opinion would suggest. Large majorities name it as the source of most of their news (probably because television connotes the big, dramatic, and sometimes threatening events that most people define as news), but in actuality more people will see a newspaper than a television news program in any two- or three-week period and more people who follow the news regularly will do so by reading newspapers than by watching television news (Comstock & Scharrer, 1999; Lichty, 1982; Patterson, 1980; Robinson, 1971). The significance of television is not that it dominates media use but that it reached the portion of the public eager for news and vulnerable to political advertising at a time when the barriers to influence abbreviated by the term *personal history* were in retreat. It stands with newspapers and newsmagazines as one of the three major means by which the public follows politics and politically relevant events. The emergence of CNN and, later, C-SPAN, CNBC, MSNBC, and Fox News, simply augmented the array of choices that make it more likely that a viewer can find a congenial news source just as the proliferation of print media has made it more likely that a reader can find a similarly congenial source (Norris, 2000). This earlier revolution, which embraced both the means of dissemination and the content of the news, is now being followed by another revolution that appears likely to have more to do with dissemination than with content, although there surely will be some different content and possibly a few reached by content they otherwise might have missed, but adds the important element of candidates being able to mobilize support by direct contact with voters and financial contributors: the Internet.

II. First Things

Although the connection between media and politics seems especially close in the contemporary arena, the two have been inexorably linked throughout this nation's history. In the United States, the media have functioned as a political institution since colonial times (Cook, 1998; Starr, 2004). Initially, newspapers—weeklies of four pages with circulations of a few hundred (the first successful daily did not appear until 1784)—observed a genteel neutrality and a deference appropriate to a colonial enterprise toward government, which was an arm of Great Britain. By 1720, however, they had become forums for public debate, with newspapers functioning as common carriers for all points of view, and beginning in about 1765, with the enactment of the British Stamp Act, they shifted toward partisan opposition to the British (Starr, 2004). The latter was the date of enactment of the British Stamp Act, which imposed a tax on newspapers, resulted in a two-to-one ratio of voices in behalf of the Revolution.

In the first decades of the nation's existence, many newspapers and political newsletters were directly funded by or otherwise overtly aligned with

political parties or other ideological organizations, although in some cases this was merely a matter of declared allegiance without the exertion of party control over journalistic practice, and some papers maintained political neutrality. Reporting news and public events with an admitted, open political bent was nevertheless the norm from the birth of the United States until the latter half of the nineteenth century, and until the emergence of the penny press newspapers reached small and local audiences. The links with government went far beyond ties between parties and newspapers and the partisan outlook of many papers. They included a wide range of financial support, although some of it was disguised, and a set of conditions favorable to the prospering of the press. The state and federal governments both paid newspapers to publish newly enacted laws for public instruction, and there were printing contracts for documents and forms. These payments underwrote other, overtly partisan activity as well as journalism in general, and printing contracts naturally favored enterprises and newspapers favorable to those in power (Cook, 1998; Starr, 2004). The allotting of printing contracts as a reward to politically supportive presses, including newspapers, continued for decades until, in response to scandals over the awarding of contracts and the handling of funds, the bipartisan establishment of the Government Printing Office (GPO) in 1860.

Then there were the important subsidies by the Post Office, which helped many newspapers survive and extended their reach into the countryside. The major pillar was negligible postal rates, accompanied by a special case of free distribution. Low postal rates were crucial, because many papers, while quite local in their emphases and circulation, nevertheless had subscribers in substantial proportions well beyond the range of hand delivery or personal purchase. The benefit of the subsidy was augmented by a policy of establishing postal routes even when they would not be self-supporting. By 1828, less than four decades after the Post Office Act of 1792, Congress had authorized 2,476 new postal routes, all of which would not only serve citizens with personal mail, and serve commerce with catalogs, but would also assist newspapers in gaining subscribers (Starr, 2004). The Post Office thus promoted newspaper circulation. The special case was another type of subsidy: free postage for the exchange of issues. This gave each newspaper a steady supply of newsworthy information that could be incorporated in its own coverage, and thereby reduced the costs of journalism. A single newspaper would receive several hundred issues weekly (Starr, 2004).

These factors combined with a broad array of other circumstances highly favorable to the development of communication (Starr, 2004). Among these were the widespread availability of common schools; a consequent market for school texts that contributed to the health of the printing industry; increasing levels of literacy that ensured a welcome reception for the products of the

presses, including religious publications, political tracts, and lurid accounts of crime; and the eventual interpretation of the First Amendment that made the right to publish freely the law of the land (Starr, 2004). Together, these forces amounted to a governmental and societal policy of cheap print, free expression, and journalistic abundance.

