follow-up editorial:

Richard M. Nixon, who prides himself on his investigative abilities, appears not to have done much checking into the background and associations of Spiro T. Agnew before choosing him as his Vice-Presidential running mate... In his obtuse behavior as a public official in Maryland as well as in his egregious comments in this campaign, Mr. Agnew has demonstrated that he is not fit to stand one step away from the Presidency.57

Nixon now went on the offensive. He blasted the Times in a "Face the Nation" interview, calling the editorial politically motivated. "It seems to me," Nixon told interviewers, "that this is certainly something that is below-the-belt politicking. It certainly is not worthy of a great newspaper like the New York Times."58

Meanwhile, Agnew saw the Times editorial as evidence that the paper had pulled "the major blooper of the campaign."59 Agnew also dispatched his legal counsel to the Times, demanding a retraction. The Times responded by reprinting the original editorial. Next, Agnew took out a full page advertisement in the New York Times itself in which he denied the charges and slammed the paper. Then the Times replied to Agnew's charges.60 Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this see-saw word battle, was a commentary by James Reston which appeared in the October 30, 1968 issue:

The candidates and the press are fussing at each other again and this is the way it should be. They have different jobs and in many ways they are natural enemies, like cats and dogs. The first job of the candidate is to win, and he usually says what he thinks
will help him win. The job of the reporter is to report what happens and decontaminate as much of the political poison as he can. The conflict is obvious.61

In the conclusion of this thesis, various symbolic orientations -- which determine the meaning which humans apply to situations -- will be discussed. Suffice it here to say, that Reston places a Mr. Clean symbolic role onto the reporter, a person who "decontaminates." Meanwhile, the politician is the heavy, someone who dispenses "poison" to his listeners. Now, of course, Nixon and Agnew as politicians, were also interpreting events from a symbolic stance. Reston also pointed out the Nixonian view of what he considered to be reality.

Ever since he /Nixon/ came into national politics he has seemed to think that a newspaper reporter should take down and transmit what he says, like a tape recorder or a Xerox machine. . . . He still suffers from this old illusion that the press is a kind of inanimate transmission belt which should pass along anything he chooses to dump onto it.62

It is conceivable that much of distrust of Agnew which the press had, actually was a fallout from the bad image which Nixon had. Since Agnew was a part of the Nixon team, Nixon's negative image was transplanted onto Agnew. Just how negative the Nixonian image was is clear from the same Reston article.

Mr. Nixon's and also Mr. Johnson's way, is to try to manipulate them /the press/, to pretend to be candid in private conversation, but to use every trick in the book to get them to fill the headlines and front pages with calculated trash. . . . The Republican candidate has tried to use the press with an air of total sincerity, and this is the heart of the trouble. Nobody has seen the reporters privately in this campaign.
more than Nixon, or talked more freely, but usually on an off-the-record basis. His television performances are masterpieces of contrived candor.63

Reston scored Nixon for "telling everything with an air of reckless sincerity" and doing it within a "controlled situation." The epitome of this Big Brother view of Nixon was aptly described in Joe McGinnis' book, The Selling of the President: 1968. Against this backdrop, it comes as no surprise that Agnew would appear as a dangerous man when he began to disembowel the media.

And the big news in 1969, from the point of view of the Agnew-media crisis revolved around the two famous speeches the Vice President delivered in November of that year. On November 14, the Times carried the story of the first speech. A two-column headline read, "Agnew Says TV Networks Are Distorting the News." On the inside pages, rebuttals by the network presidents were printed. The full text of Agnew's speech also appeared. An accompanying article on page 25, detailed FCC Chairman Dean Burch's call to the "heads of the three national television networks for transcripts of the remarks of their reporters and commentators after President Nixon's speech on Vietnam on Nov.3."64

FCC Chairman Burch had supported Agnew's attack. A front page Times article on the situation was entitled, "Burch Supports Agnew; Shift in F.C.C. Role Seen." There was, it seemed, some cause for alarm in what was now happening.

Both the Vice President's speech and Mr. Burch's
direct approach to the three network presidents were interpreted as significant departures from the traditional relationship between the Federal Government and the news media. Mr. Burch's endorsement of the Vice President's criticism of the networks also appeared to foreshadow a fundamental and unexpected change in the general posture of the seven member commission.65

History was to prove that particular Times prophetic fear wrong. In a short time, Burch would make it clear that the broadcasts had passed muster. The Fairness Doctrine had not been violated by network commentary on Nixon's speech, Burch and a unanimous Commission would soon rule. As far as Agnew's criticism was concerned, the Times writer was right, at least in one sense. Agnew's contention called for exactly that; a change in one aspect of the relationship between media and the Federal government. However, it must be added, that the change (at least overtly stated in Agnew's speeches) was not the one the media had in mind.

What Agnew called for was an end to the media's unspoken immunity from criticism by government officials. The implications of that challenge were manufactured in the mind of the beholder, depending on his view of Agnew, the role of the media and the position of the Federal government. There were, of course, far-reaching implications, in a Constitutional-legal sense, imbedded within the speech. Max Frankel pointed some of those out in a November 15 article in the New York Times.

The first and dominant theme of Mr. Agnew's speech was that the airways belong to all the people and that
a "small and unelected elite" of television producers and commentators had to be somehow stripped of their great power to shape public opinion. They have no right to claim the First Amendment's freedom of the press guarantee as newspapers do, he said, and should be compelled by their listeners — though not by the government — to "represent the views of America."66

Frankel's article was even-handed, informed and interesting. He pinpointed Agnew's speech as "an aggressive assertion of the Administration's growing resentment over the role that the press and television play in conveying dissent on Vietnam and other issues." Frankel's criticism of Agnew for challenging the press was as noted for its muted tones as Agnew's was for flaming rhetoric. "The discussion is certain to be especially difficult," Frankel opined, "if it comes in the context of momentary political complaint."67

An editorial in the Times on the day of the Frankel article was considerably less charitable. In fact, the tone bordered on paranoia. Agnew's speech was said to have considerably widened the attitudinal gap between Americans and to have "undermined the basic principle of freedom of speech on the airwaves." In the writer's view, Agnew's speech was a "transparent form of intimidation and positively dangerous to the very concept of freedom that he pretends to endorse."68 On the next day, Robert Semple raised the same spectre of divisiveness and subliminal intimidation.

Mr. Agnew — by couching his complaints in narrow ideological terms, and by focusing them on particular individuals — seemed to be inviting not a thoughtful
discussion of the very intricate problems of self-regulation but a partisan counterattack on broadcasters and the substitution of one small group of men whom the Vice-President doesn't like with another small group of men more hospitable to his own private vision of America.69

Meanwhile, columnist Russell Baker had written a kind of Buchwaldian piece for the November 16, 1969 issue. A portion of the tongue-in-cheek article makes Baker's view of the speech quite clear.

Let us cast ourselves forward in time. The networks have read Mr. Agnew's speech closely and reformed their news coverage according to its implicit suggestions. We are at N.B.C. news headquarters in Provo, Utah. The Huntley-Brinkley report is due to go on the air in 45 minutes. Chet Huntley's face is in the hands of the cosmeticians. They have massaged its familiar wrinkles and laugh lines into an expression of utter objectivity and are coating it with a heavy plaster. . . . The object is to prevent Huntley from making clear his sharp disapproval -- by the expression on his face -- of a number of fatuous political speeches he must report during the telecast.70

Undaunted, Vice President Agnew blasted the media five days later in Montgomery, Alabama. The attack was pointed with particular vehemence at the Washington Post and the New York Times. The Times carried a page one story and reprinted the speech. Responses from media executives of the three networks, Mrs. Graham and New York Times president, Arthur Ochs Sulzberger, were also published. What is of interest at this point is Sulzberger's reply. Basically, Sulzberger skirted the important issues of monopoly, the spectrum of information getting to the public, the constitutional relationship of the important triad of media, the people and government. Instead, Sulzberger sought to
focus on a specific allegation: that Agnew was wrong in his facts relative to the Times stance on monopoly. In other words, the editorial was defensive in nature, much as Agnew's criticism was, in fact, defensive of his own position in the matter. Some of Sulzberger's comments follow:

Vice President Agnew is entitled to express his point of view, but he is in error when he implies that the New York Times ever sought or enjoyed immunity from comment or criticism. Indeed, all American institutions from the press to the Presidency should be the subjects of free and open debate. It would be wise, however, for those involving themselves in such a discussion to be certain of their facts. Some of Mr. Agnew's statements are inaccurate.71

It was a call for Canossa in reverse. Sulzberger was now charging Agnew with inaccuracies. Sulzberger said the Times was against monopoly. The paper had not avoided the issue, as Agnew had suggested.

In an editorial on March 13, 1969, headed "Competition Not Monopoly," the Times stated: "The constitutional guarantee of the freedom of the press provides the press with no warrant for seeking exemption from the laws prohibiting monopoly. If anything, the sanctity attached to press freedom by the First Amendment makes it the special obligation of the press to fight for the broadest extension of that freedom."72

Of course, this was a somewhat different aspect of the monopoly question. Agnew had been zeroing in the direction of the supposed media monopoly over public opinion. Sulzberger's "monopoly" concerned individual newspapers fusing their operations together. But apparently the Times had said little else about this vital subject. However, a defensive posture on the Times' part, at least from its executives can be understood. The boys on the battle lines
had to have moral support from the home office.

Scotty Reston followed up with an article on the question of monopoly with a new twist. According to him, television and radio had actually contributed to a decline in communications monopoly. How had this occurred? The electronic media were responsible for "breaking the monopoly of the printing press." As a result of this vast informational network, there now "pours night and day the greatest flow of information and the loudest clash of divergent opinion ever inflicted on a long-suffering people in the history of the written and spoken word." On the other hand, Reston did admit that Agnew had a point. "Most of the national commentary by individuals and national columnists is more 'liberal,' if Mr. Agnew will permit the word, than the Vice President."74

Two days later, the Times followed up with an editorial reminiscent of the most fearful articles, editorials and speeches which claimed the government was attempting to intimidate the press. The editorial admitted there was nothing new in Agnew's attack nor was previous Administration criticism of the press unheard of. But the Times was afraid, and that must be the word for the reaction, of the symbolic meaning they saw behind the words.

The context of Mr. Agnew's two recent speeches and the tenor of his remarks carry his comments beyond the give-and-take of normal political debate, and lend to some of his words ugly implications that he himself may not fully appreciate. . . . When Mr. Agnew indicates that the press or networks seek "immunity from comment and criticism" or "blind acceptance of opinions," he is
conjuring up a fictitious picture of a conspiratorial, monolithic, sinister communications structure that bears no relation to reality. . . . The main thrust of the Vice President's criticism has not been directed to the genuine faults in the television and newspaper professions. The main thrust has been an attack squarely against the political opposition, an attack composed of implied threats, veiled intimidation and inflammatory language.75

The Times had a point. Agnew had made a frontal assault. He made it quite clear that his objection was political. What was frightening to the press could be simply summed up: Agnew had changed the rules of the game. It was like a wrestling match where both opponents agree beforehand to fake the eye-gouging, the arm-twisting and foot-stomping. But Agnew got in the ring, for whatever motivation, and quit faking. What Agnew had done, of course, was to attack the philosophical foundation which had given the press its charismatic position in American society. The press had claimed as its own, the position of freedom fighter. Only it, the theory went, stood between freedom and repressive dictatorship. Agnew had cleverly turned this argument on its head; the press was the dictator of American opinion.

Six months later, Agnew also turned press criticism that he used inflammatory rhetoric on itself. In a speech, at a Houston, Texas Republican fund-raising dinner, Agnew assembled a series of quotes -- very nasty quotes about himself -- from such papers as the Post and Times. These, he said, would show that the kettle was being called names by the pot, when the latter was actually in rather
awful shape itself. Said Agnew:

Lately, you have been exposed to a great deal of Vice Presidential rhetoric and how I should cool it. . . . I have refused to "cool it" -- to use the vernacular -- until those self-righteous lower their voices a few decibels. . . . I can assure you that some of these pundits make my rhetoric seem tame. Here are a few recent random samples I have collected to share with you tonight. . . . I hope you will overlook the slightly hysterical tone of some of their comments.76

The Times carried the story of the speech, rehearsing its contents on page one. Curiously, there was no immediate reaction from the editorial page on the Agnew attack. Was the Times trying to "cool it"? Had the paper been convicted? The Times also tended toward a Silent Cal treatment of Agnew's commentary on the media, except for sporadic statements, throughout 1970. The main thrust of Times commentary regarded Agnew's role in the off-year elections.

The year 1971 was a critical one from the point of view of press freedom. A number of critical controversies seemed to erupt, including the Pentagon Papers and "Selling of the Pentagon" crises. The Times skewered Agnew for his attack on the CBS documentary in the following words:

The bill of irrelevancies invoked by Vice President Agnew and Defense Secretary Laird against the Columbia Broadcasting System's documentary, "The Selling of the Pentagon," missed the central issue. . . . The heart of the matter is the flagrant violation of traditional rules -- unmistakably spelled out in Defense Department regulations -- which prohibit the military from engaging in political propaganda activities.77

James Reston and Spiro Agnew

Perhaps the most notable new element in the New
York Times was the growing love affair between James Reston and Spiro Agnew. As the Times' superstar political columnist and editor, Reston's viewpoint is well worth discussing for its potential influence among associates of the Good Gray Lady of New York. On April 21, 1971, while Agnew was bombarding the media for its role in the "Selling of the Pentagon" (and getting blasted for it in return), Reston was throwing some kudos to Agnew.

The Capitol and even the Cabinet are well-populated these days with influential men who say one thing in private and something quite different in public. But not Mr. Agnew. He didn't like the way the reporters and commentators behaved last year and said so. . . . There is nothing personal about this either. He will drink with the reporters and condemn them at the same time. . . . Even the reporters like him personally, despite his attacks on the press, because he does not pretend. . . . It would probably be wrong to say that Mr. Agnew has worked out a coherent political philosophy. . . . But at least he is not a fraud.78

Reston would have to eat some of his words two plus years later. But he was revealing at least two things. One, that reporters behind-the-scenes had to like Agnew despite his antipathy to the press. Two, that the press (or at least some of its members) were tired of political cat-and-mouse games and yearned for a straight shooter. Agnew seemed to fill the bill. In November of that year, the relationship between Agnew and Reston was apparently warmer.

Vice President Agnew has been accused of almost everything except a lack of saying right out what he thinks, and one of the attractive aspects of this compulsive candor is that he applies it to himself. . . . While he is more critical of the "effete snobs" of press and television than anybody else in this administration, he is also more available to them and more willing to discuss their problems and his than anybody
else in the capitol.79

This excitement over Agnew apparently had staying power. Even into August, 1973 -- with the Vice President on the defensive over his financial dealings -- Reston was coming on strong for the Veep's supposed candor, straightforwardness and truth.

What this town has been hoping for recently is somebody in power, who would stand up and give plain answers to hard questions, and Vice President Agnew has finally done it. . . . He didn't ask but told the President he was going to call a press conference at 3 o'clock the next afternoon. He didn't have a few "friends" in the press around to hear his story, but invited everybody. TV cameras and all. He asked for the tough questions, and he got them. . . . And the reaction to this was startling. For even without knowing the facts in Agnew's case, the feeling after his press conference was very much in his favor -- in fact, that finally in this town somebody in power had talked up with candor and passion, and taken the risk of telling the truth.80

Now, that is mystique when a topnotch journalist will decide in a politician's favor without knowing the facts! It should be pointed out that Reston clarified his position regarding Agnew by saying, "What he /Agnew/ says in public he says in private, and even if you don't like what he says, which I don't most of the time, at least you know where he stands, and this has to be a plus."81

In fairness to Reston, it should also be pointed out that he discussed the role and effectiveness of the press from a generally even-handed approach. In an April 14, 1971 article, he pointed out that both government and the press are not exactly known for their credibility, though he would guess "that the founding Fathers would
still bet on Walter Cronkite rather than on Mr. Agnew."82

Besides the credibility gap between the people and their government and/or press, there is also the longstanding chasm that separates the press and government. Watergate and the resignation of Agnew have not exactly helped to heal the breach. Reston admitted the existence of such a sad state in a September 9, 1973 article in the Times.

Discussing the problem of news leaks in the Agnew investigation, he stated:

The American press, or more precisely a few American newspapers, are really on the hunt now and rightly so. Watergate has made them realize what is really meant by the corruption and danger of power and secrecy . . . . New young investigative reporters are now competing with one another to be first with whatever happens, even in grand juries, and this is the problem.83

Of course, the same logic could be applied to the Agnew phenomenon. Today, however, few authorities can agree as to how Agnew's criticisms affected the media. While many commentators and reporters claim he had no effect, others strongly disagree. One Times writer put his view of Agnew's impact in these terms:

The rise of Agnew put a crimp in the growth of adversary journalism, causing many writers and reporters . . . while angrily wrapping themselves up in the First Amendment, to wonder if they had lost touch with their readers or viewers, and to ask themselves if objectivity were not a more important goal than persuasion.84

Did Agnew influence American journalism? And, if so, in what direction did he push it? The answers differ depending on the observer and the situation.
FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER III

1"May We Hear from the Times Now," Chicago Tribune, October 31, 1968, p. 22.


4Ibid.


17Ibid.

18Ibid.


24Ibid.

25Ibid.


28Ibid.

29Ibid.


31Ibid.

32Ibid.

33Ibid.

34Ibid.

35Ibid.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
53 Ibid., p. 29.


62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.


67 Ibid.


72 Ibid.


74 Ibid.


77 "'Selling of the Pentagon,'" Editorials on File, p. 345.


CHAPTER IV

THE ELECTRONIC MEDIA REACT TO AGNEW

The vast majority of national broadcasting industry executives and commentators were shocked by Agnew's frontal assault on the electronic media in his November 13, 1969 speech. A few supported Agnew, at least in qualified terms and with some reservations.

Steve McCormick, vice president of Mutual Broadcasting System's news department and commentator Howard K. Smith were two who did. There was also some support among network affiliates. But national broadcasting executive and commentator reaction was decidedly negative on every score. An example of the concern felt by the electronic media is evident in the titles of a number of articles which appeared in Broadcasting magazine, from mid-November to the end of December 1969. Here is a sampling:

*Burch Backs Agnew While Broadcasters Stew.
*Broadcast Journalism Under Siege.
*Nixon Aide Hits Too-Fast Critiques.
*Stanton Flays News Intimidation.
*Now an Open Season on All Newsmen.
*Print and Broadcast in the Same Boat?
*The Analyses that Touched it All Off.
*Agnew's Campaign Brings Them Together.
*Affiliates Side With NBC News.
*Can Administration Cow TV Journalism?
*FCC Rejects Role of Judging News Bias.
*Agnew Speech Draws Mixed Print Reaction.
*Sigma Delta Chi Sees Agnew Threat.
*Where the Power Belongs.

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The broadcasting industry was obviously flustered by Agnew's point-blank blunderbuss. The question is why? Agnew's criticism was certainly not new. Other individuals had been more outspoken. The difference, of course, was in Agnew's position -- who and what he was. Agnew was a "government man" and part of what was widely regarded as a cynical Nixon Administration. It is important to understand that the press was not reacting to the criticism per se, but to Agnew the individual.

What Nicholas Johnson and Spiro Agnew Had in Common

It is instructive to compare the criticism (and the reaction) of Agnew and former FCC commissioner, Nicholas Johnson. Johnson was a thoroughgoing liberal and a staunch critic of the media. His comments were both harsh and outspoken.

Johnson had appeared on "Face the Nation" exactly one month prior to Agnew's Des Moines speech. The similarity between Johnson's basic contentions and the criticisms voiced by Agnew in Des Moines are striking for their basic similarity. On comparing the Johnson interview and the Agnew speech, the author can only wonder if Agnew (or his speechwriters) cribbed material from Johnson. The quotes below represent the thrust of Johnson's critique on "Face the Nation":
He /Nixon/ is, after all in the same position of any other elected official. The only way he can reach his constituency, the only way any elected official can reach his constituency, is by knocking on the broadcaster's door and begging for a little time. It is the broadcaster, after all, who controls what information the American people will receive. . . what issues they will be permitted to know about.¹

Johnson repeated his central premise in a later answer: "You hold the power, you stand at the turnstile."²

In effect, Johnson was claiming that any information the American people receive is controlled by a small group of individuals answerable to no one. A second, related point, was Johnson's contention regarding who really was protected by the First Amendment: the public. In addressing himself to the need for public service programming, he stated:

It is absolutely preposterous that in. . . an industry that is using public property, the air waves. . . . for that industry to hold up the elected public officials and make them pay to get time from public property in order to permit the people of this country to hear from their elected officials.³

Johnson advocated some system of "ordering" the networks to provide free public service programs. One of the interviewers raised the question regarding this "ordering" as being on the verge of some form of censorship. Johnson replied with a key statement, which was to be repeated by Agnew.

Well, I'm very concerned about the problem of censorship in this country, but I am concerned about the censorship that is being done by the networks on behalf of big business interests to keep from the American people information which they simply must have to function as effective citizens. . . . But to require a certain proportion of time devoted to public service cannot, in my judgment, by any stretch of the imagination, be deemed to be a form of "censorship." And this in-
interpretation was recently supported by the Supreme Court in the Red Lion decision, which went a long way to saying, in effect, that First Amendment rights do not rest with the broadcasters, they rest with the audience who would like to have access to points of view, and they rest with those who would like to use the broadcaster's facilities.4

In a later answer, Johnson made the point-blank observation that "we stand in a very serious danger of virtual broadcaster domination of the political process in this country."5 Johnson's main thrust was clear: there was censorship and it was being indulged in by broadcasters. To Johnson, this monopoly situation was dangerous and unconstitutional. Primarily, the state of affairs was serious because broadcasters had wedged themselves into the funnel's neck between elected officials and constituents.

Agnew: Johnson's Johnson?

Johnson's remarks now need to be compared with Agnew's Des Moines speech. A remarkable similarity exists between parts of Agnew's speech and Johnson's previous remarks. The following quote is from Agnew's Des Moines speech:

The president of the United States has a right to communicate directly with the people who elected him, and the people of this country have the right to make up their own minds and form their own opinions about a presidential address. . . . The purpose of my remarks tonight is to focus your attention on this little group of men who. . . wield a free hand in selecting, presenting and interpreting the great issues of our nation . . . We cannot measure this power and influence by the traditional democratic standards, for these men can create national issues overnight. . . . It represents a concentration of power over American public opinion unknown in history. . . . The American people would rightly not tolerate this concentration of power in
government. Is it not fair and relevant to question its concentration in the hands of a tiny, enclosed fra­ternity of privileged men elected by no one and enjoy­ing a monopoly sanctioned and licensed by government.

... When the news that 40 million Americans receive each night is determined by a handful of men responsi­ble only to their corporate employers. ... Now a vir­tual monopoly of a whole medium of communication is not something that democratic people should blindly ignore. ... As Justice Byron White wrote in his landmark opinion /Red Lion/ six months ago, it's the right of the viewers' and listeners' not the right of the broad­casters, which is paramount. ... By way of conclusion, let me say that every elected leader in the United States depends on these men of the media. Whether what I've said to you tonight will be heard and seen at all by the nation is not my decision, it's not your deci­sion, it's their decision.6

Both men decried what they felt was the growing power of the media and its own brand of censorship of elec­ted officials and important issues. But the reaction and publicity which each set of comments got, one by Johnson and the other by Agnew, varied enormously. It was clear once again that the media were responding to the medium more than the message. Even Johnson, who had expressed some views which bore a great resemblance to Agnew's, criticized Agnew sharply for doing "what corporate and government of­ficials have been doing for years in the privacy of their luncheon clubs and paneled offices." Johnson was referring to the practice of cajoling and threatening "publishers and broadcasters in an effort to manage news and mold images."7

Johnson further stated that Agnew's remarks may have "frightened network executives and newsmen in ways that may cause serious and permanent harm to independent journalism and free speech in America."8 Image apparently is more im-
important than reality. While Johnson felt he had a right to criticize the media, he was unwilling to grant that same right to a government official.

Whose Is an "Appeal to Prejudice"?

Agnew was often criticized for "intimidation," for implying censorship. Most often attacked was Agnew's divisive and "hot" rhetoric. Agnew was later forced to admit that the last criticism, in particular, was applicable to his speeches. Unfortunately, Agnew's critics also resorted to the same kind of heated language. This was particularly true in the reaction to Agnew's Des Moines speech.

One example is Julian Goodman's statement in rebuttal to Agnew's November 13 speech. There is little in it except the kind of rhetoric that politicians are famous for. Goodman was President of the National Broadcasting Company at the time of Agnew's blistering attack:

Vice President Agnew's attack on television news is an appeal to prejudice. More importantly, Mr. Agnew uses the influence of his high office to criticize the way a government-licensed news medium covers the activities of government itself. Any fair-minded viewer knows that the television networks are not devoted to putting across a single point of view, but present all significant views on issues of importance. It is regrettable that the Vice President of the United States would deny to television freedom of the press. Evidently he would prefer a different kind of television reporting -- one that would be subservient to whatever political group was in authority at the time. Those who might feel momentary agreement with his remarks should think carefully whether that kind of television news is what they want.9

If Agnew was not a "fair-minded" viewer, at least in Goodman's eyes, then neither could Nicholas Johnson have
been a "fair-minded viewer." Johnson, of course, made the same criticism of television news that Agnew did. Notice, also that Goodman does not deal with issues. Rather, he appeals to the fears of his readers. Agnew's remarks are "an appeal to prejudice," they "deny to television freedom of the press," he wants television reporting which is "subservient to whatever political group" is in power. Now, of course, none of these accusations could be proved either from Agnew's speeches nor from his prior or subsequent behavior vis a vis the press. Here we have the spectacle of a network president using more volatile language than the Vice President had.

The statement by Leonard Goldenson, President of American Broadcasting Company was equally prejudicial. He, like Agnew, appealed to mom, apple pie and the flag. The only difference is Goldenson claimed he had the flag in his hand and Agnew was trying to tear it down.

I firmly believe that in our free society the ultimate judges of the reliability of our news presentation will be the viewing public. Again I leave it to the public to determine whether the Vice President's renewed attack today is an attempt to intimidate and discredit not only television news reporting, but other major news media. Personally, I believe it is. I hope we are not facing a period in the history of our nation when high government officials try to act both as judge and jury on the issue of a free press.10

Now, of course, Goldenson could not really mean what he said. Because the majority of the American public from all the different surveys taken, sided with Agnew on the controversy. If Goldenson was really going to allow
the viewing public to be "the ultimate judges of the reliability of our news presentation" then some drastic changes in the direction of Agnew's suggestions would have to have been made in television news. The author agrees that if Agnew only wanted news which was always in agreement with the Nixon Administration, that would have been a wrong step for a democratic government. Still, it does point up the hollowness in Goldenson's statement. Goldenson, in the final analysis was only arguing what Agnew argued: let the people decide what news they want to hear. Goldenson had said much the same thing in his retort to Agnew's Des Moines speech. "In the final analysis, it is always the public who decides on the reliability of any individual or organization." According to Goldenson, ABC would continue to "report the news accurately and fully, confident in the ultimate judgment of the American public." But ABC could not have been confident in the majority judgment of the American people; that majority, for better or worse, had sided with Agnew. And does the public really decide the reliability of network news? Nicholas Johnson and many others would say "no" and the argument is far from decided. Beyond that is the question of whether it really is the responsibility of the press to give the public "what it wants."

Dr. Frank Stanton's Perspective

Meanwhile, Dr. Frank Stanton, the president of CBS
was caught in the same logical trap. He appealed to the public as the court of last resort and resorted to name-calling as did the other network executives, and of course, Agnew himself.

No American institution, including the network news organization should be immune to public criticism. . . . We do not believe, however, that this unprecedented attempt by the Vice President of the United States to intimidate a news medium which depends for its existence upon government license represents legitimate criticism. The public, according to opinion polls, has indicated again and again that it has more confidence in the credibility of television news than in that of any other news medium. . . . Whatever their deficiencies, they are minor when compared to those of a press which would be subservient to the executive power of government.12

Of course, what Stanton did not say is that a majority agreed with Agnew. In reply to Agnew's second media speech one week later, Stanton came out straight, accusing Agnew of attempted censorship. "Apparently, the Vice President is embarked upon a campaign, despite his rhetoric to the contrary, to intimidate the news media into reporting only what he wants to hear."13 Reuven Frank, president of NBC news said pretty much the same thing, "As for official censorship, it is Mr. Agnew who raises that specter."14 Over at ABC, the president of the news department, Elmer Lower really boxed himself in logically when he tried to prove that he really was "elected."

No, I was not elected. But I submit that I could not have arrived at my present post without two score of news executives having made individual and independent judgments about me along the way. And I might add that none of these men ever asked me about my personal opinions. . . . Had I ever violated their trust, I
would not have been in their employ the following day.15

Which is exactly what Agnew was complaining about when he referred to the network people as being a closed fraternity of like-minded men. It apparently never occurred to Lower that he was really underscoring Agnew's opinion that a weeding out process was in progress at the networks in which people with "non-standard" views of issues never rose to the top. That, structurally, the networks were a hot bed of organizational incest. As Peter Townsend observed one time, "You see this department headed by a rolly-polly guy and he has a hundred rolly-polly guys working for him."

