MANUFACTURING CONSENT

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The Political Economy of the Mass Media

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With a new introduction by the authors

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To the memory of Alex Carey
and
Herbert I. Schiller

"The Iran-contra scandals were blamed on the President's easygoing habits, though the people had every opportunity to know this was his way of doing things or not doing before the put him in the White House, not once but twice."—*James Reston*

"They who have put out the people's eyes, reporach them of their blindness."—*John Milton*

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Introduction

This book centers in what we call a "propaganda model," an analytical framework that attempts to explain the performance of the US media in terms of the basic institutional structures and relationships within which they operate. It is our view that, among their other functions, the media serve, and propagandize on behalf of, the powerful societal interests that control and finance them. The representatives of these interests have important agendas and principles that they want to advance, and they are well positioned to shape and constrain media policy. This is normally not accomplished by crude intervention, but by the selection of right-thinking personnel and by the editors' and working journalists' internalization of priorities and definitions of newsworthiness that conform to the institution's policy.

Structural factors are those such as ownership and control, dependence on other major funding sources (notably, advertisers), and mutual interests and relationships between the media and those who make the news and have the power to define it and explain what it means. The propaganda

model also incorporates other closely related factors such as the ability to complain about the media's treatment of news (that is, produce "flak"), to provide "experts" to confirm the official slant on the news, and to fix the basic principles and ideologies that are taken for granted by media personnel and the elite, but are often resisted by the general population.[1] In our view, the same underlying power sources that own the media and fund them as advertisers, that serve as primary definers of the news, and that produce flak and proper-thinking experts, also, play a key role in fixing basic principles and the dominant ideologies. We believe that what journalists do, what they see as newsworthy, and what they take for granted as premises of their work are frequently well explained by the incentives, pressures, and constraints incorporated into such a structural analysis.

These structural factors that dominate media operations are not all controlling and do not always produce simple and homogeneous results. It is well recognized, and may even be said to constitute a part of an institutional critique such as we present in this volume, that the various parts of media organizations have some limited autonomy, that individual and professional values influence media work, that policy is imperfectly enforced, and that media policy itself may allow some measure of dissent and reporting that calls into question the accepted viewpoint. These considerations all work to assure some dissent and coverage of inconvenient facts.[2] The beauty of the system, however, is that such dissent and inconvenient information are kept within bounds and at the margins, so that while their presence shows that the system is not monolithic, they are not large enough to interfere unduly with the domination of the official agenda.

It should also be noted that we are talking about media structure and performance, not the effects of the media on the public. Certainly, the media's adherence to an official agenda with little dissent is likely to influence public opinion in the desired direction, but this is a matter of degree, and where the public's interests diverge sharply from that of the elite, and where they have their own independent sources of information, the official line may be widely doubted. The point that we want to stress here, however, is that the propaganda model describes forces that shape what the media does; it does not imply that any propaganda emanating from the media is always effective.

Although now more than a dozen years old, both the propaganda model and the case studies presented with it in the first edition of this book have held up remarkably well.[3] The purpose of this new Introduction is to update the model, add some materials to supplement the case studies already in place (and left intact in the chapters that follow), and finally, to point out the possible applicability of the model to a number of issues under current or recent debate.

Updating the Propaganda Model

The propaganda model, spelled out in detail in chapter 1, explains the broad sweep of the mainstream media's behavior and performance by their corporate character and integration into the political economy of the dominant economic system. For this reason, we focused heavily on the rise in scale of media enterprise, the media's gradual centralization and concentration, the growth of media conglomerates that control many different kinds of media (motion picture studios, TV networks, cable channels, magazines, and book publishing houses), and the spread of the media across borders in a globalization process. We also noted the gradual displacement of family control by professional managers serving a wider array of owners and more closely subject to market discipline.