The relentless pursuit of scandal associated with public figures traces back even further in history, with the first newspaper published in America in 1690 alluding to an extramarital affair being conducted by the King of France (Stephens, 1989). Thomas Jefferson was subjected to various assaults on his character in rival party newspapers. Indeed, many political figures regularly were subject to attack by newspapers subsidized by their opponents due to the conjunction of news source and political party that began in the George Washington era and continued until the increasing size and diversity of urban markets led to the success of the penny press (Starr, 2004). Covering politics with a game or sports metaphor to emphasize who was ahead and who was behind has been traced back to the 1830s when Jackson introduced rallies and party conventions, and the allure of the spectacles that they create, to political life (Patterson, 1993). Because newspapers were openly partisan well into the second half of the nineteenth century (Starr, 2004), they vied against one another to promote the qualities of their favored candidates in the hearts and minds of the public, thereby extending the metaphor from the coverage of politics to the conduct of the press.

Most historians agree that the birth of the penny press traces to the founding of the *New York Sun* by Benjamin Day in 1833 (Sabato, 1991). The partisan model of the press that had been the norm faded in the face of the lure of new urban markets and the new technology in the nineteenth century that allowed for mass production of newspapers. These technological developments began to have a major influence in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. They included remarkably faster cylindrical and rotary presses, manufacturing techniques that made paper less expensive, and stereotyping (in which molds were employed to reproduce pages of type, eliminating the need to reset or keep type standing). Other factors encouraging the rise of mass-circulation newspapers included the population shift to cities, which created a new mass audience, and the settling of the American West, which created a market for news that could be said to be of national significance (Bennett, 1983). Still, with the founding of the penny press the great urban newspapers still lay somewhat in the future because at that time only 4 percent of the population lived in cities of 25,000 or more. Thus, the *Sun* and its noted rival, James Gordon Bennett's *Herald,* were harbingers rather than instant transformations. The overt link of a newspaper to one party or one political leader, the prior model, limited the size and scope of its potential circulation. On the contrary, economics, which previously had favored the security of close and partisan ties

to a political party, now began to favor impartiality and objectivity so that a mass audience could be wooed without alienation or complaint and a large readership cutting across ideological inclinations could be pursued (Bennett, 1983; Patterson, 1993; Schudson, 1978).

The transition was sufficiently accomplished by 1861 so that Abraham Lincoln determined that his administration would not be linked to a particular newspaper (Sabato, 1991). However, the shift toward an independent press would continue until the turn of the century (Table 3.1). Daily circulation in the nation's 50 largest cities grew from 1.4 to 8.3 million over these decades, with the proportion representing newspapers that claim political independence increasing from 26 to 53 percent.

Although open partisanship in the news coverage of most newspapers was now in the past, the pursuit of outrage continued in the form of muckraking, and public figures from all parties and political leanings were equally at risk for this unwanted attention. The journalistic ideals of objectivity and accuracy were far from firmly in place as some newspaper publishers only exercised their newfound power to attract massive audiences. Scandals involving political and public figures were often salaciously reported and were frequently scant on facts.

TABLE 3.1 Political Independence of the Press, 1870–1900 (Fifty Largest City Dailies)

	Number of Papers	Total Daily Circulation	Percent Papers	Percent Circulation
1870				
Democrat/Republican	155		87.1	74.3
Independent	23		12.9	25.8
		1,384,560		
1880				
Democrat/Republican	161		64.2	44.4
Independent	85		33.9	55.2
		2,427,730		
1890				
Democrat/Republican	170		54.0	46.3
Independent	138		43.8	53.3
		5,518,160		
1900				
Democrat/Republican	161		50.2	46.6
Independent	152		47.4	53.0
		8,275,020		

Adapted from *All the news that's fit to sell: How the market transforms information into news*, by J. T. Hamilton, 2004, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Muckraking and "yellow journalism" waned as profits for newspapers grew and their publishers became prestigious citizens with a desire for respectability and, conceivably, a disinclination to harm the reputations of their fellow prominent citizens (Sabato, 1991). World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II also helped quash the press's penchant for yellow journalism and lust for scandal, as did the Depression-beset administration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Indeed, Sabato (1991) observes that the respectful distance the press kept from potentially scandalous stories about FDR, refraining from emphasizing illness, poor health, or his estrangement from his wife, was a journalistic standard that held for 40 years—that the private lives of politicians should remain untouched by the news media unless they affected performance in office.