It is the author's observation that the comments of the various executives at the networks did not enhance their case against Agnew. This is not to imply that the network executives had nothing to say. The point is that their short, defensive comments utilized the same kind of rhetoric as Agnew and put them into even a more logically indefensible position. There were some long and well-thought out statements in defense of the media. Dr. Stanton, for example gave a speech to the International Television and Radio Society in New York on November 25, 1969. In the address, Stanton flayed Agnew for a speech "replete with misinformation, inaccuracies and contradictions."16 One of the "contradictions" was put in the following terms:

The Vice President . . . asserted flatly that "no medium has a more profound influence over public opin-
ion" than television. And yet he also claimed that the views of America have been very little affected by this "profound influence," when he said, "The views of the majority of this fraternity (i.e., television network news executives and editors) do not--and I repeat, not --represent the views of America." The Vice President can't have it both ways. If the views of the American people show "a great gulf" between how a speech is received by them and how it is treated in a broadcast, obviously the treatment of it has no material effect upon their opinion.17

Regarding the claim of monopoly, Stanton defended broadcast news by saying, "Television news is broadcast in this country by four networks, all with different and fiercely competitive managements, producers, editors and reporters, involving hundreds of strongly individualistic people." But Stanton could not help returning to the specter of censorship. To Stanton, this was "the crucial issue raised by the Vice-President."18

It is far more shocking to me that the utterances of the second-ranking official of the United States government require such repeated assurances that he had in mind no violation of the Constitution than it is comforting to have them at all. Of course, neither he nor any of his associates are advocating censorship—which would never survive judicial scrutiny. But it does not take overt censorship to cripple the free flow of ideas.19

Agnew's attack on a medium licensed by the government was seen by Stanton as "a new relationship in government-press relations." Stanton remembered the days when the press was "beyond the reach of the government."20 But now this was no longer true.

Because a federally licensed medium is involved, no more serious episode has occurred in government press relationships since the dark days in the fumbling infancy of this republic when the ill-fated Alien and Sedition Acts forbade criticism of the government and its
policies on pain of exile or imprisonment. In the context of this intimidation, the self-serving disavowal interpolations of no censorship, no matter how often repeated are meaningless. . . . The troubled pages of this century's history are writ dark with the death of liberty in those nations where the first fatal symptoms of political decay was an effort to control the news media. Seldom has it been called censorship. Seldom is the word used except in denials. Always it has been "guidelines" in the name of national unity.21

In retrospect, Stanton's analysis of the future was much more dismal than the reality, as he admitted later. Agnew has come and gone. The networks continue to report as they have. Politicians continue to be unhappy with news coverage of themselves. Television is still criticized for being the "vast wasteland" it was in the days of Nicholas Johnson. The Supreme Court has issued some decisions hailed by the media and others not-so-hailed.

Richard S. Salant Comments

Richard S. Salant, president of CBS News, reflected the basic dichotomy which is an accepted cornerstone of American thought. The press and government are separate; the government must not try to influence the press. In a speech before the Arizona Broadcasters Association, shortly after the Des Moines speech, Salant explained his position clearly:

I hope I do not shock you if I turn Voltaire around and suggest that even if I agreed with every word the Vice President said, I question his right to say it. . . . What I am saying is that these issues should be debated and discussed—and I would be happy to sit down and discuss them with Mr. Agnew—on the day he is no longer Vice President of the United States.22

For Salant, the medium indeed had its own message.
And that message spelled intimidation. Salant rehearsed a number of circumstances which had recently occurred: Agnew reminding television that it was licensed ("the government has the power of capital punishment over us"), calling attention to the Red Lion case ("broadcast journalism has less freedom under the First Amendment than does print journalism"), and so on plus "all the other disturbing words and government activities." "Was all this innocent coincidence, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing but dialogue between citizen Agnew and the networks?" Salant felt not.

What makes the Vice President's speeches so disturbing, so unprecedented, is that for the first time in the history of journalism [Salant's emphasis], there was a comprehensive, angry attack by the government on licensed journalism.

Salant made it clear that "it is not the proper role and function of a free press merely to act as passive conduit, as cheerleader, or as an amplifier for official views or speeches of any group or individual." Approximately, one and a half years later, Salant spoke to the Iowa Broadcasters Association. Salant returned to his argument that it was dangerous for a high-ranking government official to criticize the media.

Whatever the particular points of agreement and disagreements with the Vice President, many of us were most disturbed that when we analyzed his words, we found what seemed to be an important and grave addition to the traditional tension between government and press. . . . What seemed to give his November speeches an alarming new dimension was first, the intensity of that attack, coming from the second-ranking official of this nation, and second, what his own words so clearly indi-
cated to us were elements of coercion.

However, in retrospect, Salant seemed to imply that the media had overreacted. "What on November 13, 1969, appeared to be a dark and threatening cloud turned out to be no bigger than a man's hand—or his mouth." In fact, Salant as much as said that the power of Agnew's criticism really came as a result of the networks decision to give Spiro Agnew prime time.

One must wonder how much of an effect it [the Des Moines speech] would have had if it weren't for the news judgments of the very networks which the Vice President attacked so strongly. After all, thanks to the cooperation of the local television stations here, ABC News, NBC News and CBS News, each exercising its own independent news judgment, carried it simultaneously on all networks throughout these United States—in prime time yet.

According to Salant, Agnew's criticisms "got as far as they did partially because we broadcast them as far as we did." In a personal letter to the author, Salant explained why CBS took the unprecedented step of giving a Vice President prime time for a speech before political constituents.

It was because my associates and I judged, when we received an advance copy at about half past two on the afternoon of November 13, that the speech was very newsworthy indeed. It marked a watershed in the relationship between the Government and the American press—and particularly broadcast journalism. Never before had there been such a comprehensive and systematic attack upon a branch of the press by so high a level of the Federal Government.

This evaluation was made by Salant in a letter dated July 30, 1974. Going back to mid-1971, Salant admitted that, though justified, the press had overreacted to
Agnew's assertions.

In the circumstances, I think that our alarm, and our vigorous reactions, were justified. But the Miami application ultimately was withdrawn, and now a year and a half has passed since Des Moines. No government action on the licensing front has been taken that can reasonably be tied to Mr. Agnew's attacks.31

However, in the light of Watergate, Salant seemed to hedge somewhat from his mid-1971 position. In a personal letter to the author, Salant stated that "many of the memoranda that came out in Senator Ervin's Watergate Hearings establish that the Vice President's speech was part of a White House pattern of attack on the press and on us."32

The Fred W. Friendly Analysis

No analysis of network officials' reactions to Agnew's speech would be complete, however, without a word from Fred W. Friendly. Friendly, the former president of CBS News and the author of Due to Circumstances Beyond Our Control, has acquired a reputation almost as legendary as his sometimes co-worker, Edward R. Murrow. In fact, Friendly is currently Edward R. Murrow professor of broadcast journalism at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism. In a speech given at California Institute of Technology just a week after Agnew's Des Moines speech, Friendly scored Agnew for wanting bland commentary.

For me, his speech was really about too little analysis. In fact, the Vice President may have provided a most valuable service in his Des Moines speech. He sharpened an issue that has been diffuse for too long, inviting us all to consider once again the state of broadcast journalism. Agnew and I share the view that television journalism leaves something to be de-
si red. We both fear the concentration of great power in a few individuals in the broadcasting industry. But we are apparently in profound disagreement on not only the nature of the networks' coverage of President Nixon's Vietnam address, but even more importantly, on our crying need for more, not less, interpretive reporting. We require bolder, not blander illumination of the issues that divide men of reason.

Friendly saw Agnew's speech as a call for the media to become "a conduit for the views of the government, or merely a reflector of public opinion." In that sense, he was equating "fairness and the possession of great power with the obligation to conformity." In answer to Agnew's criticism of having Averell Harriman parse Nixon's Vietnam address, Friendly stated the only thing ABC might be faulted for was for "not having asked him enough hard questions."

Of interest is the reaction of affiliate stations. According to Broadcast magazine, individual affiliates of all three networks privately "indicated widely varying reactions, ranging from general agreement with many of Mr. Agnew's criticisms to outright rejection of them." Officially, however, the NBC-TV affiliate board defended NBC. They called Agnew's speech, "a calculated assault on network news coverage" which "combined an appeal to prejudice with an implied threat to the freedom of government-licensed broadcasters to report the news."

Two contrasting view, once again offer the paradox of interpretation; two men viewing the same words and coming to opposing conclusions.
The more troubling [part of Mr. Agnew's speech] is his apparent belief that there should be a limit on the right of the American people to hear a full discussion and criticism of the administration in power, and his willingness to crudely wield the power of his high government office to intimidate a news medium that depends for its existence on licenses granted by that government.36

Contrast this with another local station, taking the opposing view in support of Agnew:

Those of us who have despaired of having anyone question the blatantly one-sided, biased news presentations of the television networks can rejoice in Vice President Agnew's attack on the networks, and the "handful of men who admit to their own set of biases." This has been a long time coming. Any fair-minded person who has sat night after night and watched the networks dish out their own peculiar interpretation of the news, and how only the side that they, and only they, want shown, has been sickened and disgusted.37

Who, then is the "fair-minded person?" Is it the one who agrees with Agnew and the editorial above or the one who agrees with Dr. Frank Stanton who disemboweled Agnew's speech? This same kind of paradoxical response could be seen between William F. Buckley and Thomas P. F. Hoving, chairman of the National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting. Hoving, to further complicate matters, was one of the most violent critics of the networks until he was forced onto their team by Agnew's speech. First a statement by Hoving:

Agnew's disgraceful attack . . . against network news officially leads us as a nation into an ugly era of the most fearsome suppression and intimidation.38

Not so for Mr. Buckley. According to him, Mr. Hoving's comments suggest that his "readings in history are not as extensive as his readings in art." For Buckley,
Agnew had hit the mark.

Mr. Agnew wrote a very good speech. It was, moreover, a balanced speech. He praised much of what the networks have done as extravagantly as if he were nominating them for President. But he said that the networks are also given to much bias. Specifically, he homed in on the elaborate rebuttal—that in effect was what it was—given to Mr. Nixon's Vietnam speech of November 3.39

Who is to be our guide—Hoving or Buckley? Whose view of reality is correct? Are neither? Or perhaps both? This problem of the shifting image of reality is nowhere more poignant than in the moves of the then new chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, Dean Burch. On November 14, 1969, the New York Times reported, "Burch Calls Networks on Nixon Speech."40 Burch had telephoned the heads of the three networks. He asked for transcripts of all remarks made by reporters and commentators on Nixon's November 3 speech. The request had been made on November 5. But when Agnew made his speech on November 13, Burch's action took on ominous tones of government intervention and potential censorship. On the next day, the 15th, the New York Times reported another sobering development. Burch had supported Agnew's Des Moines speech. According to the Times front page article, "Both the Vice President's speech and Mr. Burch's direct approach to the three network presidents were interpreted as significant departures from the traditional relationship between the Federal government and the news media."41 It appeared that the FCC was part of a plan, organized or accidental, to in-
timidate—if not directly suppress—television news.

Burch and the FCC Change Their Position

But then everything suddenly changed. On November 21, 1969, the day after Agnew's second media speech, the FCC unanimously stated that the television commentaries following Nixon's November 3, 1969 speech had met its fairness standard. What Agnew had lashed out against as unconstitutional was judged, by the FCC, as meeting the requirements of the Constitution. "The policy of the First Amendment," the FCC was quoted by the Times as saying, "to foster 'robust, wide-open debate,' . . . certainly permits the analysis of any one spokesman to be one-sided." Curiously, then, the view of the FCC was that the marketplace of opinion was to come about from a quantitative aspect of having many different commentators on various stations rather than from a qualitative difference with each commentator representing and voicing differing opinions.

The FCC thus had not departed from a reliance on the traditional relationship of government to the television networks. It had refused to authenticate the type of news to be carried, since it was considered a government agency. This, of course, forced the dispelling of any real or imagined feeling that the FCC was part of an administration plot to intimidate the television networks. It took some of the substance away from arguments that the Agnew speeches were part of an elaborate White House plot, along
Commentators Comment on Agnew

We have seen the network executive reaction to Agnew's Des Moines speech. What about the view of the commentators? In substance, they paralleled the view voiced by the executives. Both spoke out against what they felt was de facto or implied intimidation of the news media by the Administration.

"What does that mean, 'made'?," asked Mike Wallace in reference to Agnew's point that the networks should be made more responsive to the people. "He could have said, 'Perhaps it is time the networks became more responsive.' . . . It seems to be an implicit threat to station owners."43

Dan Rather of CBS News voiced this view of Agnew's Des Moines speech, "The speech makes me very sad. It's unworthy of the Vice Presidency and unworthy of him. Whatever he intended, that speech runs the high risk of having a demagogic effect, setting one part of the country against others, breeding distrust and suspicion."44

Eric Sevareid, of CBS, and well-known commentator, "Mr. Agnew would like those privileged to speak and write on these matters to reflect the majority mood of the country."45 Meanwhile, Walter Cronkite, the dean of television news commentators gave a well-rounded, but highly concerned speech, before a Sigma Delta Chi convention.
Mr. Agnew's attacks, of course, were particularly alarming because of their sustained virulence and intimidating nature. . . . Those who disagree with our news coverage have every right to criticize. We can hardly claim rights to a free press and free speech while begrudging those rights to critics. . . . We must resist every new attempt at government control, intimidation, or harassment.46

Howard K. Smith, ABC's Washington-based commentator, was the only one to defend the Agnew speech. In a New York Times-sponsored panel discussion which included John Chancellor, Walter Cronkite, Harry Reasoner and Smith, the latter gave the following view of the Agnew speech:

I did not disagree or oppose Agnew's original speech [in November 1969, assailing bias in some newspapers and networks] as much as I think Walter [Cronkite] did. It seems to me that if we give them hell they've got the right to give us hell. And he proposed no structural changes in the broadcasting industry part. . . . May I observe that we've planted seeds of doubt in the public's mind about the credibility of people in government. And I don't think it's bad if they criticize us. I don't think we're above criticism, as long as there are no specified restrictions on freedom of the press, which I think was basically the position of Agnew.47

Walter Cronkite disagreed in part. He saw the press as on the defensive, and in a posture which made it appear that to criticize government was to be un-American.

What has happened is that this Administration, through what I believe to be a considered and concerted campaign, has managed to politicize the issue of the press vs. the Administration. . . . We've come to that dangerous state now with the press in a position that to defend the right of the people to know—that is, to defend freedom of speech and the press—is to somehow or other be anti-Administration. Thus politicizing the issue they . . . have created two Americas—one that believes in freedom of speech and press and one that doesn't.48

John Chancellor felt that "We may all be doing our
jobs better because the Administration has accused us of being biased against them." It is easy to present an oversimplified picture of what these commentators actually said. Most of the opinions were studied and given with sincere concern for First Amendment rights. Still, in the light of subsequent history one can only say, "But thou protesteth too much and too long."

One who did not protest so much, was the already-quoted Howard K. Smith. He was, as pointed out, almost alone in admitting Agnew may have had some valid points. Of course, it should be pointed out that Smith had his reservations. "A tone of intimidation, I think, was in it [the Des Moines speech], and that I can't accept." But overall, he approached Agnew's comments in a positive vein. They are instructive for this thesis. Below is the gist of his thinking as given by Edith Efron in an interview with Smith, published in TV Guide.

Our liberal friends, today, have become dogmatic. They have a set of automatic reactions. They react the way political cartoonists do with oversimplification. Oversimplify. Be sure you please your fellows, because that's what's "good." They're pleasing the Washington Post, they're pleasing the editors of the New York Times, and they're pleasing one another. . . . If Agnew says something, it's bad, regardless of what he says. If Ronald Reagan says something, it's bad, regardless of what he says. Well, I'm unwilling to condemn an idea because a particular man said it. Most of my colleagues do just that. . . . The negative attitude which destroyed Lyndon Johnson is now waiting to be applied to Richard Nixon. Johnson was actually politically assassinated. And some are trying to assassinate Nixon politically. They hate Richard Nixon irrationally. . . . As reporters, we have always been falsifying issues by reporting on what goes wrong in a nation where historically, most has gone right. That
is how you get on page one. That is how you win a Pulitzer Prize. This gears the reporter's mind to the negative, even when it is not justified.  

The reader can form his own conclusions. Was Howard K. Smith right? Or is the opposite point of view, the one which felt Agnew was drumming up support for the Administration, intimidating the news media? That viewpoint was well expressed by Eric Sevareid in another TV Guide interview, this time with Neil Hickey.

What he [Nixon] did in the Agnew speech is just what President Johnson always said he'd never do. I can remember Mr. Johnson saying this privately more than once. He used to say to critical people like me that, look my friend, if I want to I can make this a patriotic issue and start calling a lot of names. I can drive you people right into a corner. I can arouse a great mass of people with a very simple kind of appeal. I can wrap the flag around this policy, and use patriotism as a club to silence the critics. ... And I think this is what Agnew's been doing. What this Administration has been doing. And I must say, it shook me a great deal.  

In Sevareid's view Agnew had "overstepped the line of a proper democratic dialogue," had advocated the "conspiracy theory of history," had given a speech which was made up of "irresponsible utterance" and wanted television to be "just a conduit for any government in power." Agnew may well have done all these things—including wrapping his criticism of the press in the American flag. But one point needs to be stressed again. The press was equally guilty of all these accusations. They, too, wrapped their defensive attack in the flag (we're the good boys protecting freedom of speech), saw a conspiracy in the Nixon Administration to suppress freedom of information,
themselves overstepped the proper line of "democratic dialogue" with inflammatory invective and really demanded that they were the "government" in power which had the constitutional right to be a "conduit" for all information reaching the public.
FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER IV


2 Ibid., p. 249.

3 Ibid., p. 250.

4 Ibid., pp. 250-51.

5 Ibid., p. 253.


8 Ibid.


12 Ibid.

13 Dr. Frank Stanton, statement in reply to Agnew's second media speech, Montgomery, Alabama, November 20, 1969, in Journalism: Readings in the Mass Media, Allen

14 Reuvan Frank, memo to staff, November 26, in Readings in Mass Communication, Emery and Smythe, eds., p. 320.


17 Ibid.

18 Ibid., pp. 15-16.

19 Ibid., p. 16.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid., p. 17.


23 Ibid., p. 12.

24 Ibid., p. 13.

25 Ibid., p. 9.

26 Richard S. Salant, speech to the Iowa Broadcasters Association, Des Moines, Iowa, May 21, 1971, p. 10.

27 Ibid., p. 12.

28 Ibid., p. 4.

29 Ibid., p. 5.

30 Richard S. Salant, personal communication to the author, July 30, 1974.

31 Richard S. Salant, speech to the Iowa Broadcasters Association, Des Moines, Iowa, May 21, 1971, p. 11.

32 Salant, personal communication, July 30, 1974.

34 Ibid.


43 Mike Wallace, comments on "Sixty Minutes," in Readings in Mass Communication, Emery and Smythe, eds., p. 320.

44 Dan Rather, comments on Agnew speech, in "Can Administration Cow TV Journalism?" Broadcasting, November 24, 1969, p. 55.


48 Ibid., S4536.

49 Ibid.


51 Ibid., pp. 324-28.


53 Ibid., pp. 331-35.
PART TWO

AGNEW VIEWS THE NATIONAL MEDIA
CHAPTER V

AGNEW DEVELOPS A PHILOSOPHY OF THE PRESS (1963-1968)

Any attempt at presenting a coherent and meaningful picture of how Agnew really viewed the media is dogged by several interrelated complications. First, is the current non-person status of Spiro Agnew. As has been shown by post-resignation comments regarding Agnew, his is not exactly the image of a man who means what he says. The problem is compounded in that Agnew's present standing must be compared with the backdrop of what he was thought to be -- a man who did mean what he said and said what he meant.

The second factor is the traditional symbolic roles which government and media play. The media portray an image of telling it like it is. They are the people's defenders. Politicians only speak to further their own image and standing. An axiom to follow, goes this reasoning, is never believe official statements. Could Agnew, then, have really believed what he said or were his speeches only given with political motivations in mind?

A third problem concerns the role of the observer. There is the danger of accepting the media's view of Agnew and confusing it for a truly Agnewian viewpoint. The observed one, however, probably does not view reality as does
the observer. And for the observer to assume his view of
the observed is more valid (than what the observed thought
of his own viewpoint) is dangerous. This has nothing to
do with a value judgment of the situation. Whether Agnew
was "correct" in his views of the press does not enter the
discussion at this point.

A fourth problem has to do with Agnew as a human
entity and also his relationship to events in which he was
embroiled. He was, as many politicians are, a complex in-
dividual. That he took bribes does not mean he was inca-
ble of high ideals in other directions. Because he may
have allowed himself to be used by Nixon does not mean he
was unable to use the situation in, what he felt, was for a
noble purpose. Humans, unlike many television characters,
seldom come in all black or white.

Beyond this, Agnew was caught up in an America ex-
periencing radical social changes. These were the days of
ghetto riots, mass demonstrations against the Vietnam war,
disturbances on college campuses, increasing crime and
widespread experimentation of drugs. As a public official,
Agnew was forced to interact with what appeared to be a so-
ciety ready to come apart.

Agnew and the Press

Agnew's relationship to the press must be seen as a
complex of psychological and practical motivations. For ex-
ample, his concept of the press must be seen and understood
in relationship to his position regarding dissent in a free society. The key event on this seems to be the Baltimore riots of April, 1968. But it was not necessarily the riots themselves which galvanized his opinion. Rather, it was a continuing negative interaction with moderate black leaders in the community which caused him to take an extreme position, to be discussed shortly.

There is also the political factor. Did Agnew take the hard line position on dissent because he knew which way the wind was blowing, politically speaking? There is disagreement among those who knew Agnew on this score. For whatever motive, Agnew's denunciation of the press was intimately related to his comments on what he felt were unconstitutional methods of dissent. The reader is urged to remember that Agnew had been a lawyer and, no doubt, brought with him a legal view of the media's role in society. (This will be discussed briefly in the conclusion.) To Agnew, the press was a bed partner of the violent dissenter because it constantly publicized his "unconstitutional" cause.

In all this philosophy and politics, Agnew's personal problems with the press must not be forgotten. One poignant example, previously mentioned, occurred during the 1968 Presidential election campaign. Just days before the election, the New York Times charged Agnew with not-so-honest conduct during his tenure of office as County Executive of Baltimore County and Governor of Maryland. Agnew
went so far as to purchase a full-page advertisement in the Times, attempting to refute the charges. In the ad, Agnew stated something which revealed his keen awareness of the mass media's central place in creating and destroying public images:

You know, when a man's reputation is bandied about by a large newspaper in the last days of the campaign, and he has no newspaper of his own to answer the libel /author's italics/, the whole thing becomes more than a little unfair. So I say to the editorial board of the New York Times: act with decency, act like men, act with intellectual honesty -- and for heaven's sake let in the fresh air!1

This ad, titled "The Truth Hurts at Times," reflected Agnew's personal hurt (and possibly fear of how close the Times really was). But seeing Agnew's view of the press as a sole result of his personal vindictiveness or straw-man tactics seems, in the light of Agnew's conduct and speeches, an insufficient motive force for his outspokenness. Neither is it fair to consider political Machiavellianism as the only factor, though it certainly played its part.

Rather, this thesis attempts a multi-dimensional explanation, with emphasis on Agnew actually holding and developing a constitutional rationale for his press denunciations -- and doing it, at least in part, because of a revulsion at what was occurring in America. By tracing key events and speeches throughout Agnew's career, it will become clear that Agnew was very preoccupied with dissent in America. He viewed the disturbances on campuses, the riots
in the ghettos and the increasing demonstrations against
the war in Vietnam as a dire threat to America's existence.
And, rightly or wrongly, he viewed some of the press as
either unwitting or willing allies of this disruptive dis­
sent.

Such a position can be seen as naive, seemingly
omitting the political voltage of such "patriotic" stands
in their appeal to Middle America. This motive is not to
be negated. However, a more complete explanation is seeing
Agnew as himself being middle class in his thinking prior
to his discovery that others in America agreed with his
views. In the final analysis, men act for reasons cynical
and altruistic.

Newspapers, for example, when they argue their ca­
ses before the Supreme Court (such as the Pentagon Papers),
do so as representatives of freedom. They conveniently do
not mention the fact that a series of articles under ques­
tion adds to the prestige of the publication and that it
sells newspapers, a not-so-selfless motivation. Still, in
all this selfishness, it is hoped that the press does have
a concern with freedom in America. The same benefit must
be given to an Agnew. While realizing that statements had
their political motives behind them, it would be a gross
oversimplification and distortion of reality to claim they
were made only for political purposes.

Early Ideas on Dissent and Publicity
This thesis holds that it is imperative to understand Agnew's view of dissent in a free society. Most of his comments regarding the media were given with this philosophical backdrop. Agnew had always given classifiers difficulty. Was he conservative or liberal? This was especially true in the matter of civil rights. Marsh, in his book, Agnew the Unexamined Man, long ago recognized that civil rights activists and others who found him inconsistent or unpredictable did so because they judged him according to an artificial classification rather than from the events in which ideas were expressed or decisions made.

Agnew has often been pictured as a civil rights moderate or even liberal who, following the Baltimore riots of 1968 turned into a conservative overnight. In fact, his position has always been the same. The circumstances in which that position has been held have, however, continually changed; and it is the shifting circumstances that have created the illusion of a change in substance.²

Very early in his political career, Agnew was connecting the media, publicity and violent dissent. On December 9, 1963, Agnew showed his preoccupation with the publicity which dissenters were able to generate. The speech was a civil rights statement to the Baltimore County Human Relations Commission.

The greatest enemies of effective, intelligent government are opportunists who have learned that a measure of popularity can be cheaply purchased by boldly assuming oversimplified positions on highly complex, volatile issues. But the real danger lies not with these chauvinistic self-seekers... but with their well-motivated but poorly informed sympathizers.³

Note carefully, how well Agnew understood the power
which an outspoken and controversial speaker has over the media, which automatically seem to offer wide publicity. Agnew would put such an approach to extensive use in later years. Unfortunately, he would find that if one is to get media attention, he too must oversimplify. Dramatization and oversimplification seem to be avid bed partners.

Something else should be noted in the quote above. Agnew's concern is with publicity, which obviously is press-generated. Rabble-rousers have no right to use the press in this manner. These people are dangerous to effective government. Publicity of such persons and their ideas attracts those who are uninformed and whips up their sympathy, creating mobs and mob rule. Here are Agnew's views on this problem from the same speech:

These average citizens, mentally fatigued after a day in the arena of private enterprise, are quick to seize upon the simple, clearly defined opinion and all too often prefer it to the enlightened viewpoint that focuses strongly in those troublesome gray areas of doubt. . . . So, unfortunately, many turn to the oversimplified demi-truths of the lunatic fringes of any emotional dispute. They proudly identify themselves as "liberals" or "conservatives," take predetermined stances on matters about which they have insufficient knowledge, and when controversial issues arise, generally make it extremely difficult for those in positions of governmental responsibility. 4

Even at this early date in his career, Agnew had some clearly defined ideas regarding dissent. For Agnew, constitutional dissent meant using the traditional avenues, including voting in officials who represented the dissenting viewpoint. However, this was to be sharply contrasted with "unlawful dissent." Agnew gave an example:
Open-occupancy legislation, the attempted crashing of private membership clubs, unlawful trespassing and unlawful demonstrating violate the civil rights of others just as clearly as segregation violates the civil rights of the Negro.\(^5\)

The key to Agnew's political philosophy was in the traditional manner. America is a constitutional democracy. It is the voter who chooses those to whom he entrusts the leadership function. Since the voter is, in a sense the pivotal factor, any political leader is a surrogate of his constituents.

This means, in Agnew's view, that an idealistic situation exists in practical fact. The political official's statements and beliefs on various policies which affect the voter really represent the voice of the people in a particular constituency. Therefore, to interfere with the elected official is to interfere with the wishes of the voter. Those dissenters, those who violate constituted law, or criticize politicians from a singular viewpoint are really fighting fellow citizens. Agnew voiced this kind of approach in a 1963 speech, in which he spelled out his concept of the elected official-voter relationship:

It is the county council and I who stand responsible to the voters of Baltimore County in all policy matters, and the authority that this commission is vested with comes through the elected officials by virtue of the fact that the voters have reposed certain confidences in them.\(^6\)

Agnew was still making the distinction between lawful and unconstitutional dissent three and a half years later. Rap Brown had visited Cambridge, Maryland in late
July, 1967. He counseled blacks to blow up Cambridge and burn down America. Riots soon engulfed this Maryland city. Agnew was irate. He issued a statement on how his government was to handle rioters and demonstrators. Within that speech, he made the following observation:

I believe that responsible militants within the Negro leadership should use every means available to place legitimate pressure on those in authority to break the senseless and artificial barriers of racial discrimination. But legitimate pressure -- the power of the vote -- the power of organized, political, economic and social action -- does not give any person or group a license to commit crimes. Burning, looting and sniping even under the banner of civil rights, are still arson, larceny and murder. . . . The problem-solving must be done by constructive militants such as the Wilkinsons, Kings, Youngs and Randolphs -- not by the Carmichaels, Joneses and Browns.7

There was nothing particularly original in such a philosophical stance. The importance of these statements lies in the consistency and vehemency with which Agnew voiced them. And further, it is important as the single most important backdrop for Agnew's war with the press. For in his eyes, the press increasingly condoned and publicized what he felt was unconstitutional and non-productive rioting and demonstrating.

Agnew and the April Crisis

The quote mentioned above came from a 450-word statement written by Agnew. Its title was "Civil Rights and Rioting." According to Albright, Agnew's then speech writer, Cynthia Rosenwald, vouches for the fact that Agnew wrote the speech himself and released it to the newspapers
almost verbatim. Thus, these were the words and thoughts of Spiro Agnew, not some anonymous speech writer or political hack.

This was a critical period of time for Agnew. According to Albright, after Cambridge, Agnew added a practical tactic to his political philosophy: isolate the black power militants. But, apparently, the moderate blacks' response was a disappointment. Albright quotes Agnew:

I expected that they would be incensed at the setback to what we were trying to accomplish caused by Cambridge. Instead they were very protective of Rap Brown—they would say things like "We don't agree with what he did but his motives were good."8

In Albright's view, putting it very succinctly, "Out of his disappointment came a speech that would shatter and then re-create his image on race relations as though he had hired a plastic surgeon."9 The speech to which Albright refers was one given on April 11, 1968. It was to be presented at a meeting of about one hundred of the most prominent Negro leaders in the city of Baltimore. This speech has been widely discussed and its cause diversely interpreted.

Suffice it here to say that this speech, though it may have re-created his image, was really nothing new in substance. Agnew held to his personal political philosophy without wavering. The new factor was the publicity which Agnew began to generate for himself. The publicity, however was symbolic; the actual words were little different.

Albright also mentions a "stinging editorial that
the *Baltimore Sun*" printed in criticism of Agnew after the Bowie State confrontation. The editorial accused Agnew of being too hardheaded in not meeting with student leaders and trying to make problems go away by decree. "To Agnew," says Albright, "it was like a slap in the face." At this point, it would be very instructive to quote some sections of this controversial April 11, 1968 speech. Particular attention is given to the recurring themes of Agnew's political philosophy already referred to, and his association of publicity with extremism. In later pages, these equations will be even more fully developed:

> It is deplorable and a sign of sickness in our society that the lunatic fringes of the black and white communities speak with wide publicity while we, the moderates, remain continuously mute. I cannot believe that the only alternative to white racism is black racism. Somewhere the objectives of the civil rights movement have been obscured in a surge of emotional oversimplification.

Interestingly, Agnew recognized that the so-called lunatic fringes were getting all the publicity. But he and the other moderates were mute, either from not speaking out or from not getting the exposure in the media. In that speech, Agnew emphasized that "blind militancy must be converted into constructive purpose." His greatest fear was a "polarization of attitudes as an aftermath of violence." These were already familiar Agnewian statements, to be made famous later.

**Personal Philosophy, Publicity and Motives**

Agnew, of course, got tremendous publicity mileage
out of this speech. It was carried in some newspapers and even eventually made the November 1968 issue of Reader's Digest, the largest circulation magazine in the United States, reaching millions of Middle Americans. Meanwhile the speech got immediate and strong exposure on both local and national television.

It is difficult not to speculate on Agnew's motives for giving the speech. Most writers who have written a history of Agnew's political career have done so. According to Albright, Agnew had simply "decided to go over the heads of the hundred black leaders and reach a mass audience on the evening news." From the point of view of Agnew's continuing speeches both on civil unrest and the mass media, it is clear that Agnew was frustrated--and increasingly so--with the publicity that was accorded to the extremists by the media.

We must certainly view this speech and its method of presentation before TV cameras, as at least in part, a shrewd attempt to get publicity for an anti-civil disobedience stance equal to that of the dissidents. It reflects Agnew's feeling that someone needed to speak out on the other side of the civil rights issue and do it with headline capturing force. The only way to get the headlines was to make an extreme symbolic stand in every way equal to the opposition's. It is obvious, that the statement under discussion, made to moderate black leaders, was an extreme one. Here is one paragraph from the address:
I publicly repudiate, condemn and reject all white racists. I call upon you to publicly repudiate, condemn and reject all black racists. This, so far, you have not been willing to do. I call upon you as Americans to speak out now against the treason and hate of Stokely Carmichael and Rap Brown. If our nation is not to move toward two separate societies—one white and one black—you have an obligation, too.14

It is hard to believe that Agnew, spewing forth constant chastisement throughout this speech, actually thought that the black leaders would publicly repudiate the black extremists. Though there is no way to ever conclusively prove it, certainly Agnew was an astute enough observer of human nature to know he was driving these leaders to the wall. Many actually walked out on him during the speech. This leads to only one conclusion. Agnew was not really interested in reaching his assembled audience; he was interested in reaching Americans in general with the message in that speech. The point of departure of this paper is that the author asserts he did so as much for solid philosophical reasons as he did for purely pragmatic, political reasons.

Agnew, meanwhile, continued to voice his thoughts on rioting and dissent. On August 8, 1968, Agnew gave his acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention. One excerpt reveals the same preoccupation with civil unrest:

What can I bring to this moment in behalf of our party and its great presidential nominee? Well perhaps a few objectives born of deep convictions. The objective to analyze and to help solve the problems of this nation without dependence on the canned philosophy of liberalism of conservatism. . . . The objective that
racial discrimination, unfair and unequal education, and unequal job opportunities must be eliminated no matter whom that displeases. And I believe quite compatibly the observation that anarchy, rioting or even civil disobedience has no constructive purpose in a constitutional republic.15

It indicates that Agnew's statements regarding civil rights were born of a basic philosophy that depended on constitutional principles. Also, Agnew once again rejected the ideologies of conservatism or liberalism as outmoded, "canned" and unworkable political starting points. For those who hold to such philosophies, Agnew was, indeed a paradox. He came down hard on those who tried to pigeonhole him or themselves in such a philosophy. In a U.S. News & World Report interview, he characterized himself as a "fairly moderate person." By definition, according to Agnew, this meant:

It is a person who realizes that this is a very complex society and that the extreme positions that are taken by the advocates of one philosophy or another will never give him the balance of knowledge that he needs to make sound judgments on these complex issues. I'm against the supersimplistic utterances of the demagogues who exploit our society. . . . I intend, when I go around to the cities in this campaign, to make sure that I make clear that I am for civil rights and that I am against civil disobedience. . . . In my opinion, I can be entirely for civil rights and entirely against civil disobedience. I'm for the right to demonstrate within the confines of free speech. That's a civil right.16

Most of the interview dealt with Agnew's renunciation of the "liberal" or "conservative" label. It represents another example of Agnew's continual assault on civil disobedience. And, right or wrong, Agnew's continual abhorrence of any extremist position. All this, of course,
is quite ironical. Because Agnew himself was forced to become an extremist attacking those who he felt were giving moral and publicity support to the dissenters.

The role of the press in all this was to dominate more and more of Agnew's thinking in the next year. Agnew would also work out his philosophy of political power even more minutely. But before we undertake an examination of this unfolding, one final statement made during an October 13, 1968 *Face the Nation* program gives us a clear statement of Agnew's view on the limits of dissent.

There is freedom of speech. It is defined by the constitution. It is construed by the courts. And the limits of permissible dissent are carefully laid out, and they don't include breaking the law and abrogating and violating the rights of other people. . . . we live in a representative society. We elect our public officials. They, in turn, appoint our jurists, and they construct our laws. . . . All I am saying is that the individual can't decide which laws he is going to obey or disobey but the courts will decide which laws are constitutional and which ones are not constitutional.17
FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER V


3Spiro Agnew, statement on civil rights to the Baltimore County Human Relations Commission, Baltimore, Maryland, December 9, 1963, in White Knight, Jules Witcover, p. 92.

4Ibid.

5Ibid.

6Ibid., pp. 94-95.


9Ibid.

10Ibid.


12Ibid.


14Human Events, p. 284.


16Spiro T. Agnew, exclusive interview with editors

CHAPTER VI

THE YEAR OF THE DES MOINES SPEECH: 1969

Spiro Agnew believed in the concept of political crisis, holding that political progress came from a clash of ideas. "For our history, our progress, can to a great extent be credited to the clash of ideas in Congress. Out of intellectual impasse, time and time again, we have seen compromise create whole new directions."¹ This statement was made on February 5, 1969 at a U.S. Senate Youth Program Luncheon.

Agnew also naturally believed that the system—the system of American government—could produce progress and results. A keystone to that system, in the Agnew view was that each man, each faction only had a part of the truth. The system endures "because it is founded upon one basic precept—no one has a monopoly on the truth." This is a key concept which helps us understand why Agnew feared the supposedly monolithic "liberal" press. To Agnew, the rationale behind a society in which each person was allowed open expression of his view "is to assure all ideas may compete in Congress and in the intellectual marketplace for the country's mind." Naturally, it followed that "every idea must be given every opportunity to be expressed and
Philosophically, then, Agnew appeared to be opposed to dogmatism. Not only opposed to it, but appalled by it.

If there is one reason why the elected official and the average citizen are so appalled by the kind of mind that extols violence or feels justified in closing down a college campus, it is because this is a totalitarian mind, a dogmatic mind. It presumes a monopoly on the truth and there is no greater menace to progress.

As we shall see, this was the key factor that rankled Agnew in his jousting with the press. He was disturbed by what he felt was unjustified sympathy for and unmerited exposure of radicals and dissidents given by the so-called "Eastern Liberal" press.

Furthermore, Agnew believed implicitly in the balance of power. "That's why ours is a system of checks and balances entrusting that no level or branch of the government with absolute power." In the press, Agnew saw a new power of incredible proportions, a power that seemed monolithic and unchallengeable. Again, that culprit was the "Eastern Establishment" press.

Agnew's View of "Dissent"

Agnew believed in "constructive dissent." But he saw the campus disrupters and the Mobe marchers as those who practiced a form of the "brutalization of the right to dissent." And, it irked Agnew that these so-called "brutalizers" were making the news and receiving all the publicity. "Of course," he said, "we are all familiar with the minority of youth which unfortunately has come to domi-
nate the majority of headlines." Thus, the press was a willing dupe of the implacable antagonists of the system. To work within the system was one thing; even to criticize within the system was tolerable. In fact, it was part of the method of government. "Our system is flexible enough to take criticism and take it to heart."5

But the rapid kind of "querulous criticism" was beyond the scope of the system. "Democracy cannot tolerate totalitarianism from any quarter. That includes the parricidal mouthings of a few highly-publicized malcontents. They constitute a violent movement that might be called, 'know-it-all-ism.'"6 Notice again it was not just malcontents that were the problem; but highly publicized malcontents that were to be feared.

The thoughts discussed above were stressed by Agnew in February, 1969. This occurred months before his so-called media speeches in November of that year. In March, Agnew continued his assault on the campus radicals and their relationship with the press. "While a radical campus element claims the most publicity, its notoriety is out of all proportion to its adherents."7 It was the publicity gained through the mass media that particularly disturbed Agnew. At this time, the role of the media was still discussed in an offhand manner, as a minor keynote of Agnew speeches. By May 1969, Agnew was becoming a bit more specific regarding the disaffecting role he felt the press was playing.
My speech tonight is the one President Nixon approved for this occasion. It's somewhat short... beginning with my name, mentioning my office, and concluding with my serial number. However, I plan to add a little something to it, just to see whether I have lost the knack for making a headline. After all, the press has to live too. Besides when you are thought to be too efficient, nobody pays any attention. It's only when you slip on the ice and end up with a bloody nose that the world takes notice.8

Several points are interesting in the paragraph quoted above. Agnew begins by making a statement that borders on effrontery to the President. Nixon "approves" his speeches. Agnew clearly doesn't like it. "Name, rank and serial number." I say only what I'm told. But I don't like it, Agnew says. I'm independent. "However, I plan to add a little something to it." The little something is the knowledge that he must throw the boys in the bus a little "red meat."

Agnew seemed to understand that he had to use the same methods as the dissenters if he was to get his ideas across, arouse interest and make a point. He talked about "making a headline" underscoring his understanding that only the dramatic makes news. The above speech occurred on May 1, 1969 in Phoenix, Arizona. The next day, Agnew had winged to Honolulu, Hawaii. He attacked the "panorama of criminal violence plaguing America's campuses."9 Inserted in the speech was a nice, 30-second clip which jabbed at the media. Many short excerpts of the speech are spliced together to give some idea of the content of this important and key address. It should give the reader an understand-
ing of Agnew's philosophy and his ire at certain segments of the press.

Originally, I had planned to discuss the accomplishments of the administration to date. . . . However, that is not what is on my mind today. . . . A body politic, such as our constitutional republic, cannot forever withstand continual carnival on the streets of its cities and--the campuses of the nation. Unless sage debate replaces the belligerent strutting now used so extensively, reason will be consumed and the death of logic will surely follow. . . . we have young adults hell-bent on "non-negotiable" destruction. . . . We have a vast faceless majority of the American public in quiet fury over the situation--and with good reason. Not one of these elements is constructive--compounded, they create first chaos, then repressive reaction. . . . There is damned little the federal government can do in this situation. . . . In America, constitutional government provides for elected officials responsible to their electorates to change the law. Accommodated defiance of the law allows cynical leaders responsible to no one to exploit the madness of a mob. . . . paving the way to the ultimate abuse that is totalitarianism. . . . This is the dilemma of radicalism in a democracy. . . . We begin by reaffirming our confidence in representative democracy. . . . We reassert the moral superiority of democracy. . . . The great moral strength of democracy rests with its refusal to equate politics with moral absolutism. In fact, morality is left to nonpolitical institutions--the home, the church, the school. . . . Government has no place providing a preconceived set of moral values to people. Rather in a democracy, government should reflect the values of the people.10

Agnew's position is clear. Government is amoral, and should not be criticized on the basis of right or wrong. It merely reflects the already existing morality of its citizens. Therefore, we must ask what is it the majority want and think. Though democracy is not a system for dispensing morality, yet it possesses moral superiority because it is the only system that expresses the thinking of its citizens. Being a constitutional form of democracy, it
provides that citizens express their preferences through elected officials. These officials embody and personify the will of the people.

This would also explain why Agnew wanted the press to reflect the majority will of Americans. That is, if that is what he wanted as the press claimed he did. Such a contention is hard to prove conclusively from Agnew's speeches and interviews. But back to the philosophical implications of the above speech. The laws elected leaders make, which become the laws of the land, merely express the laws the people want. The concepts which the elected officials hold, say in regards to Vietnam, are then identical to the ones which a majority of citizens hold. After all, it was the citizens who elected them.

Further, not all citizens agree on what is right or wrong. Thus, there will be debate among elected officials and the people on what course must be taken. That is why to Agnew, the kind of dissent which says, "Only my way works . . ." is dangerous. It subverts representative democracy. It says, "I am the way, instead I am a way."

"Belligerent strutting" and "continual carnival" destroy sage debate. Since the latter is the barometer of how well constitutional democracy is working, anything which destroys debate, destroys democracy. Of course, that is why, Agnew strongly believed in the need for dissent, as long as it was constructive. To have condemned him outright as one who was against dissent per se is perhaps too hasty a judg-
ment. Agnew clearly stated what kind of dissent he was against. His argument holds up fairly well when examined against the political philosophy of the American republic.

Now, since belligerent mob disruption is dangerous to a democracy, it follows that any segment of society which supports such disruption is also subversive to democracy. Enter the media.

The media comprise another American institution which must share in this drive for renewed responsibility. All too often the media have been too quick to assume that confrontation is a necessary catharsis to a sick society; to report wanton destruction in terms of noble causes; to publicize the least responsible leadership in any self-proclaimed crusade. The Fourth Estate, which would rise in righteous fury against any demagogue attacking freedom of the press, has been far more gentle with demagogues preying upon the estates of others in the established order.11

We must remember the time context of this speech. It is the first days of May 1969. Given the context of the speech, the basic philosophical nature of the address, this speech struck much more at the position of the media than the ones in November. In November, Agnew was accusing the networks and some newspapers of monopoly. Here he was implying they were actually subversive to freedom and democracy. However, since no specific newspapers were named and because the speech did not go live on the air, its real impact was blunted.

Democracy and the "Mob"

On June 7, 1969, before the graduating class of Ohio State University, Agnew returned to this same theme.
He characterized himself as "frank advocate of the American system" and as having a mission to "point out the case for American democracy." One significant paragraph tied the press in with the dissidents once more:

Democracy is above all a highly pragmatic system. It assumes truth is neither revealed nor absolute but arrived at through experience and open debate. It assumes all men have equal rights to publish their views and to affect their destinies. It assumes the more education society gives to its citizens the better the chance that they will hold enlightened views, pursue truth more perfectly and make individual and collective choices more intelligently.

In that speech Agnew contrasted the efficiency that totalitarian systems achieve with the liberty which rests with democracy. "Democracy's greatest flaw rests in its intransigent commitment to individual freedom." According to Agnew, "truth and wisdom are the products of freely competing ideas." Obviously, in order for ideas to compete, a wide array of opinions must be allowed access to the marketplace. Though groups may have disparate power, this force must be equalized so that all ideas have an equal chance to be heard.

This means understanding that the greatest threat to individualism is absolutism and the greatest menace to progress is a monolithic society. In the past year we have seen too many instances of self-appointed apostles of a new moral order seeking through force or violence to impose their will on universities. It has always been a free society's view that truth, not force, is the prevailing factor in progress. For this reason, our society has resisted philosophical absolutism just as vigorously as political totalitarianism. No one, no minority, no majority should dictate what should be thought or taught in this country.

There is an implied attack on the media. Who is
cal reality must have dictated some of the speeches in part. But Agnew's consistent discussion and belief in the principles of constitutional democracy make it hard to accept the contention that all his attacks on the media were Machiavellian. As we analyze Agnew's speeches chronologically, there is an unmistakable development of several themes. These themes form the backdrop of his fear that the mass media, indeed, did represent a threat to democracy.

The greatest single issue to Agnew was violence and blind confrontation. Campus violence, racial violence, political confrontation all signalled the first round of anarchy or absolutism, depending on which way events turned. More ominous than the violence per se, was the exposure of that violence. Beyond that, according to Agnew, was the feeling that the mass media were making a moral crusade out of the violence. Thus demonstrators became martyrs and their cause a holy war.

Still more ominous to Agnew was the control the mass media exerted. Contrary ideas were blotted out or not given a voice. On July 15, 1969, Agnew addressed the American Medical Association Convention in New York City. He hammered away at this point:

Passion without perspective is, to my mind, one of today's ironies. Blindingly illuminated causes are pushed recklessly to the foreground and, if sufficiently dramatized, are accepted as all-consuming, all-important. We hear much of "relevancy," yet the relative values of issues are rarely considered. The diatribe of a campus radical gains more notoriety than the deliberations of thoughtful men on far weightier issues. Today, our highly literate nation seems to de-
light in sensationalism and to dwell on it to the det­
riment of more serious, pernicious problems that need
solving.\textsuperscript{17}

Agnew gave the example of the environmental crisis
as an issue which had been neglected. Only a "crusading
writer" like Rachel Carson could "capture the imagination
of the nation." Normally, however, such continuing prob­
lems were overlooked for the "petty crisis of the moment."

What particularly worried and upset Agnew was not
so much the violence as it was the \textit{dramatization} of the
violence. This notoriety made it appear that the momentary
crisis was of larger proportions and of more relative value
than true crises.

\textit{Agnew Views His Role}

The question, of course, comes up in the following
words, "Well, yes, maybe those are words of some wisdom.
But, after all, was not Agnew just a mouthpiece for Nixon?"
Agnew, of course, did not deny that in general his role was
to hold up the hands and ideas of the President. In a \textit{U.S.
News \& World Report} interview printed in the October 10,
1969 issue, Agnew frankly admitted his subservient role to
the President.

My approach to the Vice Presidency, if I had to
summarize from a philosophical basis, would be that I
regard myself as supportive of the President. I have
no political ambitions to advance my own image while
I'm in this position. I came into it with a complete
knowledge that it was going to be supportive and ancil­
lary to his effort, and that's the way I treat it.\textsuperscript{18}

This, of course, does not mean that Agnew neces-
sarily cleared all media statements with Nixon or that he was only playing a Charlie McCarthy role in the Nixon Administration. In the same interview, Agnew was asked, "When you speak out on issues, are you speaking for the Administration, for the President?" Agnew's answer was the following:

I've never gone back and cleared with the President anything I wanted to say, because I assume that, if his position changes on a principal issue, he'll let me know about it, or I'll see it in a statement that is released, or that it will be mentioned in a policy meeting of some type. So I don't clear with him.19

When asked, whether the President expects his cabinet to "get in line with him" once a decision is made, Agnew answered, "Look at me: I get in line."20 There seems to be a paradox in these two statements. But they are only apparent. The paradox is simply resolved by understanding that both Agnew and the former President had relatively the same view vis a vis the press. In fact, it is probably the standard view most politicians in a particular office have of the press. The view springs from the relationship of the press to government, often called the "adversary system." Agnew summarized his view of the maltreatment of the press in the following U.S. News exchange:

Q. Mr. Vice President, do you feel that you have had fair and objective treatment from the press, from the media in general.
A. Of course not. Does anybody in politics ever feel that way?
Q. In what way have you been treated unfairly?
A. I think during the campaign last year, I was a lightning rod for the President. . . . I took some heavy sledding under the impact of one of the most effective political weapons, ridicule. I'm still taking
the spill-over from the last campaign. There seems to be a desire on the part of some people to portray me as some sort of Neanderthal man. This just persists. It's a hard thing to turn off, but I guess you develop a degree of skin after a while.

Q. How do you account for it in the first place?
A. It's a way to attack the Administration. It's an opposition device. It's not directed to me personally.21

Agnew took another swing at the press in this interview. The specific issue was the U.S. Conference of Mayors in Pittsburg. According to Agnew, the conference was very productive.

But the news stories that surfaced were the gratuitous comments of one or two Democratic big-city mayors, who thought it was terrible. It's hard to reflect an accurate impression of what takes place when some of the news media can selectively interrogate someone who would be assumed to have a hostile opinion, and utilize his statement as representing the entire group. That's a technique we run into all the time. I don't know how to cope with it, really. We tried to straighten it out with a letter to the editor. It never got published. The chairman of the Mayors Conference sent a telegram trying to set the record straight. That didn't get published either.22

Agnew would return to the specific criticism mentioned above in his November 13 speech slashing into television news. At that time he would berate the news media for trotting out Averell Harriman as one, in the words above "who would be assumed to have a hostile opinion, and utilize his statement as representing the entire group." This Agnew statement goes a long way to indicate that the November 13 criticism was not based on a single incident (the parsing of a November 3 Nixon speech on Vietnam) but that it sprang from more deep-seated philosophical animosity to this kind of journalism.
Events Leading Up to Des Moines

U.S. News also asked Agnew if "there was some Administration plan coming up to try to correct this sort of thing?" Agnew's answer was negative. "Not that I know of. We have a free press, thank God. I assume that, in time, the public will become aware of those who distort the news, because it clarifies itself in time." Of course, we are not obligated to believe either that Agnew accepted a free press or that the government had no plan to "intimidate" the news media. Whatever the truth of the matter—and the "truth" is most likely many-faceted—those are his statements.

On October 11, 1969, Agnew was in Montpelier, Vermont. He addressed a fund raising occasion. His comments are pertinent from two points of view. They continue the theme that the press is being abused by some of its practitioners and being used by the dissidents. Beyond that, another element is stressed: government must be returned to the people. This concept will figure prominently in Agnew's attack on the news media on November 13.

Freedom of speech is fundamental to our liberty, yet we have accepted flagrant abuse of this right. In politics we see most often the exploiter who uses absurd positions to advance his own failing career. A public official who minds his constituents' and the country's business has little chance for publicity. A public official who attacks the institutions he has sworn to serve makes news. It is a sad comment that the headlines are won by those who attack our nation as an imperialist aggressor or attempt to justify violence as an outlet for the aggrieved. . . . When
does it end? It ends when every individual and every institution in this country becomes conscious that this country is suffering from an acute citizenship gap—and moves to correct it. . . . The greatest reason for the citizenship gap remains the growth of the federal government. Big government means impersonal bureaucracy. When decisions are removed from the people, their sense of responsibility wanes. . . . The President has proposed reforms in government designed to restore the citizen to his rightful place in the American system—in control of his country. . . . They draw upon the strength and substance of the premise that it is those governments closest to the people that govern best. . . . For in a democracy it is not the government but the people who determine the future.24

This is one of the fullest statements of Agnew's (or the Administration's) political philosophy as to the relationship of the individual to the government. It is vitally important in relationship to the media. For on November 13, Agnew would charge that the central problem of the media is that they, like the Federal bureaucracy, were unresponsive to the wishes of the people. We shall examine this crux issue at the relevant time.

The date is now October 19, 1969. The place is New Orleans, Louisiana. Spiro Agnew: "A spirit of national masochism prevails, encouraged by an effete corps of impudent snobs who characterize themselves as intellectuals."25 Agnew has his thirty-second clip that makes national television. Suddenly, he is catapulted into national prominence.

Most of the speech is a dull, point-by-point recitation and justification of the President's policy in Vietnam, listing the gains made by the Administration. But the introductory remarks are cutting, appealing. Above all,
they attract the mass media. On October 30, 1969 Agnew is in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. He openly appeals to the American people.

A little over a week ago, I took a rather unusual step for a Vice President... I said something. Particularly, I said something that was predictably unpopular with the people who would like to run this country without the inconvenience of seeking public office. ... It appears that by slaughtering a sacred cow, I triggered a holy war... What I said before, I will say again. It is time for the preponderant majority, the responsible citizens of this country, to assert their rights.  

This appeal to the people now becomes a consistent theme. Meanwhile, Agnew once again underscores his verbalized belief in dissent, but not "street carnival" dissent:

I believe in Constitutional dissent. I believe in the people registering their views with their elected representatives, and I commend those people who care enough about their country to involve themselves in its great issues. I believe in legal dissent within the Constitutional limits of free speech, including peaceful assembly and right of petition. ... So great is the latitude of our liberty that only a subtle line divides use from abuse.

Agnew stresses the idea of separation. The true democrats dissent by using constitutional means; the demagogues dissent by despising democratic institutions. Agnew now begins to introduce the concept of "positive polarization" whereby the dissidents are to be "radicalized" away from the mainstream of America. It was an old Agnew tactic. He had done it physically in April 1968 when he allowed only respected and moderate black leaders to hear his diatribal speech.

We have just such a group of self-proclaimed saviors of the American soul at work today. Relentless in
their criticism of intolerance in America, they themselves are intolerant of those who differ with their views. In the name of academic freedom, they destroy academic freedom. . . . If in challenging, we polarize the American people, I say it is time for a positive polarization. . . . America cannot afford to write off a whole generation for the decadent thinking of a few. Americans cannot afford to divide over their demagoguery. . . . We can, however, afford to separate them from our society—with no more regret than we should feel over discarding rotten apples from a barrel.28

On November 11, 1969, Spiro Agnew spoke before the National Municipal League in Philadelphia. With the benefit of hindsight, we can tell what was to come on November 13, only two days later. Agnew told the National Municipal League that the "citizen was central" to the democratic institution.29 While admitting that the system was far from perfect, he counseled dissidents that they "should instead use the system to reform the institutions and establishments."30 Participation in democracy rather than the questioning of the system was the correct route. More important were his interesting comments on how politicians should present their programs for the best exposure:

There are formidable deficiencies in publicity and public relations techniques. And, fortunately or unfortunately, most of our citizens are conditioned to the dramatic Madison Avenue approach. Like it or not, the fact is that, until we produce a new generation of civic-oriented consumers, we can serve the total community best by following advertising techniques. Skillful presentation will not betray the integrity of a school bond bill. It is not beneath a businessman's or a candidate's dignity to launch an attention-catching campaign.31

Note again Agnew's preoccupation with "publicity," the "dramatic" and "attention-catching" devices. Agnew discussed an experience he had as governor in this connec-
tion. He saw what he felt was the "magnificent work" of a constitutional convention get vetoed at the polls because it didn't excite the electorate. "Our opponents stood by a good 'fear and fury,' hard-sell, radio campaign and defeated a superb document."32 In the Philadelphia speech, the media came in for its share of brickbats. The reader should observe Agnew's insight regarding the role of the dramatic in making an event newsworthy.

I recognize that the subtleties of everyday government cannot compete with an axe murder. I know that reporters thrive on political controversy and publishers have to sell newspapers. But freedom should be tempered by responsibility. Great causes extolled on the editorial page are often lost by reporting strident opposition on the front page while supportive but less exciting news is buried somewhere between the tire advertisements and the obituary columns.33

Meanwhile, Agnew counseled the hearers to counteract the mass street demonstrations. "We can blunt its adverse impact by seizing the initiative. . . . I for one will not lower my voice until the restoration of sanity and civil order allow a quiet voice to be heard once again."34 The "Mouth" would roar two days later and create such a bridgehead that it would not be wiped out until the Watergate scandal and Agnew's own resignation. It is now time to review that bombshell speech given in late 1969.

Agnew's Bombshell in Des Moines

Des Moines is in the heart of Middle America. Agnew stopped off there to address the Midwest Regional Republican Committee Meeting on November 13, 1969. He fired
a salvo at the television media that was to reverberate through the hallowed halls of Journalia for years to come.

It was a paradoxical situation. The speech condemning the major networks was carried live by the networks from Des Moines. Agnew, who had criticized dissidents for making statements guaranteed to bring headlines himself made statements worthy of headlines. It was to be expected, however. As we saw, Agnew had already counseled the use of publicity by elected officials. He was to be frank and blunt on this point. He would admit the use of a "throw-them-some-red-meat" approach several times in his career.

The former Vice President's comments at Des Moines sprang from a philosophical base which the reader has seen developing over the preceding months and years. Among the major tenets of Agnew's political philosophy were the following ideas:

1. The people rule. They elect representatives who reflect and embody the will of their constituents. It follows naturally that the expressed views of the officials are identical with the views of the majority of the electorate. Otherwise, the electorate would not have elected those particular officials.

2. Democracy is dependent on a free marketplace of ideas. These ideas interchange in controlled debate as defined by the Constitution. Truth emerges from this debate, not the barrel of a gun.

3. Violence and dissent which seeks to overthrow
the system rather than change it from within is non-constitutional. It is dangerous because it tends to stifle the debate by which a democracy progresses. Such stifling can lead either to a state of dictatorship or to anarchy if no force can prevail.

4. It is obvious that no group should be allowed the power which would make it capable of curtailing dissent. Neither should any institution be able to influence opinion to the degree that it drowns out contradictory ideas.

5. The mass media have become powerful and dangerous opinion moulders. In particular, the crisis rests with the media's penchant for overdramatizing dissent and then turning such dissent into a moral crusade. A corollary is that the national news media do not present the views of the majority because that view is alien to their own in-house political philosophy.

Out of this five-point philosophy grew Agnew's disenchantment with both dissent and the mass news media. From that disenchantment (plus hard political strategy), in turn, sprang the November 13, 1969 speech. Following are excerpts from the speech which show Agnew's thinking in the light of the points mentioned above. Short quotes are presented as independent thoughts.