The ideal of objectivity in reporting developed from a number of forces. In 1848, the Associated Press was born, along with the novel idea of distributing and selling standardized versions of prominent stories to newspapers everywhere. Technology quickly affected syntax. The use of telegraph wires to transmit the news resulted in a "simplified, standardized reporting format—something that could convey a large amount of information in the most economical form" (Bennett, 1983, p. 79). Thus, the construction of news stories around who, what, where, when, and why—the pervasive "five W's" of journalism education—ensured that the most important elements of an event would be transmitted, allowing less room for the embellishment of yellow journalism and defining the news with a narrative structure that would endure.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the press was still largely avoiding the reporting of scandalous stories that pertained to the personal lives of public figures. Members of the press appeared to make a conscious decision not to pry into John F. Kennedy's extramarital affairs and the public drunkenness of members of Congress and other public officials. Furthermore, though their actions pertaining to Vietnam and Watergate were certainly well scrutinized by the news media, various transgressions in the personal lives of Presidents Johnson and Nixon were seemingly off limits for journalists (Sabato, 1991).

When did private matters become perceived as fair game for investigative reporting? Sabato (1991) pinpoints Senator Edward Kennedy's role in and later response to the Chappaquiddick tragedy, the psychiatric problems of Senator Thomas Eagleton, and, of course, the Watergate scandal as the defining events that changed the press's orientation toward the private lives of public figures: Chappaquiddick because it effectively ended the presidential hopes of Ted Kennedy, a huge story that joined the personal and political; Eagleton, because widespread ignorance of his mental health record let him slip onto the Democratic ticket as George McGovern's running mate (and unraveled McGovern's liberal mantel of defying the mainstream when he removed

Eagleton); and Watergate because it involved the holder of the highest office in the land in a series of clandestine capers to damage opponents and an elaborate scheme to launder campaign contributions to thwart the laws governing political contributions (and thereby promote the agenda of the Republican Party on both the ideological and financial fronts). From then on, journalists largely have taken the position that private issues and topics beyond the limelight can importantly affect public life, and therefore are legitimate topics of news coverage. Never was this new standard more apparent than in the highly drawn out and extensively reported scandal involving President Bill Clinton and White House intern Monica Lewinsky.

The press in the United States has always closely followed and even attempted to shape politics. What began as overt partisanship in the treatment by newspapers of political candidates shifted with the ability to mass produce and mass distribute newspapers. It gave way, first, to sensationalized muckraking and yellow journalism and, then, to the pursuit of objectivity and accuracy. Negativity and an adversarial tone in covering candidates and political figures, as well as the occasional pursuit of scandal, were early themes that would robustly persevere in future relations between the press and politicians. This is best exemplified in the "focus and discard" process that marks presidential primaries (Comstock & Scharrer, 1999; Patterson, 1993). The front runner, the major challenger, and new entrants receive intensive scrutiny, and past dishonesties, ambiguous curriculum vitae, plagiarism, adultery, emotionality, and past alcohol or drug abuse are gifts the journalist offers to the public to see if one or another is enough to retire the candidate from the roster of contenders. Thus, the media act as hurdles that must be overcome before the benefits of popularity and the appeal of a political platform can be enjoyed. The framing of a political election as a race or a game that was also evident early would continue to characterize media coverage. In fact, the so-called "horse race" aspects of presidential campaigns have become prominent in all media, but especially in television where the metaphor matches neatly with the narrative utility of men or women facing challenges (Comstock & Scharrer, 1999; Graber, 1988). The commercial imperative of news media in the United States in which outlets are expected not just to perform a service by informing the public but also to contribute positively to the parent company's bottom line was established quickly. It would only become intensified in subsequent years. Thus, the coverage of politics as sport is a product of the appeal of this type of coverage and its usefulness in assembling a large audience for a newspaper, magazine, or television channel (Hamilton, 1998).