*I want to discuss the importance of the television news medium to the American people.

*No nation depends more on the intelligent judgment
of its citizens.

*No medium has a more profound influence over public opinion. Nowhere in our system are there fewer checks on its vast power.

*Audience of seventy million Americans . . . was inherited by a small band of commentators.

*President of the United States has a right to communicate directly with the people who elected him.

*The people of this country have the right to make up their own minds and form their own opinions about a presidential address.

*The purpose of my remarks tonight is to focus your attention on this little group of men who not only enjoy a right of instant rebuttal to every presidential address, but more importantly, wield a free hand in selecting, presenting, and interpreting the great issues of our nation.

*We cannot measure this power and influence by traditional democratic standards for these men can create national issues overnight. They can make or break--by their coverage and commentary--a Moratorium on the war.

*One Federal Communications Commissioner considers the power of the networks to equal that of local, state, and federal governments combined. Certainly it represents a concentration of power over American public opinion unknown in history.

*These commentators and producers live and work in the geographical and intellectual confines of Washington,
D.C. or New York City—the latter of which James Reston terms the "most unrepresentative community in the entire United States."

*The American people would rightly not tolerate this kind of concentration of power in government. Is it not fair and relevant to question its concentration in the hands of a tiny and closed fraternity of privileged men, elected by no one, and enjoying a monopoly sanctioned and licensed by government?

*The views of this fraternity do not—and I repeat, not—represent the views of America.

*It is time the networks were made more responsive to the views of the nation and more responsible to the people they serve.

*The view of the late Justice Learned Hand [was] that "right conclusions are more likely to be gathered out of a multitude of tongues than through any kind of authoritative selection."

*As Justice Byron White wrote in his landmark opinion six months ago, "It's the right of the viewers and listeners, not the right of the broadcasters, which is paramount."

*Our knowledge of the impact of network news on the national mind is far from complete.

*Bad news drives out good news. The irrational is more controversial than the rational. . . . One minute of Eldridge Cleaver is worth ten minutes of Roy Wilkins.
*The members of Congress . . . are unknown to many Americans, while the loudest and most extreme dissenters on every issue are known to every man in the street.

*We would never trust such powers, I've described, over public opinion in the hands of an elected government—it is time we questioned it in the hands of a small and un-elected elite.

The Press in a Democracy—Agnew Style

These quotes amply demonstrate how the speech flowed out of a political philosophy that was either held or developed during the first year of the Nixon Administration (or even before). In that light, the speech cannot be viewed as only the product of sinister politics. That expediency may have dictated the remarks, is quite possible and, indeed, probable. Nonetheless, the remarks flow from a previously-held structure of political philosophy. In that sense, the words are built on a rationale of how American government is to be structured.

Naturally, the press sees reality from its own perspective. Many of the nation's media representatives saw the speech from the point of view of a threat to freedom of speech. Subsequent events, of course, show that the speech was hardly of great impact over the long run. And, it was television news which gave the speech an avenue for acquiring its impact. The reality of political events seems to play a balancing effect in American politics. What looked
like increasing problems for the press from government even to the mid-1971 Pentagon Papers crisis has now become a crisis for the government. Watergate is a case in point. And, Agnew, the great antagonist has passed from the political maelstrom. So has Nixon. But at the time of the speech, political reality looked different. The press could look forward to seven more years of Richard Nixon. And there was the implied threat (or so the media thought) of censorship in Agnew's rhetoric. Agnew, of course, never proposed censorship. He even said so many times. (Did he protest too much?)

I am not asking for government censorship or any other kind of censorship. I am asking whether a form of censorship already exists when the news that forty million Americans receive each night is determined by a handful of men responsible only to their corporate employers and filtered through a handful of commentators who admit to their own set of biases.36

There is reason, of course, to dismiss such statements as political sops. The Nixon Administration was not particularly characterized as open with the facts. However, in this case, there is also reason to believe that Agnew was philosophically committed to a belief in the freedom of the press. The paradox comes in from this factor or point of view: The Nixon Administration as any administration felt it had a mandate from the people. Obviously, it felt that the policy it was pursuing expressed the will of the electorate which put it in office. Thus, from the vantage point of the politician a press which criticizes is contradicting the "will of the people."
Naturally, and rightly, the press does not feel this way. Rather, it often assumes the role of watchdog over the government protecting the people's rights. Of course, both positions are rather idealistic, mostly unsupported by reality. Publishers have to sell newspapers and politicians have to get elected. In the attempt to sell papers or politicians, the will or needs of the people are often ignored. Assuming for the moment that the "will of the people" is a germane concept. But, at least philosophically, both are committed to their particular views of political reality. To denounce Agnew as a complete political creature and to disbelieve anything he said is probably a very extreme position to take. Better to evaluate the words and see if any cohesive political rationale in regards to the press is to be found. This author believes there is such a rationale, and that from the point of view of the politician, Agnew's stance has some merit to it.

Agnew really answered his critics in the speech given one week later in Montgomery, Alabama on November 20, 1969. Best known for its attack on the New York Times and Washington Post, the speech would better be remembered as Agnew's contention that a politician has a right--like any other citizen--to voice his disagreement with the press. After some short excerpts pointing out this contention, we shall see that his point has some thought behind it.

One week ago tonight I flew out to Des Moines, Iowa, and exercised my right to dissent. This is a great country. In this country every man is allowed
freedom of speech—even the Vice President. On Monday, largely because of this address, Mr. Humphrey charged the Nixon Administration with a "calculated attack" on the right of dissent and on the media today. . . . There were others who charged that my purpose was to stifle dissent in this country. Nonsense. The expression of my views has produced enough rugged dissent in the last week to wear out a whole covey of commentators and columnists . . . . I am opposed to censorship of television or the press in any form.37

Agnew, however, said censorship could come either from the government or it could be the result of the "choice and presentation of the news by a little fraternity having similar social and political views."38 Agnew repeated his central concern regarding the media:

The American people should be made aware of the trend toward the monopolization of the great public information vehicles and the concentration of more and more power in fewer and fewer hands.39

It was in this speech that Agnew attacked the Washington Post company media conglomerate—consisting of a major television station, an all-news radio station, one of the three leading newsmagazines (Newsweek) and the largest newspaper in the nation's capital—for "all grinding out the same editorial line."40 Comments from media people attacked the particular facts of Agnew's assertion. It is obvious that Agnew's "facts" may have been awry. But as David Brinkley has said, "What is a 'fact' anyway?" In like manner, when do you "debunk" a fact?

It seems we must address ourselves to the overall viewpoint being voiced rather than quibble about details or look for motives. Motives are, after all, complex and facts can easily be distorted. A central question, of
course is, does an elected official have the right to criticize the media? Or is the media to remain immune from government criticism while being allowed to criticize government?

With the advent of the electronic age and mass technology, a medium can become all pervasive. One network can blanket an entire nation. One magazine may have a circulation in the millions. One newspaper may command the focal point of the community. This is power. Beyond that, the press is admirably protected by the First Amendment: "Congress shall make NO LAW abridging the freedom of the Press. . . ."

Can Government Officials Criticize?

Often, the press has been thought of as the Fourth Estate of government, an equal partner with the Judicial, Executive and Legislative Branches of the American Constitutional democracy. Today, such a position is a reality. Since structurally, if not legally, the press has asked to be a part of the governance procedure then it, too, must come under scrutiny. Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely. There can be no denying that the mass media have power. That power can, and some would say, has corrupted the mass media. Criticism is not control. The latter would be disastrous to the media; but criticism can be a catharsis. So it was Agnew's contention that he had a right to dole out criticism as well as be forced to ac-
cept pummelling from the press. The following quote from Agnew points out his view.

One magazine this week said that I will go down as the "great polarizer" in American politics. Yet, when that large group of young Americans marched up Pennsylvania and Constitution avenues last week -- they sought to polarize the American people against the President's policy in Vietnam. And that was their right.

And so it is my right, and my duty, to stand up and speak out for the values in which I believe. How can you ask the man in the street in this country to stand up for what he believes if his own elected leaders weasel and cringe? It is not an easy thing to wake up each morning to learn that some prominent man or some prominent institution has implied you are a bigot, a racist, or a fool. I am not asking immunity from criticism. That is the lot of the man in politics; we would not have it any other way in this democratic society.

But my political and journalistic adversaries sometimes seem to be asking something more -- that I circumscribe my rhetorical freedom, while they place no restriction on theirs. . . . We do not accept those terms for continuing national dialogue. The day when the network commentators and even the gentlemen of the New York Times enjoyed a form of diplomatic immunity from comment and criticism of what they said is over. Yes, gentlemen, that day is past.

Just as a politician's words -- wise and foolish -- are dutifully recorded by the press and television and thrown up at him at the appropriate time, so their words should likewise be recorded and likewise recalled. When they go beyond fair comment and criticism they will be called upon to defend their statements and their position just as we must defend ours. And when their criticism becomes excessive or unjust, we shall invite them down from their ivory towers to enjoy the rough-and-tumble of public debate.

I do not seek to intimidate the press, the networks or anyone else from speaking out. But the time for blind acceptance of their opinions is past. And the time for naive belief in their neutrality is gone.

Many members of the press saw an open threat. What did Agnew mean, they wondered, about the "we shall invite them down..." Down where? And who were the "we"? Was Agnew speaking for Nixon? Probably, what shocked the press
most was that the second highest ranking government official was demanding that the rules of the press-versus-government game be changed. Agnew had asked a basic question about the role of the press in a democracy: Does our form of government really demand that government officials be muzzled and not allowed to make broadside blasts at the press? Does such criticism open the way for censorship? Or has mass technology changed the power relationship of the two antagonists? In a world where the media structure controls what the public hears, is the adversary system in need of revision?

Regardless of the implications of his speeches, Agnew stuck to his guns throughout the controversy which he had created. "I'm going to continue to say what I think is proper to say, and in the way I want to say it. And if I'm not reflecting the views of the people who elect me, I'm sure they'll let me know in the mail. And the mail doesn't indicate that" Agnew told the conservative U.S. News & World Report. According to Agnew, he gave the two famous media speeches because,"I kept looking for a balanced expression of opinion in the news media and I didn't find it." Agnew's specific beef with the networks and so-called "Eastern Establishment" papers was over the coverage of war protests. "I saw all the publicity about the Moratorium," said Agnew, "and the reasons why it should be supported and the accolades to the leaders of it." According
to Agnew, many began to demonstrate without understanding what they were demonstrating against—the foreign policy of President Nixon. "And, of course, this is playing right into the hands of Hanoi," Agnew added. At the heart of the issue was an emotional reaction experienced by Agnew over his view of the coverage of the war demonstrations.

I was affected to some extent by a feeling of revulsion over the kind treatment that's continually given those among us who downgrade the United States. You pick a typical Eastern newspaper and you'll see that someone who has broken into a building and thrown files out the window is referred to as though he's on a spiritual crusade. That he has broken the law is not discussed.

On November 28, 1969, Life magazine—a part of the Eastern Liberal press—took an extraordinary action. According to the magazine: "The most controversial figure in American politics accepts Life's invitation to explain himself." In the article, entitled, "I Did It on My Own," Agnew succinctly stated the relationship between his attack on the media and "unlawful" dissent. If Agnew is to be believed, he attacked demonstrators and media because of fears that continuing and increasing disorder would lead to either anarchy, rule by a strident few or outright dictatorship.

It was not that I suddenly launched a spiritual crusade nor that I was handed the White House standard, but that I was speaking my thoughts and that those thoughts abraded some revered dogmas of the Fourth Estate. I did not make my speech at New Orleans to accommodate the President or even the American people. I made it to fulfill my own conviction that a political leader should lead, should point out problems where problems exist and dangers where dangers exist.
Of course in our age of Watergate and our stereotype of what the politician is, it is difficult to believe such words. But then Agnew proved that at least in his outspokenness he was far from a typical Vice President. If we can visualize in gray rather than black and white—looking at a development of political philosophy over time—perhaps we can accord Agnew the possibility that, at least in part, he spoke out for the reasons he said he did.

Agnew made the distinction once more between "lawful dissent" whose right is secured under the constitution and "civil dissent" which is subject to some hard thinking. Agnew included non-violent civil disobedience in the unlawful category.

The most earnest advocate of nonviolent civil disobedience would have little sympathy for an activity which affected his right to gainful endeavor. I doubt whether the network commentator who feels empathy for nonviolent demonstrations would respond favorably should several militants anchor themselves in front of his cameras and refuse to be moved so that the show could go on.47

Agnew distinguished between "dramatic group activities which interfere with no law" and civil disobedience. The former is "clearly protected by the Constitution." On this score, Agnew made the interesting observation that in civil disobedience "the communication sought is not with the party triggering the complaint, but with the non-involved whom the demonstrators hope to enlist in their support."48

In December of 1969, Agnew was still defending the
point that his outspokenness against civil disobedience did not mean he was against freedom of speech. "Now, anybody who knows me, or has taken the trouble to read what I have to say, knows that I respect the right of dissent in America."\(^49\) At this time, Agnew complained that commentators and his critics were "ready to evade a debate by challenging the motives of the debater."\(^50\) It is this which the paper hopes to avoid without simply repeating the gratuitous statements of either Agnew or the press.
FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER VI


2 Ibid., p. 185.

3 Ibid.


5 Ibid., pp. 186-88.

6 Ibid., p. 188.


8 Spiro T. Agnew, speech during Trunk and Tusk Club dinner, Phoenix, Arizona, May 1, 1969, in The Impudent Snobs, Coyne, p. 204.

9 Spiro T. Agnew, speech at Young President's Organization, Honolulu, Hawaii, May 2, 1969, in The Impudent Snobs, Coyne, p. 207.

10 Ibid., pp. 207-209.


12 Spiro T. Agnew, speech before the graduating class of Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, June 7, 1969, in The Impudent Snobs, Coyne, p. 217.

13 Ibid., p. 218.

14 Ibid.

15 Spiro T. Agnew, speech at Loyola College commencement, Baltimore, Maryland, June 8, 1969, in The Impudent Snobs, Coyne, p. 222.


19 Ibid., p. 35.

20 Ibid., p. 36.

21 Ibid., p. 37.

22 Ibid., p. 38.

23 Ibid.

24 Spiro T. Agnew, speech at Vermont Fund Raiser, October 11, 1969, in The Impudent Snobs, Coyne, pp. 244-46.


27 Ibid., p. 258.

28 Ibid.


30 Ibid., p. 262.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid., p. 264.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid., p. 265.

35 Spiro T. Agnew, speech delivered to the Mid-West
Regional Republican Committee, Des Moines, Iowa, November 13, 1969, in "Television News Coverage," Vital Speeches of the Day 36 (December 1, 1969), pp. 98-100. All quotes which appear until the next footnote are from the Des Moines speech and are found in this Vital Speeches article.

36 Ibid., pp. 99-100.


38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid., pp. 273-74.


43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Spiro T. Agnew, exclusive interview with "Life" magazine, in "I Did It On My Own," Life, November 28, 1969, p. 34.

47 Ibid., p. 35.

48 Ibid.


50 Ibid., p. 275.
On February 1, 1970, Spiro T. Agnew once again appeared on *Face the Nation*. In that interview, Agnew wanted to make "it perfectly clear that there would be no continuing effort to harass or criticize the networks." One of the interviewers pointed out that Agnew was not a man to "advocate unilateral withdrawal." Therefore, wasn't it correct to assume that he, Agnew, thought he had "achieved a kind of victory" in his "struggle for change in the media."  

The "Mouth" of the Silent Majority?

At this point, Agnew stated—as he would later—that he viewed himself as the verbalizer for many frustrated Americans who had no vehicle by which to express their opinion. Agnew also underscored his dislike of one sided, media generated opinion.  

Well, it wasn't really an effort to achieve a victory. I simply saw perhaps coming about unwittingly an undue focus on one type of opinion, and I thought it was necessary to point out that there were other opinions within the country; certainly revealed by the support for the President's program in Vietnam that weren't being given sufficient attention. Once having set it, once having evoked the public response, I see no necessity for continuing it because, obviously, I was never advocating censorship.
Agnew credited the full broadcast of the speech for the publicity he received. He underscored his understanding of the media's power to provide a forum for the growth of personalities, images and ideas. When asked regarding his then "public image," Agnew retorted, "I don't regard these things with a great deal of permanency. Images change from day to day." \(^3\) How did he explain his favorable public image created by the same media he had criticized for painting a false caricature of his ideas?

Well, I really don't know how to answer that except to say that when fairness of anyone is called into question, he generally leans over backward to be fair. Perhaps I have had some pretty good treatment lately as a result of that genuine American reaction, to be extremely fair. But I think mainly, it has put me in the public eye a little bit more and people have looked in a little more depth at what I have said rather than rely on the usual practice of excerpting what might be able to be converted to the most sensational news. In other words, people did see the entire speech I made concerning the networks because it was put on live TV at prime time. Without that, with simply excerpt reporting of what I said, the same impression might not have come through.\(^4\)

In a sense, this was a left-handed compliment to the news media for presenting the full speech without commentary. At the same time Agnew acknowledged his debt to the media for providing the kind of exposure that made him a household word. In the same interview, Agnew once more eschewed any conservative or liberal appellation. "I look at Middle America as encompassing that broad spectrum of people who may be very liberal on one subject and very conservative on another," he said.\(^5\)

Paradoxically, 1970 would see the most vituperative
Agnew anti-media speech and it would also see two very conciliatory addresses. Overall, Agnew seemed to be less concerned with the media than with the political roasting of radical-liberals in government and university education problems. Earlier Agnew had stated that when demonstrators quit demonstrating he would tune down the rhetoric. Perhaps, there really was an equation between the two. At least, Agnew felt that in early 1970, some degree of stability had come to America:

You just take a look at the complexion of society in the country compared with last year and the year before that, and you'll see that a great amount of peace and stability has returned to the United States. . . . I think that the average American would agree that there is a lot more placid atmosphere in the United States since this Administration took office.6

It is quite clear from a number of Agnew's statements, that he was convinced his speaking out had much to do with the changes. In the same way, he felt that his attack on the media had really brought some changes in the presentation of news. Meanwhile, Agnew continued throughout 1970 to stress his philosophy of constitutional dissent. On February 12, 1970 he was in Chicago, Illinois. During a Lincoln Day Dinner he made the following observations:

The only worthwhile freedom is freedom under law, because freedom without law results either in anarchy or despotism. The principal source of law under our form of government is majority rule. . . . The limits upon free action in a free society are well expressed by the saying that one man's right to swing his fist ends where another man's nose begins.7

And when Agnew was attacking the press in early
1970 it was still on the basis that they were publicizing the kind of action—and morally supporting it—that, to Agnew, was clearly unconstitutional. He went on record once more, saying that he would refuse to still his voice until the dissenters stilled their rioting.

Tomorrow some commentators and editorialists will probably wonder how the tone of this speech can be reconciled with my blunt criticisms of student radicals and other sympathizers with violent dissent. The liberal media have been calling on me to lower my voice and to seek accord and unity among all Americans. Nothing would please me more than to see all voices lowered—to see us return to dialogue and discuss and debate within our institutions and within our governmental system—to see an end to the vilification, the obscenities, the vandalism, and the violence that have become the standard tactics of the dissidents who claim to act in the interests of peace and freedom.

But I want you to know that I will not make a unilateral withdrawal and thereby abridge the confidence of the silent majority, the everyday law-abiding American who believes his country needs a strong voice to articulate his dissatisfaction with those who seek to destroy our heritage of liberty and our system of justice. To penetrate the cacophony of seditious drivel emanating from the best publicized clowns in our society and their fans in the Fourth Estate, yes my friends, to penetrate that drivel we need a cry of alarm, not a whisper.8

This rather long quote sums up the essential Agnewian position. Agnew, obviously, viewed himself as a sort of latter day Jeremiah, stirring up Americans to fight the threat of a dangerous dissenting minority. It is the contention of this paper that the continued adherence to such a position over years indicates that Agnew may really have believed what he said. That it was also a handy political tool, utilized by the Nixon Administration for political purposes, is also indicated by the record.
But neither can it be handily denied that Agnew's image of himself as a true voice of the majority was one he used only for propaganda. The best any critic can say is that the question has not been resolved. The speech above also once again showed Agnew's feeling that the media often tended to be a willing ally of dissenters. As mentioned several times previously, Agnew believed that elected officials represented the views of their constituents. To him it was unthinkable that such a majority view would not be given at least the same amount of coverage as a strident minority view.

And though, by now, it appears almost as a cliche, Agnew constantly urged that "there must be a framework for justice." The framework was the Constitution. The constitution provided a representative government to enact legislation and a court to rule on this legislation. Work within the system; not against it was his answer. And, as usual, Agnew was rankled because of the exposure that dissenters were getting. Of course, rate exposure with publicity. Who grants publicity? The press of course. So an attack on publicizing dissenters was, in fact, an attack on the press. In a speech at the National Governors' Conference, Agnew addressed himself to this particular issue. Agnew had just stated that individuals of monumental ego, sequestered academicians who criticize the government, and other dissenters are still part of a nation whose government is democratic.
Why then, if these political phenomena are standard to a democratic government, should we be disturbed about them today. The answer lies not in the fear of the kooks or demagogues themselves, but in their current respectability. Never in our history have we paid so much attention to so many odd characters. Twenty-five years ago the tragicomic antics of such social misfits would have brought the establishment running after them with butterfly nets rather than television cameras. It's in the inordinate attention to the bizarre, this preoccupation with the dramatic, this rationalization of the ridiculous, that we threaten the progress of our nation.10

It is quite clear from these remarks, that Agnew felt the television cameraman was a more critical factor in dissent than the dissenter himself. Agnew's understanding of the central role of publicity in modern society is probably the chief reason why he continually felt he, Agnew, had to make headlines by inflammatory rhetoric and point blank attack. Said Agnew, "Gentlemen, I propose that all of us elected to positions of governmental responsibility should speak out forcefully and directly against the outrageous patterns of conduct which have become so fashionable of late."11 Although eschewing the appellation of conservative and liberal, Agnew was philosophically forced to put the confrontation in classical, political terms.

We can exert our governmental authority to protect the people who placed us in these positions of responsibility. This requires firm decisive action and a willingness to withstand the criticism of the liberal community who are presently so blinded by total dedication to individual freedom that they cannot see the steady erosion of the collective freedom that is the capstone of a law-abiding society. This, of course, means acting within the law.12

So much for division on clearly political terms.

Agnew also criticized the press for disagreeing with him on
the simple basis of his being Spiro T. Agnew.

I suppose I'm for this welfare program. A lot of columnists and editors, who up to this point hadn't made up their minds, are going to be against it because I'm for it. . . . Speaking of columnists, I'm trying very hard to get along with them. I want you to know that. Just yesterday I tried a new approach that seemed to work very well on one who'd been particularly nasty in his criticism of what I say. I treated him like a gentleman.13

Although this tactic may have worked in the first two weeks of March 1970, two months later the call-him-a-gentlemen concept had been kicked out the window by both Agnew and the press. In the intervening two months Agnew had been kicking university professors, administrators and dissident students around rather heavily.

The Attack from Houston

But on May 22, 1970, he turned his verbal sword on the press in a denunciation more bitter than the ones in late 1969. Certainly, this speech on May 22, 1970 at a Texas Republican Dinner in Houston should be classified as a key Agnew media speech.

In this speech, Herblock was dubbed "that master of sick invective."14 Agnew referred to a Herblock cartoon which pictured a National Guardsman carrying a box of ammunition. The political and social context was the aftermath of the Kent State tragedy. Each bullet had inscribed on it a piquent phrase from an Agnew speech. All but one that is. "That bullet was labeled 'college bums' in honor of the President," Agnew mused. "And they ask us to cool our
rhetoric and lower our voices."\textsuperscript{15}

The Vice President made two major points in the speech. The first was to counteract accusations that his rhetoric was dividing the country. Most of the speech was taken up with examples from the media showing how volatile their comments were. Agnew reiterated his position that he would not still his rhetoric until the media stilled theirs.

Lately you have been exposed to a great deal of public comment about vice presidential rhetoric and how I should "cool it". . . . Nowhere is the complaint louder than in the columns and editorials of the liberal news media in this country. . . . There is too much at stake in the nation for us to leave the entire field of public commentary to them.\textsuperscript{16}

And then came the examples of press rhetoric and inflammatory accusations. Agnew turned the argument of his press critics, that his language was inflammatory, back on the media.

The Washington Post, which constantly urges us to lower our voices, said after the President's detailed address to the nation on his decision to clean out the enemy sanctuaries in Cambodia: "There is something so erratic and irrational, not to say incomprehensible, about all this that you have to assume there is more to it than he is telling us." The Post may as well have come right out and said that it thought the President had lost his sanity.\textsuperscript{17}

The second major point Agnew made was based on a previously held philosophical stand. Agnew felt he had as much right to use the First Amendment privileges as the press had. No government official had ever quite so strongly challenged what the media has felt was its private domain.
In the second half of the speech, Agnew summarized the first point of his complaint and then went on to claim a place for himself under the umbrella of the First Amendment.

Ladies and gentlemen, you have heard a lot of wild, hot rhetoric tonight—none of it mine. This goes on daily in the editorial pages of some very large, very reputable newspapers in this country—not all of them in the East by a long shot. And it pours out of the television set and the radio in a daily torrent. After this summary of his complaint, Agnew proceeded to describe his position vis a vis the First Amendment:

It does bother me, however, that the press—as a group—regards the First Amendment as its own private preserve. Every time I criticize what I consider to be excesses or faults in the news business, I am accused of repression; and the leaders of the various media professional groups wave the First Amendment as they denounce me. That happens to be my amendment too. It guarantees my free speech as much as it does their freedom of the press. . . . I feel this way, there's room for all of us—the Vice President and the Press—under the First Amendment. There's room for our divergent views. And let's continue to express them.

Before summarizing some of the main implications of this speech, we should recognize one other statement which Agnew made in this speech. It was a minor motif, but nonetheless strongly put and important in understanding his position.

I also recognize there are many in the news profession—a group upon whom the country has to depend for an honest report of what is going on in this world—and that they are attempting to live up to this responsibility, most of them successfully. I exclude them totally from the criticism I make here. I compliment them for doing their jobs well under strong counterpressures, often within their own offices and among less responsible colleagues.

At this point in time, we are in mid-1970. On
June 15 of that year, Agnew gave one of two very important media speeches. The other was given on November 20, 1970. They are important in that they were both delivered to members of the media. The first was addressed to the International Federation of Newspaper Publishers. The one in November was given at the Associated Press Managing Editors Convention. Because of their importance, both will be discussed here.

Only One Side of the Story?

In the June 15 speech, Agnew once more underlined his belief that the press ought to be free. He also defended his right, under the First Amendment, to criticize the media. The third point he stressed was his frustration at a press which presented only one side of the story. The following quote, splicing together statements relative to the three points, will clarify Agnew's position:

"First, the matter of freedom of the press. It is the underlying principle of your organization. I strongly believe in it. Without a free press, the Free World that we know and strive to protect would not long exist. . . .

Now, my differences with some of the news media in this country have come not over their right to criticize government or public officials, but my right to criticize them when I think they have been excessive or irresponsible in their criticism. . . .

I now speak of responsibility in perhaps a broader sense, one of obligation to the public that you serve. To me, in its simplest form, it means telling both sides of the story. . . . As a government official, I find it extremely frustrating, for example, that only one side of the Vietnam war is being emphasized by some of our most influential newspaper and television networks and that, overall, their coverage comes off slanted against the American involvement in that war without any attempt at balance.21"
Agnew contended that it was the press' duty to inform, not persuade. He also, apparently felt that it would be impossible for any government official in America to "impose any form of restraint on freedom of the press." In this regard, he referred to an encounter with former President Lyndon Johnson who warned him against "taking on" the press with this pithy statement, "Just remember this, they come out every day; you don't."22

Of interest in this Agnew speech is his juxtaposition of Jefferson's statements on the press from 1787, 1803 and 1807. Agnew contended that Jefferson's idyllic concept of the press before he became President changed to a rather morose view midway in his second term. This reflected the same frustration of the current administration.

In spite of his mollifying remarks before the newspaper publishers, of course, Agnew still viewed himself as the Jeremiah of the silent majority. In an interview with editorial staff members of the Knight Newspaper group, which included the Detroit Free Press, Agnew stated, "I think what I'm doing is providing a safety-valve for a great many people who are terribly frustrated that they're not hearing this point of view. And it at least lets them know that someone else has the same concerns they have with regard to the need for a strong stance on protecting the American system."23

Writing Letters to the Editor
At about the same time, on June 23, 1970, Agnew felt constrained to write a letter to the New York Times. The letter criticized the Times' stance regarding the qualifications of Joseph Rhodes, Jr. to remain in his job. Rhodes had charged that "Governor Reagan was bent on killing people for his own political gain." Agnew turned the question around on the Times.

Ask yourselves, gentlemen, and answer honestly—what would your editorial reaction have been if a conservative person on a panel investigating police deaths from left-wing militant action stated, "Ralph Abernathy was bent on killing people for his own political gain?"  

Agnew concluded by asking whether such an extreme statement by a member of the government was not sufficient cause to demand a resignation.

Less than three weeks later, Agnew again made the New York Times. On the occasion, Agnew defended the idea of "constructive division." The guest editorial is off the subject of this paper. However, it does reflect Agnew's concern with getting his views across to the media, and being carried by that media. On August 24, U.S. News & World Report once again devoted space to another Agnew interview. Agnew continued with his line of reasoning, now well familiar to readers of this thesis. When he was speaking out against dissidents, Agnew was "dissenting to their dissent." The world as viewed from the "liberal" Eastern news media "gives one a distorted perspective." Reading those papers is "like going to a Greek Tragedy—
there's something wrong with the country on every page."
Agnew is not trying to stifle dissent, he's "merely trying to show how irresponsible . . . dissent really is." 26

Throughout the summer and into the fall of 1970, Agnew was on his mission for the Administration attacking the so-called radical-liberals. But even here, he was able to connect these radiclibs with the media. "As for the radical-liberals--they make the evening news, and they make their living by openly and flamboyantly undercutting the President's efforts to win a just peace in Asia." 27 This was in September 1970. The same month was also famous because of Agnew's confrontation with five students on the David Frost Show.

On the David Frost Show

The show did not directly discuss Agnew's confrontation with the media. However, it does point up the problem of interpreting information accurately. Paradoxically, Agnew fell in the same trap of interpreting spoken words from the observer's point of view as he accused his adversaries of doing. It raises the question of objectivity in our world, and how we can--and if we should--achieve such a verbal nirvana. In any case, during the Frost Show, Agnew reiterated his now oft-spoken complaint:

What is unusual to me is that it seems as though my rhetoric is always called into question, and yet the rhetoric of others who impugn my motives and my philosophy is never called into question. 28

One of the students, Eva Jefferson, who testified
before the Scranton Commission on Campus Unrest had the same complaint when Agnew accused her of endorsing violence:

I did not say I endorsed this, and if you read my testimony quite carefully you'll know that I didn't. And it is this type of just picking up on what allegedly I said, instead of really studying what I said, that really disturbs me about your whole process of going about and talking around the country.29

Agnew, of course, countered, saying that he had carefully scrutinized the record. "I read your testimony. I didn't go by the news reports. I read your testimony, and you did ... indicate that the only way to get results sometimes is violent conduct." Later in the show, Agnew again claimed Miss Jefferson advocated violence such as blowing up buildings. Again Miss Jefferson complained, "Sir, the disservice you do me is that you leave out the entire context in which that was placed."30 Sounds very much like a Spiro T. Agnew complaint.

And, of course, this is a central problem in the Agnew-media controversy. The media are forced to abbreviate, to rearrange, to edit, to extrapolate. Beyond that is the bias (or view) of both the reporter and the reader. Words not only have denotative value, they are also heavily laden with connotative values, meanings which are symbolic and personal. In a sense this was perhaps the crux problem, at least from Agnew's point of view: he was claiming that the symbols he used were not being interpreted as he meant them to be. "I'm disturbed with the way people jump
from a very carefully limited expression I might use to include a lot of people that aren't intended to be included.31 This from the same David Frost Show.

In order to correct the impression of his being anti-youth, Agnew took even greater pains to show that he was neither anti-youth nor anti-dissent. But the attack on the media as the publicizers of dissent and demagogues continued. On October 9, 1970, Agnew was in Phoenix, Arizona for another Republican dinner.

The thing that is most encouraging to me wherever I go I see young people, such as the ones here tonight, who come up to me and tell me how interested they are in another point of view penetrating through the prevalent opinion of the radical minority on campus that is so widely distributed via the mass media to the people of the United States.32

Ten days later the Vice President was in Chicago, Illinois. Agnew began his speech with some extemporaneous remarks not in the official version. He referred to 1960 when Lyndon Johnson and his wife were rudely spoken to by right-wing demonstrators. "The news was instantly flashed across the country," Agnew stated. Then, two days prior to the speech, President Nixon, in quiet far-off Vermont, "was the target of a shower of rocks thrown by young radical thugs." Agnew's complaint was the following: "The physical attack on the President, however, was buried in some news columns and went unmentioned in others."33

There was also the now-usual diatribe that the news media were just too concerned with putting over the radical's cause to the American people.
My friends, we are advised constantly by the sophisticated media to listen to these young radicals, to ascertain the message behind their unkempt appearance and their filthy words.34

The next day, Agnew had winged back to his hometown area, Baltimore, Maryland. At another Republican dinner, he took a pot shot at the Baltimore Sun. The speech opened with, "It's really great to be home—until, of course, the Sun comes out! This is the only place I know where being in the Sun doesn't make things a bit clearer."35 Agnew did admit there were still "a few salubrious morsels on the editorial page."36

On November 3, 1970 the election came. There is still some argument as to whether Agnew's rhetoric and campaigning helped, hurt or had no effect on the outcome. That is not the subject of this paper, however. During Agnew's two months of solid campaigning, most of his attention was diverted to attacking those the Administration did not want to see elected. Any jibes or comments against the press were generally off-hand, incidental and subservient to the main political motivation of the Administration.

Mending Journalistic Fences

However, on November 20, 1970, Agnew spoke before the Associated Press Managing Editor's Convention. It was one of the more significant "media" speeches which Agnew delivered. The speech was frank, reiterated well-known Agnew positions regarding the press and was generally cordial, with a bit of joviality.
I've really looked forward to this day. Here we have America's Greatest Menace to the Free Press, in the eyes of your profession, eyeball-to-eyeball with Censorship Unlimited. It was meant as a joke. For Agnew prophesied that after the speech, both sides would find they were "far more compatible than we would have thought." Agnew recited his familiar complaint of being misinterpreted. He showed how the phrase "effete snobs" had been progressively applied to people he had not meant to wear the title. Agnew then described the reason for the anti-media speeches. "My highest hope was to get the industry to appraise itself critically. I believe it is now doing that." He reiterated his anti-censorship position by repeating the statement disavowing such censorship in the November 13, 1969 speech attacking television news. "I stand by that statement," Agnew said. He emphasized and underscored his no-censorship stance by saying,

To the extent that censorship in any form exists in America, it rests solely with the media people, whether broadcast or print. You—and only you—determine what is reported and the emphasis it receives. As a public official who has been both gratified and dismayed by your news judgments, I would not have it otherwise. But I must underscore the awesome power that you hold and the trust placed in you by the public.

Agnew then proceeded to a point by point description of what he conceived "to be the strong and weak points of our free press in America." First, the strong points:

I have found newscasters and reporters, in large majority, as fair and as objective as they are emotionally and psychologically able to be, and I have found the great preponderance of them very conscientious in their calling. I have found most news accounts of my
deeds and words adequate and factual, indeed. Time and again I have found surprisingly complimentary coverage of my viewpoints by journalists who I happen to know do not suffer from ardor for Agnew.41

It was Agnew's most effusive panegyric of an institution he had shown little regard for. In his comments, Agnew extolled the American press as the "fairest, and finest journalistic complex in the entire world."42 Agnew admired immensely the entire process. The speech was obviously a fence-mending one, for never had so many positive remarks in so short a space been made by Agnew.

Agnew had three suggestions for the press. First, he said, "I wish the media would overcome their hypersensitivity to being challenged in return."43 A now old Agnew complaint, but a basic one, Agnew also suggested that "Many news executives would do well to give more attention to a balanced presentation of views on controversial issues."44 Not a particularly original complaint, either with Agnew or with other news evaluators. The third call for improvement was related and equally pedestrian in terms of its being cited so often as a weakness of the media, television in particular.

I urge more management attention to the continuing problem of segregating factual news from opinion—to confining opinion to the editorial page or prominently labeling it as opinion if it is run elsewhere. Newspapers, I find, work harder than TV, radio or the news-magazines to make this critical distinction clear to readers. But still we see slanted stories, whether or not the tilt is deliberate.45

Towards the close of the speech, Agnew admitted that the press can't be intimidated, urging it to use its
power thoughtfully and fairly. The speech serves as an inter­
esting counterpoint to the Houston speech in which it
appeared most of the news media could do no right. In this
speech, they seemed to have about reached perfection, with
only a few slightly imperfect corners left. As for Agnew,
his philosophy and complaints continued in the same vein,
even though the target emphasis changed dramatically from
one of railing accusation to pat-on-the-backism.
FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER VII


2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., p. 40.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid., p. 43.


11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.


15 Ibid., p. 333.

16 Ibid., p. 332.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid., p. 334.
19 Ibid., p. 336.
20 Ibid., p. 335.

22 Ibid., p. 342.


27 Spiro T. Agnew, speech at New Mexico Republican Reception, Albuquerque, New Mexico, September 15, 1970, in The Impudent Snobs, Coyne, p. 375.


29 Ibid., p. 90.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., p. 91.

34 Ibid.

35 Spiro T. Agnew, speech at Maryland Republican Dinner, Baltimore, Maryland, October 20, 1970, in The Impudent Snobs, Coyne, p. 413.

36 Ibid.


39 Ibid., p. 429.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid., p. 430.

45 Ibid.
CHAPTER VIII

THE YEAR OF THE TWIN "PENTAGON"
GOVERNMENT-MEDIA CRISSES: 1971

Agnew had ended 1970 on a positive note with the press, at least in one major speech. But the honeymoon with the press, if there ever was one, was destined to be a short one. The year 1971 would host two major crises between the media and government.

The first centered around the one-hour television documentary, "The Selling of the Pentagon." It was first aired on February 23, 1970 by CBS. The reaction, positive and negative, was immediate and volatile. Then, on March 18, Spiro Agnew entered the fray with a frontal assault on the program. The speech on that date would be a seminal one, repeating Agnew's now well-known stance on the media.

Even before the "Selling of the Pentagon" controversy had subsided, with its government accusations and press counter-accusations, a new storm of controversy broke out. The new crisis involved the New York Times. On June 13, 1971, the Times began publication of its "Pentagon Papers" series. Federal court injunctions stopped the presses, until the Supreme Court refused to uphold the injunctions which the Justice Department had secured against
the New York Times and Washington Post. Some observers commented that this was the first time the federal government had attempted prior restraint and had gotten federal injunctions to carry out the plan. Further, many in the press were unhappy with what they felt was something less than a ringing Supreme Court affirmation against prior restraint. For Agnew, of course, it was the kind of media-government conflict which he felt must be commented upon. And comment he did.

Before the press-government controversy exploded in late February, Agnew wrote a letter to the Times, published in their February 9 issue. Agnew took a contrary position to the idea that the President had an obligation to hold news conferences on a regular basis.

Eric Sevareid asserts that the President has "an inescapable obligation" to hold news conferences "since he cannot be summoned by either Congress or the Court and can, in this age of electronics, argue his case uninterrupted to the whole nation directly, and at times and under circumstances of his own."1

Agnew contended that the President is accountable to both bodies, this accountability being implicit in the system of checks-and-balances. Further, Agnew argued that the President had a right to argue his case uninterrupted before the American public when this is a right which "network commentators enjoy each day."2 At this point, Agnew suggested the following:

I suggested several months ago that it might make for better public understanding of "the news of the day" if those commentators who interpret the events for "the whole nation" were to be interviewed, on a volun-
Agnew also tried to rebuff the contention, voiced by Sevareid that "he has been on-the-air for thirty years and his views are known."\(^4\) The Agnew counter-thrust was:

> It is difficult to forgo an observation that Mr. Sevareid would not for an instant tolerate an evasion such as "my views are known," were a public official to offer this rationale in refusing to appear on CBS's "Face the Nation."\(^5\)

### The "Selling of the Pentagon"
#### And Other Agnew Complaints

Though an interesting point, it was to prove incidental, when on March 18, 1971 Agnew began pummeling CBS for its presentation of "Selling of the Pentagon."

In a Boston speech, Agnew began with a short discourse on the hollowness of the Vice Presidency. "As presently constructed," Agnew stated, "it may be compared to an adjustable easy chair. The occupant has his choice of either reclining sleepily or sitting up alertly."\(^6\) But Agnew said he had decided to change all that.

Quick Constitutional research revealing no authoritative reason why a Vice President is required to choose between catalepsy and garrulity, I forsook the comfortable code of many of my predecessors, abandoned the unwritten rules--and said something.\(^7\)

Having said this, Agnew began referring to such notables as the *New York Times*, *Time-Life*, *Washington Post* and Eric Sevareid. Next, Agnew had a few words for "the national news media" and what he felt was their erroneous claim for immunity from comment. Incidentally, Agnew at
this time clearly identified who he meant by "national news media." "By 'national news media' I mean the powerful news outlets having not just a regional, but a national impact." Agnew's contention that the news media should be criticized and that First Amendment rights do not protect said media from governmental criticism (as opposed to regulation) must be understood. It bears repetition at this point.

Such is the power of the national media today that of all our political, social and economic institutions, they seem to be able to cloak themselves in a special immunity to criticism. By their lights, it appears, freedom of expression is fine so long as it stops before any question is raised or criticism is lodged against national media policies and practices.

Agnew next turned to another familiar gripe of his. This was his oft-repeated charge that the national media give inordinate exposure to the dissidents.

Any extremist who dignifies our adversaries and devalues our traditions is sought out and spotlighted for national attention. He is interviewed as though he were representative of a large following and is treated with the utmost deference as he unloads into millions of American living rooms his imprecations against society and disrespect for civilized law. Such attacks against American institutions are editorially lauded as healthy demonstrations of freedom of expression in a free society.

At that moment in Agnew's speech, a young heckler interrupted. He was hauled out by authorities. In knee-jerk fashion the lights were turned on the dissenter and the cameras followed. Agnew couldn't resist: "And, incidentally, ladies and gentlemen, in a graphic and personal demonstration, did you notice where the lights and cameras
just went?"11

Agnew next took up his complaint that every time he commented on the news media, they cried "intimidation!"
Agnew then referred to a comment by Dr. Frank Stanton that no American institution, including news organizations, should be immune from public discussion or criticism. Agnew said, "I wholeheartedly agree."12 At this point, he told his audience that he wanted to examine some specific CBS works.

Proceeding from this premise, I therefore intend to discuss the public's right to know more about the performance of Mr. Stanton's network news organization in two cases involving documentaries.13

Agnew was quick to point out two things. One, he only meant to "raise questions" about areas of network news about "which the public knows little and needs to know more."14 What Agnew had done, of course, was to turn Stanton's argument on himself. If the media should be open to criticism, he, Agnew would do the criticizing on behalf of the public. The second point was political in nature. Agnew quickly strove to quash any accusations that his attack was politically motivated.

These questions do not originate with me, nor do they arise from any partisan political considerations. Others before me, including the Federal Communications Commission, a special subcommittee of the Congress and a former Democratic cabinet member, have asked Mr. Stanton similar questions, to no avail.15

Agnew, of course, was referring to the "Selling of the Pentagon" Documentary. He then began to register a number of complaints with it and two other documentaries,
"Hunger in America" and "Project Nassau." The various charges have been the subject of much controversy, pro and con. Agnew tried to escape any future criticisms of his criticisms by quoting the complaints of others regarding the documentaries. Regarding one attack on "Project Nassau," Agnew stated, "They're not my words, ladies and Gentlemen. They're the words of the man of the House of Representatives charged with this investigation."16

Agnew also attacked the news media for silence in commenting on any personal involvement in not-so-above-board dealings. "When the industry and institution involved is itself a part of the national news media, a strange silence and rare restraint inhibits the people's right to know."17 Which is an interesting point. There has been, for example, no hour-long documentary on the recent attempts by CBS to prohibit Vanderbilt University's Television News Archive from "renting tapes of the show [Walter Cronkite Evening News] (on a nonprofit basis) or sections from it to anyone who wants them, without permission."18

In his conclusion, Agnew took the usual claim of immunity which the media uses, that is, the people have a right to know and the media make possible this right, for his own use. Agnew having appropriated this slogan for himself, claimed that the reason he needed to speak out against the media was so that the people could know the facts.
My purpose, here, however, has not been to pillory or "intimidate" a network or any segment of the national news media in its effort to enhance the people's right to know. Rather it is, once again, to point out to those in positions of power and responsibility that this right to know belongs to the people. It does not belong to the national networks or any other agency, public or private. It belongs to the people themselves, and they are entitled to a fair and full accounting of the truth, and nothing but the truth, by those who exercise great influence with their consent. Let the people's representatives—not only in their government but in their national news media—also look, listen, and take heed.19

On this note, Agnew ended his speech. One point is very important. As we have seen, on several occasions, Agnew had strongly contended, in effect, that the airwaves and the printing presses, belong to the people—not the publishers and newscasters. Agnew constantly stressed the need to make the national news media accountable to the people. That, in effect, the people should somehow determine what they hear, as they determine who represents them in government. Or to put it another way, the First Amendment is for the protection of the listener not the broadcaster. Of course, the idea is not new. Agnew had gotten the idea, most likely from the august Supreme Court.

Who Is To Be Protected

On June 9, 1969, the Supreme Court ruled that the Fairness Doctrine did not violate the position of the broadcaster in relationship to First Amendment protection. The Fairness Doctrine requires that a person attacked on radio or television must have an opportunity to reply. What was novel and interesting in the Court's decision is
the following statement:

It is the right of the viewers and listeners, not the right of the broadcasters, which is paramount. It is the purpose of the First Amendment to preserve an uninhibited marketplace of ideas in which truth will ultimately prevail, rather than to countenance monopolization of that market, whether it be by the government itself or a private licensee. . . . It is the right of the public to receive suitable access to social, political, esthetic, moral and other ideas and experiences which is crucial here.20

This was the opinion of the Court delivered by Justice White.21 It is certainly the line of reasoning which Agnew consistently espoused in his media speeches. As early as November 1969, he was saying that the media are responsible to the people and that his speeches were only meant to make that media take a look at itself in relationship to that responsibility. In the recent speech quoted above, Agnew flatly stated that "This right to know . . . belongs to the people themselves." This in all its ramifications is a constitutional position, though obviously opposed to the constitutionally based position of the media.

And, of course, it should be recognized that stressing the relationship of the media to the people did not originate after June 1969 with either the Courts or Agnew. It is, in many ways, the classical Miltonian approach to a free press, now several hundreds of years old. Agnew, himself, expressed a similar position in early February 1969:

The whole point to providing and preserving a free and open society is to assure all ideas may compete in Congress and in the intellectual marketplace for the country's mind. Every idea must be given every opportunity to be expressed and examined in the belief that ultimately the best will prevail.22
This explains why in Agnew's thinking he was as much of a supporter of Free Speech as anyone in the media. But he felt that the media simply were not allowing the kind of balanced diet of ideas and viewpoints to the public which would allow a free marketplace of ideas. In particular, he constantly berated the media for its negative slant on the news. Agnew discussed one piquant, example of this in an April 7, 1971 speech in Los Angeles.

News: Which to Accentuate, Positive or Negative?

Agnew alluded to a poll taken by Gallup in which it was found that fewer Americans wanted to leave their nation than those interviewed in eight other nations. Contrasted, for example, with forty-one per cent wanting to leave Britain, only twelve per cent wanted to leave America. There was one problem with the low U.S. figure; it had doubled from the figure gotten in a similar survey in 1959. This is where Agnew's complaint was registered.

That's all that was needed to accentuate the negative. It was almost a reflex action. The headline in the New York Times said, GALLUP FINDS 12% WANT TO QUIT U.S. It was not "88% Prefer U.S." or "U.S. Lowest in Dissatisfied Citizens." It was, I repeat, 12% WANT TO QUIT U.S. And the same negative finding was emphasized in nearly every other paper I saw.23

Agnew then turned to Vietnam in chastizing the press. "The news coverage of that war has been preponderately negative in tone," Agnew stated. Case in point. There was little mention of the fact that Nixon had brought home 265,000 troops in a period of approximately two years.
Agnew admitted there were problems: "Of course there are great urgent needs to be met, which are not yet being satisfactorily met." But his point was that "it is all the more reason to work to correct those faults" but that certainly was "no reason to downgrade our country."24

Of course, the usual retort to this is that all Agnew wanted the press to do was make the Administration look good--talk about all the things President Nixon said he was going to do for America. And, since, the Vice President was Nixon's mouthpiece, he was not really interested in "positive versus negative" but in making Nixon look good.

Agnew addressed himself to this challenge a number of times. He admitted that he was philosophically and duty bound to uphold the express wishes of the President. However, he complained this did not mean that the ideas he expressed were not his own. In an exclusive interview with the conservative Chicago Tribune, Agnew again reasserted his independence of the Executive office:

Obviously, a Vice President who cares about his President isn't going to be making statements against the expressed wishes of the President--although I would remind some of my detractors that the Vice Presidency is a constitutional office and [the Vice President] cannot in effect be muzzled.25

Once again, Agnew stressed his major objections to the national news media: "The national media refuse to be criticized in any constructive form. . . . and upon being criticized, turn immediately to accusations of repression
Such repression may not even be in the mind of the speaker, according to Agnew. He may simply be trying to inform the public that bias can exist in the media. Agnew was then asked, "Have you ever called anybody on a commission and said punish NBC or punish CBS or have you ever taken any action ever to do something about the press or the media?" Agnew's answer was the following:

Never have, and wouldn't consider it, because my purpose, as I have said so many times, is not to regulate, restrict, intimidate, repress. It's merely to inform the American people that the media are not infallible any more than any other group or segment of society. . . . I wouldn't think of taking any steps, nor would I recommend legislation.27

Though this is an area for further study, there is no demonstrated proof that Agnew himself was involved in any attempts to directly suppress the press. When the government tried to muzzle the Times on the Pentagon Papers case and harrassed CBS on the "Selling of the Pentagon," there is no direct proof of Agnew's advocating or being involved in overt action. In retrospect, it must be admitted that the researcher can find little, if anything, to tie Agnew to any attempts at regulating the press. The one exception may involve subpoenaing reporters to divulge the sources of "leaks" in the case which led ultimately to Agnew's resignation.

Telling It Like It Is?

Someone may complain, "Well, it was the rhetoric in itself that was intimidating." "Intimidating" of course,
is a loaded word. What may be "intimidating" for one person, may only be "informing" for another. It must be admitted, however, that Agnew's rhetoric was forceful, blunt, direct. Nowhere was this more evident than in a May 18, 1971 speech Agnew delivered in Jackson, Mississippi. The curious aspect to Agnew's verbal barrages—is that he admitted that was his purpose.

Senator Javits, as might be his political habit, may "intimate" what he will. But I think that those who have followed my career know by now that when I hold an opinion or have something to say, I don't "intimate" it. I come right out and say it.28

And that is exactly what Agnew did in Jackson. He once again blunderbussed the national media. This time in reply to the contention that the Administration was pursuing a "Southern Strategy" for political purposes. Agnew, naturally, echoing the Administration line, claimed there was no "Southern Strategy." With that, he lashed out at the national media.

We all know what "Southern Strategy" really is, of course. It is a political phenomenon that is born in the suspicious minds of the liberal pundits and flung at an unsuspecting public via tons of newsprint and network rhetoric whenever a national administration attempts to treat the South on equal terms with other regions of the country.29

There were other innuendos about the press. The people of Jackson, Mississippi lived "outside the first strike capability" of the Post and Times. Of course, those in the Northeast residing in the "zone of revealed truth" were fortunate to rise "each morning with the editorial guidance" of superior intellects in the media. In this
speech, Agnew coined a new word, "mediamorphosis." That is, according to Agnew, hoodlums and lawbreakers were transformed by the media into "'kids' who are 'trying to tell us something, if we would only listen.'"30

Agnew returned to his usual defense. That he, even though a Vice President, had the right of free speech and could criticize the media if he chose. What disturbed Agnew, as usual, was the media cry of intimidation whenever it was criticized by those outside the press fraternity.

If by chance some outspoken public official who has totally lost patience with such fatuous nonsense--let's say, for purposes of argument, a Vice President who simply doesn't understand--if such an official were so insensitive as to disagree publicly with this media assessment--he isn't just exercising his right to dissent. Far from it. He's being "repressive." He's trying to "intimidate" the national news media.31

Agnew returned to his argument that just because a "demonstration is nonviolent doesn't make it right" and that physical obstruction of another citizen's right "is itself a form of repression of constitutional rights." Let the dissidents obstruct access to Times offices or CBS studios and "we insensitive simpletons who condemn such actions will gain some new allies."32

Speaking Before the Press

That was May 18, 1971. Less than two weeks later, Agnew was in Nassau, the Bahamas. The occasion was a meeting of the Mutual Broadcasting System Affiliates. Agnew chose the occasion for some more pointed comments at the press. Interestingly enough, in that speech, Agnew openly
admitted that the White House staff "place before me every article or report of a broadcast they can find that has been critical of me personally or that deals with some subject in which I have expressed a particular interest."

Herblock, previously characterized as "that master of sick invective" came in for another Agnew barb. "Let me observe here that if Herblock won't toughen you, nothing will." In the speech, Agnew in effect was responding to a "clutch of articles" portraying the "latest 'threats' to the news media from the government." Agnew also answered the criticism that what he meant by balanced reporting was to "tell it my way."

For your information, gentlemen, I have never said, "tell it my way or else." I have only said to the news profession, "Why don't you tell it like it is?"—not my way, or the chamber of commerce's way, or the radicals' way, or even the way you think it should be, but like it is.34

This, of course, gets to the heart of semantic theory: do words and situations have an intrinsic meaning or are they a product of individual viewpoint? Since the latter appears to be true, how does one tell it "like it is?" But if it can't be told like it is, can we allow a national media to tell it for someone else?

A constitutional scholar, who had recently written an article for the New York Times, came in for a rather lengthy piece of Agnew invective. At issue was the scholar's call to the press to fight back, and in Agnew's view, deny to the government an equal chance to wage battle.
Presumably the constitutional scholar would re-
strict the President to the use of a megaphone and a
mimeograph machine to get his views to the people who
elected him to head their government.35

Agnew then addressed himself to two, interrelated
points. Criticism, said Agnew, was not a unique character-
istic of the Nixon administration. Secondly, Agnew claimed
that there was no talk of attempting censorship and cer-
tainly no attempt to have any in the future.

Criticizing the news media predates the Nixon ad-
ministration. Sincere individuals in the past and in
the present, in both political parties and in the news
profession itself, have expressed grave concern about
excessive bias and distortion in the news media. . . .
It is not the administration but a Democrat-controlled
Congressional subcommittee that is pursuing the matter
of editing techniques used in the final production of
a recent television documentary.36

Agnew, of course, was referring to the investiga-
tion of CBS's "Selling of the Pentagon." Agnew was heavily
critical of the documentary in a March 18, 1971 speech. On
the one hand, he was apparently upset about some news ac-
counts of the controversy which would make some "think the
administration was sponsoring it."37 Then, he tried to
assure the press, he was on their side also.

Never has this administration or anyone in it ad-
vocated censorship of the press in any form. It might
surprise some of you, but you would find me among your
staunchest defenders if anyone tried to impose any
measure of censorship on the free flow of information
to the public, or on your right to criticize those of
us in government.38

Agnew also made a plea for some kind of "even-
handed presentation of government-related news. In one
sense, as he pointed out, the media was in the driver's
seat with government a passenger when it came to communicating with the citizenry.

We in government are wholly dependent on you who run the news media in this country to get our message to the people—in a straightforward and accurate manner, as undiluted as possible. Unlike most governments, this government has no newspaper or radio or television network to publish or broadcast its message, or to respond to what it considers to be bias or distortion in the presentation of its message. There is no Pravda or Izvestia or Radio Moscow, Radio Peking, Radio Hanoi, or Radio Havana in the United States of America. There's not even a BBC.39

We'll pause at this moment and see how words can be taken in any number of different ways. Let us assume Agnew is a well-known advocate and practitioner of press censorship. (As most media representatives went on record as saying.) What is Agnew saying? A paraphrase in the following words: "We want you to get 'our message'—our propaganda to the people. Don't 'dilute' our managed propaganda. This government, who would like to give out distorted facts, has no newspaper, radio or television station of its own, to 'publish or broadcast its message.' Therefore, we want you to be our Pravda, our propaganda mouthpiece. Send out our propaganda without 'bias or distortion' (read 'truth')."

Did Agnew really mean that in the way it can sound? Some would think so. Agnew, of course, disputed that claim. Reading in context we go on to the next paragraph.

But as tempting as it would be to me to have such an outlet to vent my ire some mornings, I'm glad we're dependent on a free and independent and honestly skeptical press to relay our message [that phrase again] and to report to the people on our stewardship . . . .
Like government, you will fail if you don't have confidence of the people. You should, therefore, guard that credibility with the same zeal that you would nail a politician who lies or exaggerates or distorts.40

Agnew closed his speech with another example, of what he felt was news bias. This concerned the VFW membership with over 400,000 members who had served in Vietnam. According to the national commander, the dissidents did not represent the views of the majority of the veterans. The commander told a Senate Committee he tried in vain to get its members equal time for the 120 minutes the networks had given the demonstrators. Then came the usual Agnew call for the press to clean itself up.

Gentlemen, if the representatives of the news media are sincere about their claims that they provide balanced news coverage why didn't they give Mr. Rainwater's large, established veterans' organization equal time with the dissidents and protesters? Why? One can reasonably conclude they didn't want the coverage to be balanced.41

In July, Spiro Agnew addressed himself to the Pentagon Papers case. He called the charges that the government had been "trampling with impunity upon the First Amendment Rights" as "propaganda--malicious, deceitful and false."42 To Agnew, such charges were a smokescreen to hide the real issue. What was that issue? Agnew put it in earthy terms:

Like a veteran burglar, being hauled in for his umpteenth arrest, the first thing the Times did on arriving at the station house was to accuse the arresting officer of violating its constitutional rights.43

Agnew called this a simple case of "swearing one's innocence and proclaiming one's virtue, while denouncing
the prosecutor." Why did the strategy work, in Agnew's thinking? There were two, interrelated reasons.

First, many, if not most American journals see the controversy as institutional in nature—a conflict in rights between government and press—and they have sided with their own. Secondly, the dominant media which controls how the controversy is presented to the American public, is itself, largely controlled, by soul brothers of the New York Times.

Agnew was determined to "present arguments that have not been fully aired" to the American people. His attempt was to eliminate what he felt was an "imbalance in the national news coverage." These, were by now, traditional Agnew arguments. And it cannot be the purpose of this paper to enter a "who-was-right" controversy. The Pentagon Papers case was fought with many issues, many very complex issues.

Some of the points, however, which Agnew raised are pertinent to the discussion. He claimed the Nixon Administration had nothing to hide as it was uninvolved "in embarrassing revelations about the Democratic administration" brought out in the Pentagon Papers. Agnew admitted that classification of documents had not always been done out of regard for the nation. This was really an astonishing admission.