The value of objectivity serves as a useful illusion for the press (Schudson, 1978). On the one hand, it serves as a heuristic credo for maintaining a professional aura in the newsroom. On the other, it serves two exemplary purposes in the relations of the press with the public (Comstock & Scharrer,

1999). The means by which objectivity is ostensibly achieved—the checking of facts, interviewing of multiple participants or witnesses, the avoidance of accusatory language, and the insistence on two or more sources for controversial stories—all provide protection to and shield the media from criticism and rebuke by the public and from lawsuits by offended individuals. It also vigorously asserts the continuing claim that the news coverage of a news outlet can serve a public varying in its views, and thus can pursue with greater possibility of success a profitable mass audience.

Objectivity, however, is probably best thought of as a useful heuristic rather than a state that can be achieved. If we think of news coverage as having three dimensions, we could probably agree as to whether the behavior of a medium in a specific instance met these criteria (Comstock & Scharrer, 1999). The three dimensions are accuracy, by which we mean adherence to fact and identifying uncertainties; inclusiveness, by which we mean the full coverage of facts favorable to one or another of the various sides or perspectives in a controversy; and, fairness, by which we mean the roughly equal treatment of opposing sides, candidates, and parties when a correct or preferred resolution is ambiguous (this criterion acknowledges that sometimes one or another side has distinctly less merit). These constitute objectivity once coverage has been initiated. However, there is a crucial fourth dimension. Only selected stories are covered by the media, and one outlet may pursue one or another theme or topic that is ignored by another outlet. The news is not a blank slate upon which events are writ, but a construction of reality where organizational needs, personal judgments, and events meet in setting the day's stories (Comstock, 1989; Shoemaker & Reese, 1991; Tuchman, 1978). News values, on which many news workers will agree, at best provide a general guide but, except at the national level of disasters, strikes, crises, wars, assassinations, and some aspects of presidential politics, are not determinative. For example, the intrusion of news policies promoting the pursuit of audience satisfaction lead local television stations to vary wildly in their coverage of murder, rape, and violent crime (Hamilton, 1998). Objectivity, then, is less of a servant than a slogan when it comes to the content of the news.

The same concerns ennobling objectivity led to the divorce of editorial commentary from news coverage. This duality has long besieged the media, and each medium in turn has had to develop standards distinguishing news from opinion as a strategy to protect itself from charges of bias in the former while often retaining the right to express a point of view in the latter. The solution that has emerged for newspapers ostensibly confines opinions to the editorial and "op-ed" pages and the columns of clearly identified commentators (which in some cases may be scattered throughout the paper). The commercial model did not end partisanship and support for candidates and parties but

attempted to deflect them to a more confined arena. The four terms of FDR amply demonstrated that a charismatic political figure could triumph without the editorial support of the nation's newspapers, for a majority consistently opposed Roosevelt and urged voters to cast their ballots for his rivals. However, editorials are not mere exercises of the ego either, as Robinson (1974) documented in his analysis of poll data from five presidential campaigns in which there were modest but detectable increases in the vote for candidates supported by local newspapers. Radio is far less sharp in this demarcation, with some widely disseminated newscasters crafting their stories in a decidedly opinionated way. Still, there has been a definite struggle to keep the two separate, with CBS a pioneer in the pre–World War II years in forbidding "commentary" (which would be only opinion) and welcoming "analysis" (presumably based on facts), and the networks in general both before and after the war using panels of commentators to avoid the appearance of a single editorial viewpoint (Kobland, 1999). Television has taken a similar path, with comment confined to the broadcast (or cable) equivalent of newspaper columnists and panels known for their ascerbic exchanges. Networks and local stations have scrupulously avoided the appearance of editorializing by restricting analysis to the expert elucidation (presumably based on facts) of events such as elections, plane crashes, cult murders, upcoming trials, and terrorist attacks. The separation is inevitably imperfect; the very selection of a story for coverage inescapably introduces material that may be more or less favorable for one or another point of view, political party, or candidate.

III. CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

The first half of the twentieth century can be characterized as the adolescence of the mass media, with newspapers commanding huge circulations and with television first appearing as a potential competitor in the late 1940s. Television became prominent as a news medium in the 1950s, and by the early 1960s had become in the minds of a majority the primary source from which they received "most of their news" (Roper Starch, 1995). Increasingly, people named television as their primary news source; by the mid-1990s almost three-fourths were naming television and only 38 percent were naming newspapers, an advantage of about two-to-one. Television had markedly expanded the options for seeking out information about politics and campaigns. Decisions about whether to vote, and which party or candidate to support, now drew on the easily accessible and generally easy to understand medium of television along with the two staples of print journalism: newspapers, with their great detail and daily updates, and newsmagazines, with their narratives placing the news in historical context (Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992).