I recognize and would readily admit, that within the Nixon Administration as in others, documents have perhaps been classified not for reasons of national security, but reasons of political security. This is a failing common to all Administrations.

However, Agnew chastized the press for revealing secrets that they had no right to reveal.
Who elected the editors of the New York Times to decide which government official secrets should remain secret from the world? The answer is no one. The Times has finally itself taken up the practice of civil disobedience it has so long excused in others.48

Thus, even into late 1971, Agnew was taking a "responsible government" position in relationship to the press. In September, after the Attica riots, Agnew attributed the riot to responsible voices remaining mute.

What happened at Attica proves once again that when the responsible voices of society remain mute, the forces of violence and crime grow arrogant. One need only recall the era of Hitler's Storm Troopers to realize what can happen to the most civilized of societies when such a cloak of respectability is provided thugs and criminals.49

Clearly, Agnew saw himself not as a censor of the press, but as a responsible voice of society. And, by speaking out, against the press if need be, he was preserving the very freedom for which the press was claiming to fight. Agnew's position was interesting. In the light of subsequent revelations in Agnew's life, it could be challenged that Agnew's intentions were not so noble. This, of course, remains an unproved point. We cannot infer out of hand that because a man takes a bribe in one case that in another, more philosophical area, his motivations are also completely Machiavellian.

There is also a further consideration in the point Agnew raised about Attica, about dissenters in the streets and so on. It is easy to accuse the government of "intimidation" and "censorship" and to compare any alleged attempt at suppression of press freedom by the Administration in
power with, say, Hitler's Germany. However, one point is usually missed. Hitler and his band of thugs started out in the streets. They were the dissidents of the late twenties and thirties. It is they who criticized the German government then in power. This really was Agnew's point. The point could not be dismissed, no matter how much one might rightly fear established government censorship. The press by publicizing demonstrators, rioters and dissidents in society could, conceivably, be contributing to a possible "Hitlerian" takeover. At least, this was Agnew's claim and many Americans agreed with his view.
FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER VIII


2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.


7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., p. 463.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid., p. 465.

17 Ibid., p. 466.


19 Agnew, Middlesex Club speech in Coyne, p. 466.

In June 1974, the Supreme Court ruled that governmental compulsion forcing publication of material in newspapers is a form of prior restraint and, therefore, unconstitutional. The Court, in Miami Herald vs. Pat Tor-nillo, held that "it has yet to be demonstrated how governmental regulation of this crucial process can be exercised consistent with First Amendment guarantees of a free press." See "Supreme Court Decision," Editor and Publisher, June 29, 1974, p. 6 for a discussion of this ruling. Spiro Agnew, of course, never argued for governmental intervention in forcing the press to print (or not to print) material. He did not publicly advocate this even in the electronic media which have not been granted the carte blanche given to newspapers by the Supreme Court.


Spiro T. Agnew, speech before the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce Luncheon, Los Angeles, Calif., April 7, 1971, in The Impudent Snobs, Coyne, p. 470.

Ibid., p. 470.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Spiro T. Agnew, speech at Mississippi State Republican Dinner, Jackson, Miss., May 18, 1971, in The Impudent Snobs, Coyne, p. 496.

Ibid., p. 495.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Spiro T. Agnew, speech given during Mutual Broadcasting System Affiliates meeting, Nassau, Bahamas, June 1, 1971, in The Impudent Snobs, Coyne, p. 499.
34 Ibid., p. 500.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., p. 501.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid., p. 501.
41 Ibid., p. 504.


43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid., p. 23848.
48 Ibid.

The year 1972 was a relatively quiet one for Agnew, perhaps the quietest one in his short career in national politics. It was an election year and Agnew, as part of the Administration drive, was cooling his rhetoric. That does not mean, as we shall see, that he had nothing to say about the media.

**Agnew vs. the Press: A Short History**

In 1968, Agnew had the October confrontation with the *New York Times* over alleged "improper" activities. The year 1969, was a pivotal one for the United States. There were mass demonstrations against the war in Vietnam and increasing disruptions on campus. The year culminated with the two Agnew media speeches in November which raised a national storm of controversy. 1970 was an election year, with the Administration seeking to gain control of Congress. In his consistent attacks on the "radiclibs," Agnew also smashed the press and liberal academics. This hard-line rhetoric kept Agnew in the spotlight. Noteworthy, was Agnew's blast against the media in a Houston, Texas speech.

Two major media crises occurred in 1971. The
"Selling of the Pentagon" controversy began in the second half of February to be joined by the Pentagon Papers flap in mid-year. Agnew, of course, had something to say about both while continuing a general barrage against the press. And, of course, in early 1973 Agnew faced a personal political crisis which resulted in his resignation in October of that year. During 1973 there was criticism of the press, particularly in relationship to so-called damaging "leaks."

This resulted in the subpoenaing of reporters to divulge the sources of their information. Agnew, of course, resigned before the confrontation reached critical stages.

In comparison, then, the year 1972 was relatively quiet. At least, it was so from the point of view of his shooting match with the press. However, there was at least one major speech that did criticize the press with Agnew continuing to blast the press on the same rationale as he had done previously.

In a March 1972 interview with U.S. News & World Report Agnew took issue with what he felt was a media-constructed idea that youth presented one, anti-government monolithic bloc.

The view that youth is a monolithic entity and that all or most young Americans think or act alike is largely a media myth. Who, for example, can say that a young construction worker or young policeman doesn't have more in common, at least in terms of electoral interests, with his fellow workers or policemen of all ages than he has, say, with a young person attending a university or of a different economic stratum.1

In the same interview, Agnew echoed his previously
cited sentiment: the press was not presenting a true statement of either his story or his criticism:

Sometimes it is difficult to get the merits of your position across, because the news reports of what you are saying sometimes center on the fact that you have criticized an institution or an individual or a procedure, without even going into the basis of your criticism. The whole news story is the fact that you did criticize somebody—and that's frustrating because you'd like people to know the reasons for your criticism.2

Interestingly enough, one of the more significant media speeches of 1972, was not directed at the media. Rather Agnew was sounding, as Gerald R. Ford put it, "a significant warning about a serious threat to academic freedom through the politicizing of the educational process."3 Agnew saw the same kind of monolithic, "liberal" bias in the educational community as he had noted in national news. In fact, he began his speech by noting this connection.

My subject today is a threat to academic freedom—specifically the threat to the availability of scholarly, diverse research products which arises because some intellectuals are attempting to impose an ideological conformity on American education.

Over two years ago, I directed public attention to the lack of diversity in the process of deciding what news should be presented to the American people, and in the singular ideological conformity of those who make news judgments for the television networks and most major publications of national impact.4

Later, in the speech Agnew devoted considerable comment to some findings by Professor Sidney Hook, who had discussed, in Agnew's words, "the conversion of formerly authoritative and objective sources of encyclopedic information into vehicles of propaganda."5 Agnew, of course,
saw the same kind of "conversion" in national news:

As has occurred in the area of news reporting, recent years have witnessed a growing tendency toward the "interpretive" rather than the "objective" in a number of research publications as well as textbooks of significant circulation. . . . Unless checked, such opinion imbalance, similar to that which affects our national news media, holds ominous implications. . . . The Sander Vanocurs have their doctrinaire counterparts in the groves of academe.6

Agnew's ire was particularly aroused with the manner in which one encyclopedia handled a description of attorney William Kunstler. In the encyclopedia, as quoted by Agnew, Kunstler was said to be "the last line of defense against the destructive forces of tyranny" and "his sincerity and devotion to his clients and to his causes." Kunstler was said to be "one of the most remarkable of this breed" which takes on unpopular causes and unpopular individuals. Agnew was particularly incensed that Kunstler was made out to be a saint, and Nixon, by comparison, was given short shrift.

A comparison only of the opening line in the Kunstler biography with that given the President of the United States is sufficient to draw the pejorative inference the editors intend: "Richard M. Nixon is President of the United States," they tell the young reader, "but he is above all a politician."7

Agnew next discussed the word "bum" which Nixon used for certain demonstrators who had destroyed a scholar's work at one well-known university. He saw as Hitlerian propaganda, the attempt to make it appear the President was calling all students "bums." Then Agnew tied in the liberal press, the leftists and the academic community in
one grand assault. Overtones of conspiracy theory were readily apparent.

The President has never applied that term /"bums"/ to protestors or young people, however. The contention that he did is simply one of those gross falsehoods in the propaganda arsenal of those latter-day Goebbels of the Radical Left who daily assault, not simply the President, but rather the institution of the Presidency itself -- an assault strengthened by the ready and all-too-willing cooperation of their ideological allies in the national news media and, as we see, the academic world.8

Agnew saw an inadvertent conspiracy by the nation's "mind managers" -- the Left, the university and the press -- to propagandize Americans. Worse yet, he felt that this unholy triumvirate was squeezing out other opinions. And, if anything, Agnew saw himself as a white knight halting this trend towards philosophical dictatorship by speaking out and offering a contrary viewpoint.

What I have urged is not the imposition but the elimination of ideological conformity; not censorship but freedom of inquiry; not the interjection of the politics of the Nixon Administration or any other administration, but the removal of current politics from American education; not bookburning but more books, covering every point of view and not just the propaganda of the view favored by the professor.9

Agnew had struck at those elements of American society -- the Left, the press, the university -- who saw themselves as representatives (and the last holdouts) of American freedom. Agnew accused them of destroying the very thing they claimed to be furthering: liberty and freedom. It is no wonder, then, that these institutions felt constrained to attack Agnew. In the same way, Agnew tore into critics of Nixon's Vietnam policy on April 21, 1972. The
occasion was a convention of the American Society of Newspaper Editors. Strangely enough, and what is of particular interest to this thesis, Agnew did not harangue nor eulogize the media.

Under calmer circumstances, I would have been inclined to use this opportunity to discuss the disproportionate impact on the American people of that relatively small and increasingly monolithic segment of the communications media that enjoys frequent nationwide exposure. But there are more serious matters before you as newsmen and before us as a people.

What Agnew failed to mention was that there were more serious matters before the Administration: critics were tearing apart Nixon's Vietnam strategy. Agnew saw this as a good opportunity to get across the other side. Getting this other side across consisted mostly of going back into the record to show that current "doves" were very much the supporters of the war in previous years.

Though Agnew did not have that much to say directly about the media in 1972, it is quite clear that he continued to criticize them on the same grounds as he had done previously. There is, therefore, little new to add regarding his relationship to the press. But 1973 brought forth from Agnew some very important media speeches which have not been sufficiently publicized.

Agnew vs. the Media: 1973

On February 23, 1973, Agnew spoke before the Minnesota Newspaper Association. His speech, "The Press and the Presidency" contains basic Agnewian observations on the
media. In particular, Agnew zeroed in on the press' contention that there was an Administration conspiracy to curtail its freedom. Agnew began his speech with the following words:

Washington reporters... always believe that each new administration is plotting an assault on the freedom of the press with a determination and malignity never before seen in the Republic; the iniquities of past Presidents fade quickly in retrospect.11

There was one unusual aspect to those words. They were not Agnew's as the former Vice President was quick to point out. They were written in 1965 by Arthur Schlesinger in his book, A Thousand Days. Agnew then read further, quoting Schlesinger on White House-press relations in the year 1962: "If a government official dared disagree with a news story, it was an attempt to 'manage' news."12

Agnew then assured his listeners once more that there was no plot on the press by the Nixon Administration. Agnew extolled the virtues of the adversary relationship as "not only traditional but healthy."13 He then pinpointed the rationale, which according to Agnew, justified and demanded that government should be allowed to criticize the press.

A pliant press is not carrying out its responsibility as an independent guardian of the public interest. Neither is a government that is pliant to the pressures of day-to-day headlines or editorial criticism necessarily carrying out its long-range responsibilities to the national interest.14

Though the burning rhetoric had been mollified with oil, the thought was substantially the same as when Agnew
told the "gentlemen of the New York Times" back in November 1969 that the day of diplomatic immunity from comment and criticism of what they said was over. He served notice on the press once more that comment and evaluation on how the media covered government affairs would continue to come from the White House. Only the tone was different. Instead of invective, there was a plea for understanding.

Why cannot a public official criticize the editorial advocates for emphasizing that which supports their opinions and playing down that which contradicts them? After all, editors are only human. They are subject to the same business pressures, need for peer approval and pride in the efficacy of their opinions that affect the rest of us fallible mortals.15

Agnew restated his position that the "Nixon administration is no more desirous of nor more capable of curtailing freedom of the press in America than any of its predecessors." Meanwhile, Agnew called for the existence of a "diversity of opinion." Such diversity, stated Agnew, was the "best protection against the danger of censorship -- whether it be suppression of information by the corporate giants of the national media." According to Agnew, the fundamental issue involved the interface between the rights of a free press and "other institutions and rights in a free society."16

No institution in a free society can operate in a vacuum. The interests of no single institution can be allowed to supercede the interests of all other institutions within that society. . . . Nor does any institution -- whether of government or the press -- have a monopoly on truth or on the zeal to pursue truth in the public interest. The genius of America's free society -- that which reflects the philosophy of our revolutionary Founding Fathers -- is the absence of such a
Though Agnew had consistently voiced these concepts and ideas, he was now directly pointing out -- from a constitutional viewpoint -- that the First Amendment was not absolute from an institutional sense. That is, the press could not stand apart and yet be in the system of American government. To Agnew, the First Amendment did not mean the press could freely criticize without coming in for its share of darts. The press would have to eat as well as dish out. Criticism did not mean "intimidation" and the media should not hide behind the constitutional skirt. Agnew was counseling the press to come out into the marketplace of controversy, be viewed and examined.

There was, however, an overall softening noted in 1973 in the way Agnew evaluated the media. We do have, unfortunately, the complicating factor of the investigation of Agnew's wrongdoing, with his subsequent resignation. In spite of all this, there did seem present, overtures by the Administration to bring about a meaningful and reasonable dialogue with the press. This, at the least, seemed to be the tenor of some Agnew speeches. However, on some volatile issues, such as amnesty, Agnew spoke out with his customary bluntness.

Just as their 'protestors' views on the war were magnified out of all reasonable proportion by their sympathizers in the media, so now are their views on amnesty being given unjustifiably solicitous attention. Scarcely a day passes when we don't find on the editorial pages of some of our prestigious national newspapers essays calling for amnesty.
The Harding College Speech

One month later, in mid-April, Agnew was in Searcy, Arkansas. He addressed the April Freedom Forum at Harding College. In his address, Agnew once again reiterated his basic philosophy regarding the interrelationship of press and government. He also called for a cooling of animosity and suggested a meaningful debate between members of the press and government. Perhaps it will be most helpful at this juncture to capsulize the main points of the speech with explanatory quotes from his speech.

1. Agnew reiterated his belief in the absolute necessity of a free press in a free society.

   Let me begin by emphasizing my conviction that free and unintimidated news media are essential to a free society.19

2. Agnew once again made clear his personal antagonism to any kind of censorship and stated that the Nixon Administration had a similar repugnance to any censorship.

   The idea of interference with the free flow of information to the American people, by Government or anyone else, is repugnant to me ... [Going back to a part of the speech already given] That is not only my conviction and my position, but the position of the Nixon Administration. I state that position with full knowledge that some well-known personalities in the opinion-making media believe and state flatly that the Nixon Administration is committed to their demise through a grand conspiracy to destroy their credibility.20

3. Agnew defined explicitly which "media" he usually directed his criticism toward. In this speech it was the "opinion-making media."
I do not refer to the typical newspaper or radio or television station. By "opinion-making media," I mean the media of more than local impact--the large newspapers and magazines which cover the Nation and the world with their own personnel--the networks--the wire services. Through their resources, multiple ownerships and wealth, they exert a clout far in excess of any combination of small media--even a combination with hundreds of times their circulation.21

4. Agnew blamed "advocacy journalism" for the current strain between the media and government and for what he felt was an insufficient diversity of opinion reaching the American people.22

5. Agnew directed attention to the enormous power the media wielded. This, in Agnew's feeling, was an emerging pattern that threatened freedom.

At the base of our concern lie several interrelated changes in media patterns and attitudes. These changes have occurred mainly during the past fifteen years and have led to the emergence of the opinion-making media as a formidable social force in our society. . . . But what is most troubling here . . . is the mind set which gives rise to it. And this mind set is the essence of advocacy journalism. Its practitioners, seeing a given result as right, act more in the style of lawyers developing a brief than as reporters. They ferret out and publicize principally those facts which support their own points of view--points of view which are considered by them to be revealed truth and the only ones that should be presented to the American people.23

6. Agnew issued a direct call for a dialogue between media and government. This was one of the first times that Agnew came out so positively for some kind of debate on the subject.

Government and media must put aside their visceral reactions and engage in a productive, intelligent discussion of their differences. The Administration is prepared to participate in such a discussion.24

Agnew addressed himself positively, and understand-
ably, to two specific raw areas between media and government. The first was the right of media to publish classified government documents obtained in an illegal manner. The second problem referred to reporter privilege is not revealing sources during grand jury or court proceedings.

Agnew admitted that he didn't "know how to fairly handle this problem of unidentified sources." He suggested that perhaps an unidentified source could simply be referred to as an "unidentified source" rather than being "embellished with the indicia of credibility such as 'a long-time State Department professional' . . . or 'people with no ax to grind who are in a position to know.'"25

The general tone and comment of the speech was not belligerent or faultfinding. It was constructive, and in many ways, beseeching towards the press.

**Agnew's Detente with Press**

Two weeks later, the Washington Post reported on another Agnew speech given to the Maryland Press Club. "Talks with Press Near, Agnew Hints," was the headline. Agnew was quoted as saying, "I do not apologize for the content of my earlier criticism, but I freely admit that it could have been stated less abrasively." Once again, Agnew asked that the hostility between himself and the press come to an end. Agnew called for an "intelligent discussion of the differences" between the media and the Administration.26 The same conciliatory tone, though peppered
with the old Agnew accusations, was found in an early May interview with U.S. News & World Report. Agnew said he wanted both parties to:

Bring about a restoration of an impersonal, if adversary, but fair relationship between governmental spokesmen and the media. This is tremendously important, because the only way that our people are going to be able to understand what goes on in government is if they get impartial reports uncolored by predetermined positions of those who are reporting the news. Now, I've said in recent remarks that I don't blame the media entirely for the situation. There's adequate fault on both sides. There have been times when rhetoric has gotten out of hand on both sides, and I include myself in that criticism.27

Agnew was obviously softening his line, even admitting personal shortcomings, unusual for a politician. The fence-mending comments, however, were accompanied by a new demand. Agnew admitted that a public man might relate a position on an issue that was "colored by self interest." The media man, however, was to "have confidence that what he's being told is . . . at least an effort at an accurate portrayal of the facts as they exist." Agnew was also telling politicians that they "must have confidence that what he /the media man/ is relating about his /the politician's/ position on an issue is going to be accurately relayed to the American people."28

Apparently, to Agnew this was not to be naive belief from both reporter and politician. Rather, Agnew seemed to be stressing the need for each participant to attempt maximum objectivity under imperfect conditions. The alternative to Agnew was no longer tenable.
When interviewer and interviewee sit down in a totally hostile and guarded environment where the object of the public man is to say as little as he can and the object of the media man is to wait for the opening and reach for the jugular, then the public interest is hurt.29

In spite of this idealistic call for honesty, the old Agnew burrs were still present. For example, there was the following answer to the question put to Agnew: "How would you describe your relations with the media today?"

I think they're about the same as they've been right along among certain segments of what I've characterized as the "opinion-making media." I see little improvement of their attitude toward me as an individual. I don't see anyone looking to examine what I'm doing. They're all fascinated with what I'm thinking -- particularly with what they think I'm thinking -- and I would much rather have them report what I'm doing and saying.30

The reader should not, however, lose sight of a very important symbolic reorientation that was apparently occurring in Agnew's approach to the press-government controversy. Agnew was stressing that both needed to make some compromises in the public interest. In the conclusion, we shall see that many media people were also expressing grave concern with the state of the adversary system. Meanwhile, Agnew admitted that the softening of his rhetoric had something to do with his maturity as a speaker.

I've learned a great deal about how to be less vulnerable, how to anticipate possible areas of attack in what you say and to make certain that you respond within your speech to those areas. That's a matter of an experienced debating technique. And maybe I won't be as vulnerable to the criticisms as I've been, because I will anticipate what may be taken out of context or distorted.31

At the same time, Agnew emphasized that he might
still make remarks which would give him the image of being the "cutting edge" or the "hatchet man." "I'm not going to slow down on the principles of what I'm saying," Agnew emphasized. "I said them because I really believed in them. And I believe in them just as much today as I did then."32 Interestingly enough, the day after the cover date on the U.S. News interview, Agnew blasted the press for having "transgressed the boundaries of propriety" in reporting on the Watergate scandal.33

Agnew made it perfectly clear that he did not like the way in which the news media had handled Watergate in general. So while Agnew was seeking a dialogue with the press, he nonetheless refused to muzzle himself on specific issues.

Broder Interviews Agnew

In June 1973, Washington Post political writer, David S. Broder, contacted the Vice President. Broder was seeking an interview regarding Agnew's new line on press-government relations. What had sparked the idea was Agnew's April speech at Harding College in Arkansas. Broder eventually talked with Agnew for an hour.

In the interview, Agnew complained about the press' penchant for "extrapolating one attention-getting segment and excluding the substance of the prepared remarks of a government official." That is, Agnew did not like the idea of the press using only "the red meat" he threw them; he
wanted to see something of the skeleton in print or on the tube. Agnew gave one piquant example. Agnew referred to his Harding College speech which began with a bit of quick levity: "Before I left Washington the President asked me to say a few kind words about John Connally, and I will -- but not today." But, said Agnew, this is how CBS reported it on radio that night:

I turned CBS radio on last night and this is the way my economic speech was handled: "Well, today it was politics as usual for Vice President Agnew, who had the following to say..." and on came what I just told you. Not a word about the forum, not a word about the subject of the speech.

Agnew discussed his old complaints -- monolithic viewpoint in the media, not enough balanced and thorough coverage of a subject, looking for the dramatic and not the substantive. There was one new point of importance. Agnew spelled out in detail his antagonism to the network "instant analysis" of presidential talks in new terms. The key idea centered around the "image" concept. Commentators had developed benign images; whereas political leaders had images that could easily make their statements seem cynical by comparison. Agnew's view was thoughtful and bears repeating in detail.

In my opinion, a person who comes into a living room every night with regularity as a news commentator, a network commentator, becomes a very highly respected and regarded individual, particularly if he's personable and as decent and nice as most of the people who appear on U.S. television. There's a credibility that flows to these people on the simple basis that the average listener says, "Well he has no axe to grind, why shouldn't he be telling me the truth?" There's an avuncular image, a benign image, that revolves around
a commentator. He is apolitical in their eyes, and he has a much firmer basis for being objective than someone who is in a position of political responsibility who is trying to explain why he took certain moves or why he didn't make certain moves. Consequently, you can't conclude that, to the average viewer, the analysis is regarded with the same degree of suspicion as the subject of the analysis. You look at a president and say, "Well, he has his administration's viewpoint, he's trying to justify what he's done." But these people (the commentators) don't have anything to justify. In the viewer's mind, they have no reason to go one way or another. Consequently, they are in a much more formidable position to react pro or con to what's said.

In other words, Agnew would say that when a television news commentator drags out F. Averell Harriman to comment on the President's speech, it is done under the guise of benign commentary. That is, Harriman is not identified as a political person in the viewer's mind since he is brought out by the apolitical newscaster. Meanwhile, the President is already recognized as a partisan political figure. Therefore, the President is at a psychological disadvantage from the point of view of image, and hence believability.

Agnew and Watergate

A few days after the Broder interview, Agnew gave a speech in St. Louis where he criticized the televised Watergate hearings. Agnew's main concern was with the lack of political safeguards. He singled out seven specific ways in which proper discovery of facts was being violated. The basic thrust of the arguments is outside the scope of this paper. However, the media did come in for some nega-
tive comments. "In the Watergate hearings, the witness is permitted to testify as to his inferences, his impressions, even his speculations," Agnew complained. In a judicial trial, of course, such opinion testimony would not be admissible as evidence. Agnew's main contention with the media was that it compounded the original error by mass producing such incriminating, but unproved, opinions.

The stark difference between the Watergate hearings and our basic concepts of justice came screaming out that night when the Washington Star's banner headline announced; "Felt Nixon Knew, Caulfield Says." The next day, the New York Times carried a similar banner on an inside page: "Caulfield Asserts He Believes President Authorized Clemency Offer to McCord."

This discontentment paralleled Agnew's assertion that one-sided opinion was harmful to the proper dissemination of information. While Agnew was addressing himself to justice and the press, a kickback scandal in which he was alleged to have been involved in began to heat up. Agnew first heard rumors in February that he might be involved in an investigation. In April, Agnew retained legal counsel. On August 8, Agnew was forced to issue a statement denying the allegations. Naturally, the press came in for some opening darts.

Because of defamatory statements that are being leaked to the news media by sources that the news reports refer to as close to the Federal investigation, I cannot adhere to my original intention to remain silent.

But the investigation continued and the evidence began to pile up. Meanwhile, Agnew decided on a fighting stance. In an address before the Los Angeles Convention
of the National Federation of Republican Women, the opening blast was once again aimed at the press.

In the past several months I've been living in purgatory. I have found myself the recipient of undefined, unclear, unattributed accusations that have surfaced in the largest and most widely circulated organs of our communications media.40

Agnew rounded out his indirect attack on the media in his October 15, 1973 farewell speech. He had resigned five days earlier, entering a nolo contendere plea to one count of income tax evasion.

Late this summer my fitness to continue in office came under attack when accusations against me made in the course of a grand-jury investigation were improperly and unconscionably leaked in detail to the news media. I might add that the attacks were increased by daily publication of the wildest rumor and speculation... The news media editorially deplored these violations of the traditional secrecy of such investigations, but at the same time many of the most prestigious of them were ignoring their own counsel by publishing every leak they could get their hands on.41

Agnew complained that his accusers, who were self-confessed bribe brokers, extortionists and conspirators had their stories "treated as gospel by most of the media."42 This, to Agnew, was a particularly dangerous travesty, especially in a technological age where "image becomes dominant" and "appearance supercedes reality."43 And so the end came for Spiro T. Agnew. He went out like he came in; swinging with both fists in righteous indignation. Though Agnew retired into obscurity, Watergate would not, casting a further pall over press-government relations. And in retrospect, because of personal misdoings, it may be well nigh impossible to accept what Agnew said on face value.
FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER IX


2Ibid., p. 40


5Ibid.

6Ibid.

7Ibid.

8Ibid.

9Ibid.


12Ibid.

13Ibid.

14Ibid.

15Ibid.
16 Ibid., S4535.
17 Ibid.


20 Ibid.
21 Ibid., S8036-37.
22 Ibid., S8037.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., S8038.
25 Ibid., S8037-38.


28 Ibid., p. 38.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.


35 Ibid.

36 Ibid., E3943.


38 Ibid., S10890.


42 Ibid., p. 99.

43 Ibid., p. 98.
CONCLUSION

AGNEW: SYMBOL FOR AN AGE

The purpose of this study was to describe the manner in which Agnew criticized the press and the press reaction to that criticism. The analysis of the content of criticism and counter-criticism was not an end in itself. Both viewpoints were presented through the eyes of the respective advocates in order to make manifest the underlying symbolic orientations.

As Theodore White and others have observed, the press and the Presidency are the two chief power rivals in America. The real question between Agnew and the press revolved around power: who was best in tune with America and who had the right to communicate with the national constituency. Here, then, was a fundamental aspect of democratic government -- the role of the press in modern, mass media America -- being vociferously argued over by the most prominent members of that fraternity and the second highest ranking government official in the nation. One would be hard-pressed to find in American history the equal of an Agnew in terms of his public and direct attack on a cherished institution.

There was also the phenomenon of Spiro Agnew him-
self. Agnew had been prominent politically only since the year 1966 when he was elected governor of Maryland. Yet, two short years later he was Vice President of the United States. More important was the image metamorphosis which Agnew underwent in a short time. From his nomination in 1968 and on through his first year in office, Agnew’s image was that of a rather doltish figure. Some examples of Spiro jokes make the point clear:

* Spiro Agnew: It's some kind of nut -- the kind you eat.
* It's some kind of disease.
* Spiro who?
* He's the Greek that owns the shipbuilding firm.
* A Greek bearing few gifts.
* Nixon's life insurance policy -- with Agnew waiting in the wings no one would dare shoot Nixon.
* Micky Mouse is wearing a Spiro Agnew watch.
* Apologize now, Spiro, it will save time later.

Then there were the verbal gaffes already cited in this thesis: the "Fat Jap" incident, his "if you've seen one city slum, you've seen them all" statement, his reference to "polacks." The Democrats took savage advantage of Agnew's image as an inept, bumbling oaf. Hoffman, in his book *Spiro!* refers to that famous 1968 Presidential campaign advertisement sponsored by the Democrats:

"Agnew for Vice President" reads the words on the TV screen. Then the sound track started -- first a titter, then a chuckle, then a belly laugh, finally a full-throated roar. Then silence -- and the words, "It would be funny if it weren't so serious."¹

It was part of the so-called "heartbeat" campaign of the Democrats. The theme was, "Can the nation afford to have Spiro Agnew a heartbeat from the Presidency?"² But
on went Agnew's foot-in-mouth disease. When asked if Jesus, Gandhi, Thoreau and Martin Luther King did not participate in civil disobedience, Agnew responded, "The people you have mentioned did not operate in a free society." Then there was the time he accused Hubert Humphrey of being "squishy soft" on communism. But "Zorba the Veep" as he was dubbed by the press, kept up the goof schedule. He accomplished everything from smashing golf partners in the head, to falling on the ice when greeting Nixon at the airport, to talking about "tightened sinews and constricted sphincters" at White House dinners for British royalty.

From all indications, Agnew would go down in history as Throttlebottom personified. He was the king of the faux pas, a man not to be taken very seriously. But then he had settled down in terms of trying to learn and master the complexities of his job. Still, Agnew was not particularly a man to be respected, certainly not to be feared or listened to.

All that was changed in late 1969. If anywhere, it began on October 19, in New Orleans during a speech in which he stated, "A spirit of national masochism prevails, encouraged by an effete corps of impudent snobs who characterize themselves as intellectuals." Those words which can still be recited almost perfectly from memory by many an admirer or disdainer, peeked the interest of the press. Agnew was suddenly becoming "news." He was making dramatic statements. Then on November 13, came the nationally tel-
revised "media speech" from Des Moines. Television had provided Agnew with a national platform for his views. With this boost, Agnew found himself becoming a national celebrity. Gallup Opinion Index Report No. 55 for January 1970 revealed that Agnew was the third most admired man in the nation. Though this can hardly be used as a reliable index of his popularity, there was no doubt that Agnew had struck a responsive chord in Americans of all ages and cultural groups. Letters and calls coming into television stations and government offices were decidedly in favor of Agnew. "Spiro my hero" bumper stickers began to adorn car fenders.

Who's Really Defending Freedom?

There were, then, two important phenomena to be considered: the rise of Spiro Agnew to national prominence and the raging controversy regarding the role of the media in America. There was a paradox in the latter. The reader who has studied both Agnew's criticism and the media reaction as described in this thesis is already aware of what it was. Both parties claimed to rest their views on constitutional considerations. Both claimed they were defending individual freedom and the people's right to know the facts. Here are parallel comments by Walter Cronkite and Spiro Agnew. First Cronkite.

"We're not defending a precious right of our own of freedom of speech and freedom of press; what we're defending is the people's right to know and we have to be in the front line of that battle at all times."
By way of counterpoint, here is Agnew's reference to the celebrated Red Lion case, handed down on June 9, 1969 by the Supreme Court. By aligning himself with the "constitutional" decision of the Court, Agnew was implying that he was on the side of freedom.

As Justice Byron White wrote in his landmark opinion six months ago, it's the right of the viewers and listeners, not the right of the broadcasters, which is paramount.6

As pointed out in this conclusion, Agnew as a politician saw himself as an embodiment of the people's will, demonstrated through the election process and the response he was getting to his attack on the media. Meanwhile, the media tended to deplore Red Lion and Agnew's criticism as potentially (or actually) violating the First Amendment, therefore being unconstitutional. Television in particular, observed Walter Cronkite, because of its being licensed by the government was "stripped of this constitutional protection," Red Lion being one of those decisions stripping away such protection. "Broadcasting's freedom has been curtailed by fiat through rulings of the Supreme Court,"7 feared Walter Cronkite.

Individuals or groups do not see a common reality. Humans interact symbolically. That is they interpret wording of speeches, events and what people represent based on prior reference points and meanings which are attached to those reference points. George E. Reedy, former Special Assistant to President Lyndon B. Johnson, put it well for

The political leader who rises to the top moves through a world which is sharply delineated between those who are helping him; those who are opposing him; and those who are uncommitted but can be swung in any direction. His success has been based upon the manipulation of these three groups to achieve what he regards as fulfillment of the national interest. . . . To persuade them that the press should be an exception would be pushing their credulity beyond human limits.8

The position of the press, and its view of itself, has been amply portrayed -- and will be discussed more in this conclusion. The author can now state the central orientation of this study, which he wishes to emphasize in the following sentence: 

*symbolic meanings determined Agnew's rise to prominence, the view he held of the media and the view of the media which media representatives hold.*

Every culture, or even component of society (which is not a philosophical congeries) possesses at its heart "prime symbols" or "philosophic presuppositions" which determine its reaction to words, situations and people. Pitirim Sorokin, perhaps the most influential macro-sociologist in this century, put it in the following terms:

>Cultural or superorganic phenomena have the "immaterial" component of meaning (or meaningful value or norm) that is superimposed upon the physical and/or vital components. . . . Without the component of meaning, there is no difference between rape, adultery, fornication, or lawful sex-relations in marriage, because the purely physical act of copulation may be identical in all these actions that vary so profoundly in their meaning and sociocultural significance.9

The press has a particularly deep-seated "prime symbol" by which it monitors its relationship to government. That symbolic reference frame revolves around
absolute autonomy. It sees itself as the only non-partisan element in the governing process. Only the press is capable of ferreting out truth and defending American freedom. Government, especially powerful government, is a threat to this freedom. No matter how diverse in their cultural heritage, geographical location, political background, any member of the press worth his salt must accept such a premise. Therefore, there must be total non-interference by governmental outsiders in determining the flow of news.

Autonomy: The Press Watchword

Many examples of this view have been cited in this thesis. But an article by J. Edward Murray, managing editor of the Arizona Republic, reflects this stance well. In an article entitled, "The Editor's Right to Decide," he stated the following:

Dr. Jerome Barron... firmly believes that either the courts, which is to say judges, or legislators or other government officials, which is to say non-editors, should become the final arbiters of what is a fair presentation of all points of view in a community. To me, this is simply pre-First Amendment thinking because it puts the government back in the saddle. It would make someone besides the trained editor the judge of the news... Why do so many people, from Mr. Agnew and the Silent Majority on the Right to Professor Barron and the liberal intelligentsia on the Left, want to tell the editor what is news, and make him print it or broadcast it.10

Murray bemoaned the Supreme Court's Red Lion decision as "a deceptive reversal of traditional free press." Perhaps the epitome of this autonomy "prime symbol" is expressed in John C. Merrill's book, The Imperative of Free-
dom: A Philosophy of Journalistic Autonomy. Interestingly enough, Merrill rejects all the common reasons which media people give as the rationale for a free press. He does not accept the view that the press is to be a "watchdog on government" or the "Fourth Estate of Government." Consistently, he rejects the idea that the press has a "social responsibility" to the citizenry.

The scoffer at this idea will insist, the people have a right to know. What gives them such a right? Where is it found? Certainly not in the Constitution. Yet, an unabridged press freedom to publish without prior restraint is in the Constitution. . . . Such a right, if it existed, would impose an obligation on the press to let the people know; this would thereby conflict with the freedom of the press to determine its own editorial actions. For a "free" press, constitutionally as well as theoretically, is one which can decide what it will publish or not publish. A people's "right" to know would abrogate this freedom.11

Merrill substitutes a collective right to know with an autonomous press right to publish. Thus, he would turn Red Lion around and claim that the First Amendment is for the broadcaster and not for the listener, viewer or reader. Whatever the rationale, the prime symbol of journalism demands that it be autonomous and free to do as it wills. (This is especially so in relationship to government per se.) With such a symbolic orientation, it is obviously hopeless for a government official to do anything less than appear "intimidating" when he criticizes the press.

Such a reaction by the press is the only one, in general, that it is capable of. (The same, of course,
holds true for the politician's "they're against us" view of the press.) The only way to change that reaction, is for members of the press to slowly adopt some new "prime symbol" which would allow for outside criticism in general, and government criticism in particular. This is exactly what Merrill fears the press is doing. He would see the "social responsibility" idea as the kind of philosophical concept which would undermine the press by allowing it to accept criticism and government intervention if it could be shown that it, the press, was not being socially responsible.

This is where Agnew, among other critics come in. Agnew demanded that the media be more socially responsible to the thinking of the majority of America. It fitted well with the politician's concept of his role in society, as discussed at the beginning of this conclusion. The electorate's right to hear is to be fulfilled by the politician elected to office, an Agnew would say. Agnew, as a politician, naturally saw himself as the objectification and protector of this right -- not the upstart Eastern and very liberal press.

Is the Press Independent?

There is no question that, in some ways, the press is the independent bane of the politician, in particular the Executive branch of government. However, from another point of view -- a very paradoxical one -- the press is
hardly the bastion of autonomous spokesmen which it would like to be. In many cases, reporters are almost wholly dependent on the government officials who they fancy as their adversaries. As Leon Sigal, in his very useful study on how news is acquired and processed, put it, "While the identification of a class enemy may enhance solidarity among reporters, it ignores the extent of their collaboration with the enemy."12

According to Sigal, the pattern of news acquisition is such that, "The reporter cannot depend on legwork /personal interviews and on-the-spot investigation/ alone to satisfy his paper's insatiable demand for news. He looks to official channels to provide him with newsworthy material day after day."13 In fact, the structure of news gathering is such that, "Reporters become spokesmen for their news sources rather than dispassionate observers." Over time, says Sigal, these reporters "may well be press agents for those they are covering."14 The point is, press autonomy is sometimes more of an idealistic catchphrase than a practical reality. Observes Sigal:

Whatever the location of their bureaus and their beats, reporters rely mainly on routine channels to get information. The beat system of the Times and Post concentrates staff at routine channels set up by the U.S. Government -- channels generally under the control of senior officials. The routine channels for newsgathering thus constitute the mechanism for official dominance of national and foreign news in the two papers /Sigal's emphasis/.15

Now, of course, we must distinguish the average reporter from the editor, the star reporter, the executive
personnel of the newspaper. At the same time, most newspapers, unlike the Times and Post do not have a bevy of reporters in Washington. These papers, in fact, rely on the wire services and often take their cue from the great "national papers." It is no wonder that political men are very concerned with what the Times and Post say on the editorial page, since the Washington elite and those in the media read both papers assiduously.

According to Sigal, his findings revealed that, "The newsman's first impression of what the news is comes from what newspapers, especially the Times and Post, cover. This accounts in part for the importance officials attach to the initial version of a story."16 Thus, the reason for Agnew's preoccupation with the media of "national influence." What the Times said on the editorial page, for example, might well influence newsmen in other papers regarding what they said of an event or how (or if) they covered it. The initial television coverage of an event, say on CBS, could set the tone, later coverage by other stations or papers reacting to the content of the initial.

From this aspect, one can see why coverage of dissenters and demonstrators by the media in 1969 so irked Agnew. Normally, Sigal observes, "News is... less a sampling of what is happening in the world than a selection of what officials think -- or want the press to report -- is happening." In other words, as has been described by others, officials have learned how to stage-
manage the news. The Executive branch of the government has been particularly adept at this. But in the 1960s, "a greater variety of Americans than ever before" were learning "how to obtain news coverage for their points of view." The mass demonstration before television cameras was one of the methods used. This, naturally, took control of news production out of the hands of the government. A demonstration is more dramatic than a press handout.

It is clear why Agnew and Nixon were upset. Agnew went on the counterattack to make the government position equally as dramatic as that of the campus radicals. Once it is understood how news is often "made," it is evident why Agnew and the Nixon Administration were so opposed to the printing of the Pentagon Papers. Reporters had gotten information in a manner which circumvented official channels and positions. This meant that government was losing control of news manufacture and management.

The Political Viewpoint

Like the press, Agnew based his counterattack not on overt political grounds, but utilized a benign philosophical base for his criticism. While members of the press saw themselves as defenders of the "people's right to know," Agnew claimed to be upholding the people's right to hear from the officials they elected. As has been amply pointed out in this thesis, Agnew consistently referred to the fact that he and the President had been
elected by the American people. Therefore, the people -- at least a majority of them -- had vested in Nixon and Agnew the prerogative to govern them. Thus, the will of the people was one and the same as the will of Agnew, and the President. This was especially so when it came to making decisions which affected the common weal. This was a critical claim, and one which the press claimed disqualified the politician as a press critic. In the words of Walter Cronkite:

The question is whether those who are elected to public office on partisan platforms, who represent, properly the special interests of their region, who by their political nature properly hold strong views on the issues of the day, should be vested with the right to say whether broadcast journalism is performing in the people's interests.18

Agnew's counter argument would be that his "partisan platform" represented the "special interests" of a majority of Americans. Therefore, he would be the true protector and exponent of what viewpoint Americans needed and wanted to hear.

What, then, about the contention that Agnew was merely a creature of the Nixon Administration drive against the media? It is really an irrelevant question. Both Agnew and Nixon were acting on the basis of political group-think, which in turn was fashioned upon the prime symbol that they, government officials, represent the existing will of the people. All presidents, to some degree, have had their difficulties with the press; in fact, most politicians view the press as subversive of the public good at
least sometime in their career. William Small, in his book *To Kill A Messenger* refers to a statement made by former Presidential aide, George E. Reedy. It reflects a basic antagonism of the political man to the press.

There are very few politicians who do not cherish privately the notion that there should be some regulation of the news. To most of them, "freedom of the press" is a gigantic put-on, a clever ploy which has enabled publishers as an economic group in our society to conduct themselves with a degree of arrogance and disregard of the public interest that is denied to other groups. The "ploy" has succeeded to an extent where it cannot be challenged publicly and therefore must be accorded formal deference. But the deference is purely formal and rarely expressed with heartfelt enthusiasm. If censorship ever comes to the United States, it will explode out of the frustration of a political leader convinced that the public good is being thwarted by self-serving reporters distorting the news.19

What is frightening about all this is Reedy's description of how a President becomes increasingly isolated from reality and what it can do to his thought processes. Already feeling a mandate from the people, it is a simple step to seeing oneself as a man of destiny who will marshal the people to victory and right all wrong. Meanwhile the President's men form a groveling court, a group of "yes men" anxious to please the Chief Executive at every turn, in the hopes of landing a few crumbs of power. From this vantage point, it requires little mental gymnastics in order to brand the press as "the enemy of the people." Censorship would be the final end product. Now, as to whether a President could gain the power to do this is another question. What is clear is that the conflict
between press and politician is a dangerous one, particularly when it involves the White House. What is particularly disturbing is the following: both press and politician claim to speak in the name of the "people." This viewpoint is also found in the domain of the lawyer and the judge.

The Red Lion decision, mentioned previously, is a prime example of this point of view. Professor Jerome Barron, who has actually proposed that the Fairness Doctrine be extended to newspapers expresses this third "prime symbol" in the following words:

Our constitutional theory is in the grips of a romantic conception of free expression, a belief that the marketplace of ideas is freely accessible. But if there were a self-operating marketplace of ideas, it has longed ceased to exist. The mass media's development of an antipathy to ideas requires legal intervention if novel and unpopular ideas are to be assured a forum.

In a sense, we are looking at three diverse symbolic orientations. The press views the world from a vantage point of its right of autonomy to be an ombudsman, watching over government; the politician interprets events from his right to (and rightness in) representing the people who elected him; the lawyer (or judge) who sees the public as the entity needing protection by the First Amendment rather than a branch of government or private industry. This third philosophical supposition has been succinctly put by the famous legal authority, Alexander Meiklejohn.
The authority of citizens to decide what they shall write and, more fundamental, what they shall read and see has not been delegated to any of the subordinate branches of government. It is "reserved to the people," each deciding for himself to whom he will listen, whom he will read, what portrayal of the human scene he finds worthy of his attention.21

This is where the symbolic position maintained by Agnew assumes importance. Being a politician, Agnew already held to the idea, developing it forcefully over the first years of his public life, that duly constituted and elected officials held a mandate from the people. Therefore, it was the responsibility (and the right) of such officials to imprint this will of the people in the laws of the land and policies of the administration. From this reasoning, the idea that governing officials should know what is important for the citizenry to know, flowed easily and naturally.

Agnew also had, certainly by mid-1969, adopted the legal-judicial point of view which claimed the people's right to know was the most important consideration. Agnew had skillfully, if unconsciously, intermeshed the two viewpoints. Since the people's right to hear was critical, who was in a more "rightful" position to know what they wanted to hear than the politician who's prime reason for existence is to work out and express the will of the people? Thus, Agnew's contention that the networks did not represent the views of America. Ergo, he, Agnew did.

Agnew was obviously a dangerous man, at least from the press' viewpoint. And, yet, there was something very
strangely appealing about Agnew. As the reader has seen in this thesis, men like Walter Cronkite, Richard S. Salant, James Reston, Jules Witcover and many others revealed a certain kind of admiration for Agnew. The very virulent criticism which Agnew received after his resignation is indicative that they had believed in Agnew as a man -- a different kind of political man. For example, even into the dark days of 1973, Reston was applauding Agnew for being the kind of politician who gave straight answers to tough questions.

Agnew, as Theodore White has pointed out, was the foremost spokesman for the conservative position. More correctly he was a symbolic leader who was a spokesman for a synthesis of viewpoints. Untouched by Watergate, with no overt act of government censorship attached to him, known as a sometimes articulate spokesman, commanding a prestige position, given the historical temper of the times in terms of press-government relations, it became clear why Agnew made such an impact.

Many media men were concerned about the fratricidal war between the reporter and the politician. A number of them were increasingly addressing themselves to this particular problem. David Broder was one such spokesman.

The relationship between the press and politics is a topic increasingly of concern to those of us who are working in newspapers, and I gather from the contacts I have had with politicians, also increasingly of concern to them. We have become in recent years -- at least it seems to me in Washington -- so involved in the antagonisms between the press and politics that
we have forgotten what the common concerns are that we share in these two institutions.  

Broder spoke those words, it should be recognized, even before the press battle sparked by former Vice President Agnew broke out. Now Broder is no idealist; he is an experienced political reporter in Washington. He recognizes that politicians seek to manage the news by what he calls "selective disclosure." He also brands as myth the idea that objectivity can be achieved in news dissemination or that "there can somehow be a neutral relationship between a politician or public official and the reporter or the press." The reasons, to Broder, were obvious. The politician sees publicity as a means to power. The reporter, meanwhile, wants relevant information.

So, I'm interested in them /politicians/ for what they can give me -- information about a subject that I'm pursuing. They're interested in me for what I can give to them -- a channel to the public for the goals in which they are interested.

The relationship is manipulative from both sides. By its configuration it breeds dissension, distrust, suspicion and tension resulting in a very debilitating attack-defend posture. Can such a conflict be mediated? (Should it be is another question.) Broder gave one suggestion. The suggestion happened to be the one Agnew, in more vociferous and partisan terms, stressed in his speeches. Below is Broder's point of view, suggesting that a solution to the reporter-politician squabble could come only,

... if we shift our perspective from a two-sided conflict or engagement or relationship between press
and government, between politician and reporter, and look at both of them in terms of the essential third party to this transaction, which is the public.26

In the December 1973 issue of Seminar the results of a News Media/Government Consultation series of meetings sponsored by Freedom House were published. Both government officials and leading exponents of the media view took part, as well as legal experts. Agnew had come and gone but the antagonisms lingered. The conclusion of the delegates was pessimistic:

Relations between the news media and the executive branch of the federal government are deplorable. . . . The general situation is harmful to the public interest and should be rectified /author's emphasis/. The danger is that there is too much power in government, and too much in the institutionalized press, too much power insufficiently diffused, indeed all too concentrated, both in government and in too few national press institutions, print and electronic. . . . Both government and news media have exacerbated their normal adversarial relationship so that each has suffered losses of credibility in the estimate of the public.27

The meetings had pinpointed what the controversy was all about: a struggle for power. What is important at this point, however, is that the press in particular and politicians felt the need for a detente. In other words, the press from its side was questioning to some degree its "prime symbol" of guarding the public trust at all costs. Merrill would cringe at the idea. That is why he has been so opposed to the idea of the press accepting a social responsibility to the public. He rightly sees this as an erosion of press autonomy because the questioning and new focus would erode the prime symbol which guided the editor-
reporter in his relationship with government.

The press could be made to feel guilty, that if it pressed its attack on corruption or simply to find out the "facts," it was destroying America's morale. Ergo, it was not acting in the public interest. Meanwhile, Agnew was stepping into this potential vacuum, constantly berating the press for exactly that failing: not being responsive to the public need.

On the other hand, it is conceivable (though the idea would be flatly denounced by the press) that Agnew could have found himself in the role of press-government mediator. It has already been pointed out, that Agnew had an atypical political image. He did not "intimate," he spoke out. Agnew seemed candid, straightforward -- no matter what the consequences. He was accessible to reporters. Agnew even admitted he and the Administration could be wrong. Seminal from this point of view is the Harding College speech in 1973. In that speech, Agnew admitted that classification of documents needed drastic revision and sought some compromise on the matter of revelation and use of reporter's sources. He also admitted that his criticisms of the press had been too strong and called for a truce. All three had been major sore spots with media representatives.

While Agnew had strong symbolic meaning for the press, he also came to have meaning for Americans in general. This came to constitute his source of power by
which he was able to fight the media to a standstill. This second symbolic role saw him as a spokesman for and representative of the so-called "Silent Majority" in America.

**Agnew, The Flag, Mom, Apple Pie**

In order to see Agnew as a symbolic leader of a certain segment of America, it is necessary to view the politics of the so-called "Social Issue." A seminal work on this is the Richard Scammon-Ben Wattenberg book, *The Real Majority*. Their book dealt with psephology -- "The behavior of American voters at the polls." According to the two authors, a new political issue, the "Social Issue," was surfacing in the 1960s. That social issue was composed of several factors: crime in the streets, race relations including riots in the ghettos, demonstrations on campuses. It was summarized in the three "D's" -- "disruption, dissension, demonstrations."

Scammon and Wattenberg neatly summarized their suggestion that politicians needed to appeal to the Middle American voter by the following brief description:

Middle voter is a forty-seven-year-old housewife from the outskirts of Dayton, Ohio whose husband is a machinist. She very likely has a somewhat different view of life and politics from that of a twenty-four-year-old instructor of political science at Yale. . . . He does not know much about politics, or psephology, unless he understands what is bothering that lady in Dayton and unless he understands that her circumstances in large measure dictate her concerns.

Scammon and Wattenberg contended that Nixon understood this point and had pursued it with a vengeance in
his election campaign strategy in 1968. The two authors recommended its application for the foreseeable future.

Insofar as the political eye can see, this is the apparent paradox of attitude in the seventies: conservative on the Social Issue, liberal on the bread-and-butter issues. Barring for a moment any unforeseen events or issues, it would seem that the party and candidates that will best understand how to cope with these apparently contrary public attitudes will be well on the way toward a strategy for victory.31

Scammon and Wattenberg further claimed that Nixon specifically chose Spiro T. Agnew in pursuit of a centrist policy aimed at capturing the center of the American attitudinal spectrum.

Perhaps the clearest indication that Nixon gave that he understood these factors... was his choice of Spiro Agnew as Vice President. It may be said, in fact, that Agnewism as a social thought won the election for Nixon, while Agnew, the individual, almost lost it for him... The importance of selecting Agnew was symbolic; it was Nixon's clear choice of a centrist path.32

Of course, warned Scammon and Wattenberg, one can go too far with the "Social Issue," or with the resounding rhetoric of the "Social Issue." According to the authors, that was the problem with the George Wallace campaign. And, in a footnote, the authors said, "There is a lesson here, probably most applicable today to Vice President Agnew... If carried to a point where pro-Social Issu-ism becomes in itself a disrupting and chaotic influence, it can begin to be a vote loser."33

With that bit of background, the role of Agnew as a symbolic leader to segments of the American population can now be discussed. This conclusion takes as its refer-
ence point the thesis of Orrin E. Klapp, in his *Symbolic Leaders: Public Dramas of Public Men*. Klapp defines a symbolic leader as "one who functions primarily through his meaning or image." 34 Ghandi was such a leader, who while holding no official position, was greatly esteemed by the Indian people. Abraham Lincoln has come to be such a personage. As Basler points out:

In the immense mass of Lincoln literature there is an historical lie for every historical truth. As each new student of the material holds the entire or a portion in solution, a new figure is precipitated. The result is never the same. The biography of Lincoln has not yet appeared, and it is unlikely that it will ever appear. But if it is charged that the legend-making propensities of the people of the United States have once and for all buried the real Lincoln under a mass of untruths, it must be considered that the same forces have clothed him in truths that the facts of his life could never have otherwise attained. 35

Andrew Jackson was another symbolic leader. John William Ward surveyed this aspect of his life and published the incredible results in his, *Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age*. Ward describes how Jackson became a mystical symbol for Americans of his day. One example of how Jackson was viewed is revealed in the words of a Washington correspondent for the *New York Times*, tracing Jackson's career:

There is a mysterious light which directs his intellect, which baffles all speculation upon philosophy of mind and the channels through which conclusions are reached. . . . He arrives at conclusions with a rapidity which proves that his process is not through the tardy avenues of syllogism, nor over the beaten track of analysis, or the hackneyed walk of logical induction. . . . His mind seems to be clogged by no forms, but goes with the lightening's flash and illuminates its own pathway. 36
Now a symbolic leader has something of a mirage quality about him, as is evident from the quote above on Jackson. He "moves people through his image, the kind of man he seems to be, the style of life or attitude he symbolizes," Klapp points out. Certainly, this applied to Agnew. He was even a symbol for the media, having the image of being an atypical politician. Which explains why he was most sarcastically berated by his former supporters after his resignation. They had come to believe in what they thought Agnew represented. But as one individual sadly stated, "Spiro Agnew was like the rest of us after all." The symbolic image had been shattered.

How did Spiro Agnew become such an image? Was it because he plotted his course, waiting for the propitious moment to emerge as "the symbol"? Did he acquire his symbolic value through the office he held? Was it because of Nixonian strategy? Klapp would suggest that none of these is the answer.

Let someone try to be popular, and it is likely that he cannot find the key to unlock the door. I believe that the public is highly selective, even at times finical. Sometimes the door seems to open accidentally to someone, who, one might say, leaned on it, not intending to please people.

Agnew is a perfect representation of the above observations. Scammon and Wattenberg had indicated that Agnew the man almost lost the election for Nixon. It had appeared that Nixon's studied choice of Agnew was the political blunder of the election, that perhaps it really
was the most outrageous political choice since Caligula named his horse a consul, as the Washington Post put it. Try hard as he might, Agnew kept putting his sandal in his mouth in late 1968 and through most of 1969.

And, then, almost by sheer accident, he was granted nationwide television time to berate the very media which granted him wide exposure. It is doubtful whether Agnew hoped for more than a snippet on the late news. But here it was -- prime time -- across America. The full speech going to Americans on all three national networks!

Still, that is not enough. For opportunity to be useful, it must be taken advantage of. As Klapp points out, "Certain persons have enormous effect, not because of achievement or vocation but because they stand for certain things; they play dramatic roles highly satisfying to their audiences; they are used psychologically and stir up followings."

At this point, the Scammon and Wattenberg analysis of the "Social Issue" looms important. In 1969, there were increasing disruptions on campuses, anti-war feeling was becoming virulent and the ghettos were still smoking. More pertinently, it appears as though a substantial body of Americans had come to the conclusion that the media was, in part, responsible for the disruptive nature of American society. And here was the Vice President of the United States telling them what they already believed! The response was overwhelming and shocked the media.
Many Americans had become tired of seeing news clips of those who were tearing up American flags and burning draft cards. Meanwhile, Spiro Agnew was talking about the national spirit of masochism, about nattering nabobs of negativism, about a national media unresponsive to all those viewers out there in America. Agnew struck a responsive chord. The timing was right. Agnew stood for certain values. He was for America and Americans. He was against violent dissent, against those who constantly tore down America (including a "liberal," Eastern-dominated press). Suddenly a buffoon image metamorphosed into one of a leader who was worth listening to.

Did Agnew know he would gain such notoriety from his Des Moines speech? Probably, not. According to Klapp, the symbolic leader is "an emergent phenomenon." The potential leader does not know he will become symbolic. It is a discovery process, based on a symbolic interaction between speaker and hearer. As Klapp puts it:

Very often a performer "finds himself" by using cues from audience responses and making himself into what people want. He may do so by painful trial and error, or he may hit it quickly. In any case, sensitivity is crucial -- sensitivity to the feedback that helps him perfect his style.40

As has been amply documented in this thesis, it is quite clear that Agnew was unusually sensitive to audience feedback. During the events surrounding the Des Moines speech, it is conceivable that Agnew drew upon his experience as governor of Maryland, when before television
cameras, he denounced the black leadership. Out of that denunciation came the same kind of audience reaction which Agnew elicited in late 1969. Once Agnew got his cues, that Americans liked his denunciations of dissidents, ivory tower intellectuals, street rioters and unresponsive national press, he reacted by further criticism.

Agnew was playing a particular role -- a dramatic role in the fullest sense -- that found meaning for his audience. Klapp discusses this unique occurrence as "clicking" or "making a hit." For the late actor, Edward G. Robinson, it was a part in "Little Caesar." Elvis Presley put together swinging hips, good looks, a new guitar sound and a combination of rhythm and blues with country music at just the right time.

The break comes in "finding a play or scenario that is a perfect vehicle for a particular personality,"41 Klapp advises. Agnew was a fighter, naturally outspoken, had a sincere belief in the "system," looked a certain way, sounded off in a particular manner. The catch came in putting it all together in the right combination, at the right time in the right place. A nationally televised speech from Des Moines, Iowa on November 13, 1969 in which he attacked the news media was the "break" in which he clicked. Agnew had discovered his symbolic political role.

It is interesting in this connection how sensitive Agnew was to audience reaction. Klapp points out that "censure of Joseph McCarthy by the United States Senate
showed that the door had closed to this kind of role."42 Now, when Agnew was accused of using statements reminiscent of McCarthy's, Agnew vowed he would do several somersaults to avoid them. Symbolically, it was dangerous to be identified with McCarthy. Agnew understood Klapp's moral for the practical politician: "He must try to improve his perception of popular moods and the dialectical processes that offer a glimpse of what the public is waiting for."43

Timing is crucial. The best time to strike, according to Klapp, is "when things are so bad that they can only get better."44 Which is exactly what Agnew did in late 1969. If events in America had gotten worse, it is conceivable that the educational system would have been in shambles, general rioting over Vietnam would have occurred in the streets, whole sections of cities would have burned to the ground. When Agnew attacked, it was the worst of times. From there, from the time of his verbal barrages, things did seem to improve. Agnew could take at least part of the credit. Indeed, credit would automatically flow to him, regardless of his real effect.

Timing has two aspects. The drama and inherent suspense must be at a peak and there must be the possibility of a rapid shift from crisis and defeat to victory, Klapp points out. "This is the real opportunity: the conjunction of a dramatic moment with a crisis that can be solved because the forces are ready to cooperate with the
Klapp mentions the Americans in World War I, who came to the rescue late in the war, did not have to fight as long or hard as the British and French, yet came out of that war as the heroes and saviors of Europe.

Another hazard is the enormous importance of timing, of the right role at the right time. One can "play the hero" a moment too soon or too late and be the biggest kind of fool. The successful hero steps into a situation at exactly the moment when audience expectation and the plot call for such a part... the crisis has been properly developed; suspense and interest are at a maximum, so no one is tired of the situation; and the balance has become so precarious that it can easily be tipped in his favor.

To Klapp, it matters not at all or little what a man is or intends to be. Rather, acting at the right psychological moment is the key. So is having the spotlight. Mood of the audience must be considered. How effectively the potential symbolic leader carries his role before the audience and whether he is suitably cast for it are important. So is the "plot pattern." Specifically, who is playing what parts against the hero and how are they being carried off. "If these factors are changed," Klapp argues, "all kinds of remarkable things can happen to the public character of a man."

In regard to Agnew's Des Moines speech, the predictable media reaction fell right into his hands. Its phalanx-like criticism of Agnew merely reinforced what many people felt was true about the media. There is also the matter of aggressiveness in helping the potential hero to emerge. Says Klapp:
(1) The most active person captures the most interest, (2) the one who starts something is more likely to be a hero than the one who follows, (3) the one who gives the crowd a thrill is likely to be a hero, (4) the winner (or good loser) of a fight is likely to be a hero. All these considerations put a premium on aggressiveness, taken in a broad sense; they give the advantage to the one who seizes the initiative, pushes where others will let be, starts a fight. Americans dislike, or think they dislike aggressiveness, but the fact remains that fights create heroes, and one of the best ways not to dramatize one's self is to avoid controversy.48

Agnew, of course, was controversy personified. He knew the value of a good, public fight, of "throwing them a little red meat," and of putting on the verbal gloves. On the other hand, to ask if Agnew simply manufactured himself at will, is irrelevant. The hero cannot manufacture himself. He can throw out a line to see if anyone bites. If no one does he is no hero. Most likely the first bite will be an accident of right timing. It is at this point that the hero can do something for himself. He can toss another cue to the audience to see if they will again respond. The process is one of a continuing but fluid interaction procedure.

Situations change, new personalities emerge, the thinking of the hero's constituency alters. Klapp maintains that we do not really know why a person becomes a mass symbol. Once this symbol emerges "there are endless learned speculations about his 'personality,' 'magnetism,' and so on, but usually these views overlook the dozens or hundreds of others with similar qualities who failed to 'hit' or 'sell.'"49
In his political career, Spiro Agnew moved on and off the convergence point between himself and his audience, at times being symbolic hero and at others representing the extreme anti-hero. Perhaps, after all is said and done, this is the most remarkable aspect of Agnew's public career: that he spanned the entirety of the symbolic continuum from a complete anti-hero (late 1968, late 1973) to super-hero (late 1969), at other times finding himself at points along the spectrum.

Why did Agnew strike such a responsive note with both the public and some media representatives, in some ways at some times? One line of reasoning would focus on his seeming (and perhaps actual) candor. Sophisticated Americans were tired of cliches, of the put on, of the cosmetic job. They wanted someone who stood for something but that "something" had to be positive. Many Americans were tired of the kind of negativism that seemingly was tearing America down. As has been pointed out, many media people also saw the dangers of the adversary system. Much of the blame could be put at the doorstep of politicians who sought to manipulate the press. But here was Spiro Agnew, who stood for values, who spoke out and who gave the press hell -- no matter what the consequences. Agnew's performance was what the times called for. Klapp ended his book on the following note, and it applies to Agnew: "If a magician performs to an audience of magicians, he may find that his most winning way is not tricks but
candor." That Agnew was well-known for "candor" is to state the obvious. It explains, if anything can, one reason for some of his popularity.

**Comments at Thirty**

The final question as to what Agnew said and why he said it must remain generally unanswered, if we are seeking some objective reality of meaning inherent in communication. As Dean Barnlund has pointed out, "It is the production of meaning, rather than the production of messages that identifies communication." He decries the attempt to "treat communication as a thing, a static entity, rather than a dynamic process occurring within the interpreter." (And, it might be added, within the communicator of the message.)

Since meaning resides in humans rather than in any communication per se, it is circumstantial to the person and the situation. Meaning changes through time; it differs with the person. In the final analysis, there can be no single answer to the question which Agnew's attack on the media raised. The implications can only be seen through the eyes of those who read meaning into the message. Perhaps it is fitting to close this thesis on a note of "it depends" by referring to statements made by two journalists during a panel discussion reviewing the impact of Agnew on the media.

To Norman Isaacs, well-known newspaper editor,
Agnew's attacks on the media forebode a time of sinister trial for the media.

Now this thing to me is very serious. I think that the networks are in trouble right now because of these /attacks/. It's coercion. I'm almost willing to bet that the next time there's a Presidential address, a great many of the affiliates are going to cut right away and not carry commentary. This will be the test. In other words, Mr. Agnew and Mr. Burch may say up and down all they want to that they're not for intimidation or coercion. But they got what they wanted. They will cut off these people and silence the commentary in the vast part of the country. And I'm scared of it.52

To James Kilpatrick, syndicated columnist and former editor, the networks got what they deserved and shouldn't complain.

I listened to him /Agnew/ with absolute satisfaction. He was saying at the highest level of government some things that needed very badly to be said. . . . When Mr. Agnew tees off on the television industry he is an outsider. Makes all the difference in the world. Because I am a part, and Mr. Isaacs is a part, of the greatest bunch of crybabys in the world. When anyone from the outside picks on us, we scream to high heaven. We howl "intimidation." . . . This is one of my blasts and I think this is what Mr. Agnew was talking about. The essential unfairness. Mr. Isaacs said that after the next Presidential speech there might be no commentary. I think next time there might be fairer commentary which certainly would be a novelty on some of the networks.53

Agnew: pro or con? The individual will have to decide based on the symbolic meanings he holds of the world around him -- especially politicians, the media and Spiro T. Agnew.
FOOTNOTES FOR CONCLUSION


2Ibid.

3Ibid., p. 46.

4Ibid., p. 52.


13Ibid., p. 104.

14Ibid., p. 49.

15Ibid., p. 125.
16Ibid., p. 103.
17Ibid., pp. 188,190.
18Walter Cronkite, Media and the First Amendment in a Free Society, p. 132.
23Ibid., p. 63.
24Ibid.
25Ibid., p. 64.
26Ibid., p. 71.
29Ibid., p. 40.
30Ibid., p. 72.
31Ibid., p. 78.
32Ibid., pp. 221-23.
33Ibid., p. 203.

37 Klapp, Symbolic Leaders, p. 23.

38 Ibid., p. 27.

39 Ibid., p. 32.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid., p. 36.

42 Ibid., p. 38.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid., p. 236.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., p. 72.

47 Ibid., p. 76.


49 Ibid., p. 31.

50 Ibid., p. 264.


52 Center for Cassette Studies, No News Is Agnews: Famous Journalists Devour the Vice President's Criticism of the Press (North Hollywood, California: Center for Cassette Studies, 1971).

53 Ibid.
POSTSCRIPT

A PERSONAL VIEWPOINT

I should like to begin this postscript by saying that there is little likelihood that a solution to the dilemma of media access and control will appear in the near future. Yet, it is a critical problem. The Agnew-media quarrel discussed in the preceding pages has focussed on the access controversy. By showing how virulent each side was, I have tried to point out that solving the access problem may be well-nigh impossible. Though the point should have been evident from the context of the material covered, there apparently exists a psychological hiatus unless the author attempts to put the material "into perspective," which means giving his own opinion.

But presenting "solutions" in the guise of viewpoint can sometimes do more to obfuscate than elucidate. Those who think they have the solution to this or that problem more often than not deceive themselves. They see the reality (i.e., the solution) from personal experience or research. However, the prison in which the human lives forces him to look out on those experiences bombarding his sensibility from a personal orientation. This orientation, in turn, has been reflected through the symbolic view of
the groups a person is a part of and the individuals to whom he relates. This can cause the exponent to mistake the tail (or the trunk, or the tusk, or the belly) of the elephant for the whole elephant (i.e., objective reality "out there"). But the elephant does not even exist. Rather, "reality" is composed of a melange of disassociated tails, tusks, trunks, skins and so forth. These constitute the symbolically-created observations of onlookers as they seek to make sense of the stimuli which impinge on their sensory apparatus, first shaping and then reshaping the consciousness in a give-and-take interaction process.

That is meant to be my disclaimer for presenting a personal view of the subject. With this out of the way, I should like to ask: Who was right, Agnew or the national media? In my view, there can be no complete resolution of conflicts between power groups unless all humans become exactly alike in their needs, viewpoints, culture and so on. Such a thought to most people smacks of mind conditioning and has little to recommend itself as a viable methodology for conflict resolution. Humans remain independent, thinking beings in spite of a kind of "mass" thinking which many feel is overwhelming America.

Also, such a "biological engineering" approach to conflict eradication contradicts the concept of the "marketplace of ideas" in which competing value systems struggle against each other. Out of this chaos, truth is somehow supposed to emerge. That the "marketplace" idea may
be a viable concept will be discussed later. But if it is useful it is so for different reasons. The idea that "true reality" or "truth" is somehow to emerge from the conflict in the marketplace is no longer acceptable.

Few people have access to or control of the "marketplace," today translated "media." I shall have more to say about this shortly. But one other objection is much more fundamental.

If it is true that situations do not have intrinsic existence within themselves and neither exist extrinsically apart from individual thought, then there really is little in our world which can be labelled truth. We must even question the concept of "fact" as truth. I may see the following headline: "President Says America Self-Sufficient in Energy by 1980." That the President said this may be a fact. He may even believe it. But the fact is merely a supposition, perhaps a wish. And we may well ask: But which facts are the more important? Environmentalist Paul Ehrlich may say "no way" to the President's remark, as I heard him recently do. Who are we to believe? And which array of facts marshalled in defense of either idea are we to accept?

To have a witness swear that he will "tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth" in old Perry Mason television shows is the farce carried to its ultimate. Situational "truths" simply cannot have intrinsic reality, especially in terms of their meaning. In fact,
this was often the point in a Perry Mason mystery. The accused may have been seen entering the home of a murder victim prior to his murder. To the bystander, it appeared that there was a connection between the accused and the murder. Mason's entire quest was to show that what appeared to be "truth" was a mirage in the viewer's mind.

The same holds true for the Agnew-media conflict. There is a great lesson in value judgment here. We must live in a world in which we are forced to accept human-constructed conceptual schemes. If we can recognize the shifting and relativistic nature of human "beliefs" the firmer our own attempt to make sense of the world will be. Those individuals who had come to believe in Spiro Agnew as the great righteous deliverer ("Spiro Our Hero") of America from the grips of a media gone berserk -- at least in his view -- were grossly disillusioned. But the fault resided in the viewer; he simply expected too much from an Agnew. But I should immediately like to make it clear that those gentlemen of the press who have come to see their role as the last bastion of freedom in America have also been baptized into a religious faith by mumbling the sacred and prescribed prayers before fallible peers.

A prime evidence of this built-in press self-righteousness is revealed in the stance many members of the press took in relationship to Agnew's criticism of them. It was kosher to smear Agnew and Nixon with some of the most incredible personal slanders before and completely
unrelated to Watergate or Agnew's hanky-panky. But let an Agnew criticize in turn and the press cried, "Intimidation! Intimidation! He's trying to tear down the credibility of the press." Who, then, is the more righteous or the more evil? Neither one, is my answer. The point is, "righteousness" and "evil" are irrelevant concepts in such situations. The reader is asked to see both as simply individual viewpoints of what the real world is (i.e., who is censoring whom, for example). But the "real world" does not exist apart from the humans who conceptualize it.

This is important in terms of what one accepts and incorporates into his view of the world. Perhaps the realization that man is an interpreter by nature (a "special kind of actor," as sociologist Herbert Blumer puts it) will keep some from mistaking individual point of view for objective reality. I hope that this thesis has demonstrated this to the reader by showing him how men with totally contradictory viewpoints can argue from the same base, each upholding (in their view) individual freedom and accusing the other of censorship.

This brings me to several related points I would like to make regarding Agnew's confrontation with the national media. Specifically, I would like to deal with each protagonist's contention that he was fighting for your and my constitutional freedom.

Let us begin by making one observation. There has always been freedom of the press and always will be. This
is an implication which some of Karl Marx's statements regarding the press seem to have. It puts the concept of "freedom" in a slightly different perspective. The point is that only some of the people at a given time in a given culture have enjoyed freedom of the press. In Germany during the mid-1800s -- to single out one nation -- the king (and/or the chancellor) had freedom of the press. So did those in the establishment of its day. Government had press freedom to print or decide what was to be printed. It was not muzzled or censored. I suppose those common folk who agreed with the powers that were also had "freedom." But one man's freedom may be another man's censorship.

"Who is to censor the government press except the people's press?" I asked Marx. There was no people's press in Marx's Germany. But today, in America there is a people's press -- and it can censor the government. The media (the people's press) is controlled by corporate baronies and the "spokesmen" -- the editors, anchormen and reporters. Though the media complains about government regulation, it is basically not censored; it does the censoring. I am attempting to use the term without any implied value judgment.

But do you and I have "freedom of the press?" That is difficult to say. There is certainly an illusion that the press is free in America. The illusion stems from the fact that control of information dispersal has passed from the government to the media. Someone always has control;
someone is always the censor. You or I cannot use the media unless we have a product that is acceptable to it. I may not want the newspaper to carry the latest murder as the banner headline. But do I have a choice? Does the newspaper have a choice? I argue it doesn't. But its staff still decide the paper's contents for you and me. The paper has freedom of the press, in one sense of the term. This is only meant as a statement of what exists not necessarily as a criticism.

According to Theodore White in his *Making of the President: 1972*, the press and the Presidency are the two most powerful institutions in contemporary America. He wrote before the full force of Watergate inundated the Presidency. As I write, the Presidency is in something of a shambles from the point of view of credibility. Is the press the sole surviving member, the most powerful entity in America today?

It is difficult to say. And if the answer is clear for this moment in time, the shifting definitions of reality do not allow us to predict the media's position tomorrow. This is also a lesson of the Spiro Agnew controversy. Lyndon Johnson once warned the political man against taking on the press. "Remember, they come out every day, you don't," he is reputed to have said. Former advisor to the late ex-President, Lyndon Johnson, has stated that every politician cherishes a notion, at least sometime in his career, to impose censorship on the press. But the press
has acquired such a symbolic status as preserver of American freedom that formal public deference must be given to this new religion. One had to bow before the communication altar in public while privately laughing at the newly established media gods.

At least this was one common conception until Agnew came along. He failed to heed what appeared to be some sound advice. Agnew blasted the media before 40 million Americans. Americans applauded. A majority seemed to side with Agnew. The press was frightened. (Did the network executives miscalculate thinking that the people would support them when they heard Agnew's inflammatory rhetoric from Des Moines on November 13, 1969?) The press had lost its symbolic awe with the people of America, if it really had such a mystique to begin with. This leads me to the next point.

For those individuals or groups who feel freedom means being able to express a viewpoint and get action, the following advice will be given. Access to the media comes best by the use of "drama." Agnew, for example, may have symbolized a deepseated American apprehension that events are out of control, that the individual is helpless before the "big" things out there like pollution and CBS. Agnew felt this way about what he felt was news bias. So he dramatized his case through the "red meat" approach. By doing so he gained access. However, in his quest to publicize an acceptable reality, Agnew was forced to dramatize, and
in one sense, to create a new reality.

Agnew realized that access to the media comes through the psychological technique of "drama." The thesis has tried to document his "red meat" approach. Drama is inherently interesting. The media are slaves of the dramatic. Indeed, I am inclined to go so far as to say that neither the media nor the politician nor the publicity seeker controls the media. "Drama-manufacture" is an absolute prerequisite for men who want exposure of their viewpoint (or in the case of media, interest in their programming product by the public). I could become a national celebrity overnight by the simple expedient of taking a pistol to a political rally and shooting the speaker or with a rifle gunning down a national leader. Both ploys, tragically enough, have been utilized.

The media was a slave of Spiro Agnew. Agnew was dramatic; he had to be covered. On the other hand, Agnew was also a slave of the dramatic. He was forced to oversimplify, to use rhetoric, to manufacture a case as much as anyone in order to get his viewpoint across.

This explains the paradox of who controls: does media manipulate officials or vice versa? The question is meaningless. Both are subject to the dictates of drama. The person who wants to be heard, be he president, priest or pauper must dramatize (i.e., manipulate) his cause. Since media are also slaves of the dramatic, they must cover such events. When media present their view, they
must dramatize it. That is why they complain about "telling both sides of a controversy." Such an approach takes the sting out of the show, it loses its dramatic quality and is less interesting.

For those who feel their viewpoint is not being heard, the solution is to find a way to dramatize. Instead of a marketplace of ideas, we must think of a marketplace of clashing dramas. Dramas are interesting metaphors which represent individual realities. The Zenger trial of 1735 lives on as a symbolic representation of the fight for "freedom" because it was a dramatic event. It did little substantively to change the position of the press.

The drama, the confrontation comes first, then the legislation is enacted. If we are to change a structure of relations as perceived, then we shall have to find a dramatic confrontation. It is only when two parties with opposing views clash that the case arrives at the Supreme Court for a decision.

Let us also ask, Who really represents the views of the people? This was another aspect of the crux argument between Agnew and the press. Another way of stating the essence of the struggle is to ask, how do the people express their wishes and/or ideas? Few spokesmen, from the liberal intelligensia and radicals on the left to the conservatives and the far right, are happy with the media. Thus, they are united by a common symbolic orientation vis a vis the media: the press is "unresponsive," they say.
The media on the other hand, by the nature of its own view of itself, feels it is the only institution responsive to the people.

But I argue that all institutions are responsive only to themselves. Also, some group of persons must come to control media. These people, be they government officials, media baronies, radicals or some new group, will be forced to take an interest in the preservation of the status quo. Marx, for example, was an embattled and embittered journalist—fighting against press censorship. Saul Padover has made this quite clear in the collected writings of Marx he has gathered for his book, Karl Marx: On Freedom of the Press and Censorship. But what happened to press freedom in Russia, the first state to attempt to put Marx's theory into practice? "Press freedom" in the American conception of the phrase never existed. The standard explanation is that Russian communism is an "abberation" of Marxism, that Lenin, Stalin and all the rest perverted Marxism. I would say that had Marx become the leader of a nation using his philosophy of government, he would have employed censorship.

Marx stated in his "The Role of the Press as Critic of Government Officials," published in Neue Rheinische Zeitung, on February 14, 1849, that, "The first duty of the press, therefore, is to undermine all the foundations of the existing political system."² It is hardly likely that Marx would have agreed with his own definition of the press
had he been ruler of Germany. The reason why is clear. Marx would have assumed that his system of government was the correct one, functioning for the benefit of all the people. As the protector of his personally produced political value system, Marx could hardly be expected to see this as the function of a press in a "perfect society."

I would like to state this in terms of what amounts to a law of human action: every organization or system is dedicated to the preservation of itself. A corollary is that every leadership (either as an individual or group) must believe in the efficacy of its own actions. Thus, any concept of action which seeks to destroy the existing system of belief must be censored. It also explains the reason why the press defends itself as an institution and why Agnew defended the role of the politician and his particular administration.

Now both press and Agnew (personifying the Nixon Administration) conveniently claimed to speak for the "people," and in a sense they did. They did to the degree that both institutions are based on the existence of individuals. There can be no government, obviously, without the existence and support of people. Neither can media exist if there are no people to speak, listen, read or watch. Thus, the appeal to "the people" is both real and an illusion. The appeal is made because the structural configuration of the represented organization demands it by virtue of the fact that it is composed of people. On the
other hand, the interest is in keeping the organization per se in a cohesive force configuration, with the leadership remaining in power. No leadership is dedicated to the purpose of destroying itself.

Beyond that is the structural configuration which must be dealt with in its physical, social and psychological aspects. This configuration forces the media or an Administration into a particular pattern. For example, the need to find dramatic film footage and material forces the media to "control" what goes on the television screen. In like manner, the need for the politician to dramatize his cause in order to be heard or become popular forces him to "stage-manage" the news.

There is a great need for individuals to realize that both politician and newsman are victims as much as they may be causes of "biased media." This leads to another problem: what does "biased media" really mean? What is good or bad programming? Further, who is to decide for us what is "fair?" Who is to claim, and on what credentials, that what he is saying or doing on my behalf (because 200 million Americans cannot all get prime time on network television) is good for me and explains my feelings and thoughts? And because he expresses what I want him to express on my behalf, is that really good for me? Obviously, it is impossible to answer these questions as they constitute complex value judgments. Yet, can we really come to any conclusions regarding the Agnew-media confrontation
without answering them? I say no which is why I feel there is no "solution" to that confrontation.

A word needs to be said about what is "media fairness." Legal scholar Jerome Barron would like to see the Fairness Doctrine extended to newspapers. But should it be? Should there be a Fairness Doctrine at all? Should it apply only to the electronic media? The case has been argued--and argued convincingly--for each of these three positions. Can they all be right? Is it necessary that two be wrong? Does it really matter, in the long run? In some ways, the idea that the First Amendment is meant to protect the public and not the broadcaster (as pointed out by the Supreme Court's Red Lion decision) is meaningless verbiage. Someone must still make a decision as to what is "protecting the public." It may be the broadcaster, the FCC, the Supreme Court, a government agency. But someone in a power position is still making a choice. And there is no unanimous agreement. For example, the FCC under Dean Burch decided that the broadcasters had obeyed the Fairness Doctrine in their commentary on a Vietman speech by then President Nixon. However, Agnew supported by a majority of Americans claimed the commentary was grossly biased. Or at least, a majority of Americans supported Agnew in his Des Moines speech denouncing the media, which included a substantial discussion of the media's role in commenting on that speech. Yet, the FCC decided against what a majority of the Americans believed about media fairness. Was that
really fair? Suppose the majority of people wanted government to intervene and silence the networks? Would the Supreme Court be protecting the people if it said no? Are we saying, then, that the people do not know any better? Then, we are implying that the people must be protected from themselves. If so, it does not really matter what they think. But if that is the case, then why do both politician and media claim to record the people's wishes and viewpoints. The chain of questions ends in a reductio ad absurdum.

There is only one final lesson from the Agnew-media controversy. It proves again that humans have strong personal beliefs, that they seek to impose those beliefs on others, that as representatives of groups they have come to identify with—they are psychologically duty bound to protect the structure and interests of that group. Here and there an individual, at some time and in some isolated way, may protest the symbolic orientation of his group. A Howard K. Smith may bob up above the surface of the water to shout out a disagreement before he sinks below the surface. By and large, however, at a given time and in a given situation the symbolic orientation of a group holds sway over the individual. He has no choice in the matter. Because that is what he is, that is how his consciousness has been formed and that is the glue which holds society together.

Agnew was as much a product of the milieu in which
he maneuvered as was the newsman he confronted a part of his own world. The drama was created when two different worlds, so to speak, clashed in a war of attrition. The drama made evident, or should have made evident, that there is a choice of viewpoints, though it does not tell us which of the choices is "better." But the Agnew-media confrontation was very meaningful in that it had the power to destroy the effect of propaganda—either press or politician-generated. As Ellul has written,

Propaganda must be continuous and lasting—continuous in that it must not leave any gaps, but must fill the citizen's whole day and all his life. . . . Propaganda tends to make the individual live in a separate world; he must not have outside points of reference. He must not be allowed a moment of meditation or reflection in which to see himself vis-a-vis the propagandist, as happens when the propaganda is not continuous. At that moment the individual emerges from the grip of propaganda. Instead, successful propaganda will occupy every moment of the individual's life: through posters and loudspeakers when he is out walking, through radio and newspapers at home, through meetings and movies in the evening. The individual must not be allowed to recover, to collect himself, to remain untouched by propaganda.3

Do we not read the newspaper in the morning, listen to the radio on the way to work, read the magazine in the office, watch the television set in the evening? Thus, if there is a national "media group-think" it could be slowly propagandizing us. What the Agnew-media controversy did was to provide a reference point in relationship to the possibility that media was unknowingly disseminating "propaganda." It allowed the individual to see himself in relationship to the "propagandist" (the media), at least from
the politicians' viewpoint. The listener may not have known why he was displeased with the media or even that he was. But a new reference point, a new orientation put the previous information in a new perspective. I am not taking the side of Agnew. I would say there is also a "government propaganda" which itself needs to be "perspectivized." But the government is not in control of information and idea dissemination though it may be in control of some of its production (and/or destruction). Thus, the paradox referred to earlier as to who really controls the media. But it is clear that the politician, like the rest of us mortals, must come hat in hand to the media barons for access to his constituency.

That information which is disseminated is what propagandizes. And if the editor is to be left with the decision as to what to print or to broadcast, then he is saddled with an incredible responsibility, one he is incapable of filling by virtue of his being human. We are in the hands of other human beings who are fallible because they are products of their world as much as the shapers of a new one. If we can both realize the symbolic fallibility of the human mind and do it without value judgments, we shall in some measure be protected. We shall not look for the hero to light our way, avoiding the need to "anthropomorphize" our beliefs. And, above all, if we recognize our own weakness and fallibility perhaps we will be less inclined to fall under the spell of another's beliefs. I
should like to close this personal observation from another quote by Jacque Ellul.

American sociologists scientifically try to play down the effectiveness of propaganda because they cannot accept the idea that the individual--that cornerstone of democracy--can be so fragile; and because they retain their ultimate trust in man. Personally, I, too, tend to believe in the pre-eminence of man and, consequently, in his invincibility. Nevertheless, as I observe the facts, I realize man is terribly malleable, uncertain of himself, ready to accept and to follow many suggestions, and is tossed about by all the winds of doctrine.4

The Agnew-media crisis as recorded in this thesis gives two man-made doctrines. Each flays the other and points out the other's vulnerability. Out of that vulnerability comes our strength. We are no longer obliged to accept either. We may find one or the other to be our liking. Or we may, in a seeming paradox, find merit in both. In the Agnew-media conflict both politics and press have been demythologized. In the process, it is hoped that the individual has been re-formed to stand more strongly in his own individuality--and to recognize that he is both strong and weak.
FOOTNOTES FOR POSTSCRIPT


2 Ibid., p. 144.


4 Ibid., XVI.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

A number of comments are in order explaining some important points regarding this bibliography. The first observation is that it is selected. Material, especially from newspapers and secondarily from periodicals, is encyclopedic in nature. There is no way, for example, to list all the articles from the New York Times that dealt with Spiro Agnew in one form or another. Even if entries are limited to those articles which only dealt with Agnew and the media, the listing would still be too long.

Neither would it be practical or useful to examine or cite all the books which have commented on Spiro Agnew's encounter with the media. Most of the comments, in fact, tend to be highly repetitious. Only those books directly used in the thesis have been cited in the bibliography. This is not true for magazines, journals or newspapers. Many citations appear in the bibliography which were used only in an indirect and ancillary way.

Often important portions of a work cited in the paper were included in another author's work. In this case both the second author's compilation and the individual components of the original author's work are listed in the bibliography. On the other hand, when a person has been quoted an article or book not exclusively devoted to that
individual or particular point, the interested reader should consult the footnote for the specific author's name.

In connection with this, is the handling of Agnew speeches and interviews in the bibliography. The author at first considered having a separate section in the bibliography listing material directly spoken or written by Agnew. However, his speeches, writings and interviews are scattered throughout many other references such as John Coyne's, The Impudent Snobs, the Congressional Record and U.S. News & World Report. In the end, it seemed that such a listing would only serve to confuse any attempt to find sources. The decision not to make a separate listing was finally arrived at with the following important point in mind. The author has quoted from virtually every important Agnew speech, interview or article which dealt with his relationship to the media. This obviously, does not mean everything Agnew has said on this subject was included. There were, for example, hundreds of press conferences during Agnew's career in which he, at times, discussed his concept of the role of the press. However, all the important material in the author's hands has been quoted from. And it is hardly likely that any important concepts have been overlooked. Therefore, if the reader is interested in a particular speech, he need only refer to the text of this thesis. Since Agnew's view of the press is developed in a chronological sequence, the reader should experience
The bibliography is divided into four parts: Books and Unpublished Works; Periodicals; Newspapers; Special Reference Material. When the author of a magazine or newspaper article has been given, the listing is in alphabetical order by author. However, when there is no author, the articles are classified in alphabetical order by publication. Naturally, author citations are interspersed in alphabetical order by publication. When the author of a magazine or newspaper article has been given, the listing is in alphabetical sequence. Further, all articles, either by the same author, or by publication, are listed in chronological order, the oldest coming first.

Items from the Congressional Record are listed if they related directly to the Agnew-media controversy even if they were not cited in the text of the thesis. Incidentally, the articles in the Record give some idea of how Congressional leaders felt about Agnew's criticism of the press. A subject alluded to but not fully discussed in the thesis, the articles in the Record, give some idea of how they related directly to the Agnew-media controversy even if they were not cited in the text of the thesis. Incidentally, the articles in the Record give some idea of how Congressional leaders felt about Agnew's criticism of the press. A subject alluded to but not fully discussed in the thesis, the articles in the Record, give some idea of how they related directly to the Agnew-media controversy even if they were not cited in the text of the thesis. Incidentally, the articles in the Record give some idea of how Congressional leaders felt about Agnew's criticism of the press.

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and because of the above mentioned comments, the author decided (in the interests of brevity which have not been adhered to sufficiently) against any annotation.
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