All of these trends, and greater competition for advertising across media boundaries, have continued and strengthened over the past dozen years, making for an intensified bottom-line orientation. Thus, centralization of the media in a shrinking number of very large firms has accelerated, virtually unopposed by Republican and Democratic administrations and regulatory authority. Ben Bagdikian notes that when the first edition of his Media Monopoly was published in 1983, fifty giant firms dominated almost every mass medium; but just seven years later, in 1990, only twenty-three firms occupied the same commanding position.[4]

Since 1990, a wave of massive deals and rapid globalization have left the media industries further centralized in nine transnational conglomerates—Disney, AOL-Time Warner,Viacom (owner of CBS), News Corporation, Bertelsmann, General Electric (owner of NBC), Sony, AT&T-Liberty Media, and Vivendi Universal. These giants own all the world's major film studios, TV networks, and music companies, and a sizable fraction of the most important cable channels, cable systems, magazines, major-market TV stations, and book publishers. The largest, the recently merged AOL-Time Warner, has integrated the leading Internet portal into the traditional media system. Another fifteen firms round out the system, meaning that two dozen firms control nearly the entirety of media experienced by most US citizens. Bagdikian concludes that "it is the overwhelming collective power of these firms, with their corporate interlocks and unified cultural and political values, that raises troubling questions about the individual's role in the American democracy."[5]

Of the nine giants that now dominate the media universe, all but General Electric have extensively conglomerated within the media, and are important in both producing content and distributing it. Four of them —Disney, AOL-Time Warner, Viacom, and News Corporation—produce movies, books, magazines, newspapers, TV programs, music, videos, toys, and theme parks, among other things; and they have extensive distribution facilities via broadcasting and cable ownership, retail stores, and movie-theater chains. They also provide news and occasional investigative reports and documentaries that address political issues, but the leaders of these pop-cultural behemoths are mainly interested in entertainment, which produces large audiences with shows like ABC TV's *Who to Be a Millionaire* and CBS-TV's *Survivor,* or with movies like Disney's *Lion King* that also make possible the cross-selling "synergies" that are a focal point of their attention and resources.

Important branches of the media such as movies and books have had substantial global markets for many years, but only in the past two decades has a global media system come into being that is having major effects on national media systems, culture, and politics.[6] It has been fueled by the globalization of business more generally, the associated rapid growth of global advertising, and improved communications technology that has facilitated cross-border operations and control. It has also been helped along by government policy :and the consolidation of neoliberal ideology. The United States and other Western governments have pressed the interests of their home-country firms eager to expand abroad, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank have done the same, striving with considerable success to enlarge transnational corporate access to media markets across the globe. Neoliberal ideology has provided the intellectual rationale for policies that have opened up the ownership of broadcasting stations and cable and satellite systems to private transnational investors.

The culture and ideology fostered in this globalization process relate largely to "lifestyle" themes and goods and their acquisition; and they tend to weaken any sense of community helpful to civic life. Robert McChesney notes that "the hallmark of the global media system is its relentless, ubiquitous commercialism."[7] Shopping channels, "infomercials," and product placement are booming in the global media system. McChesney adds that "it should come as no surprise that account after account in the late 1990s documents the fascination, even the obsession, of the world's middle class youth with consumer brands and products."[8] The global media's "news" attention in recent years, aside from reporting on crusades such as "Operation Allied Force" (the NATO war against Yugoslavia) and on national elections, has been inordinately directed to sensationalism, as in their obsessive focus on the O.J. Simpson trial, the Lewinsky scandal, and the deaths of two of the West's supercelebrities, Princess Diana and John F. Kennedy, Jr.

Globalization, along with deregulation and national budgetary pressures, has also helped reduce the importance of noncommercial media in country after country. This has been especially important in Europe and Asia, where public broadcasting systems were dominant (in contrast with the United States and Latin America). The financial pressures on

public broadcasters has forced them to shrink or emulate the commercial systems in and programming, and some have been fully commercialized by policy change or privatization. The global balance of power has shifted decisively toward commercial systems. James Ledbetter points out that in the United States, under incessant right-wing political pressure and financial stringency "the 90s have seen a tidal wave of commercialism overtake public broadcasting," with public broadcasters "rushing as fast as they can to merge their services with those offered by commercial networks."[9] And in the process of what Ledbetter calls the "mailing" of public broadcasting, its already modest differences from the commercial networks have almost disappeared. Most important, in their programming "they share either the avoidance or the defanging of contemporary political controversy, the kind that would bring trouble from powerful patrons."[10]

Some argue that the Internet and the new communications technologies arc breaking the corporate stranglehold on journalism and opening an unprecedented era of interactive democratic media. And it is true and important that the Internet has increased the efficiency and scope of individual and group networking. This has enabled people to escape the mainstream media's constraints in many and diverse cases. Japanese women have been able to tap newly created Web sites devoted to their problems, where they can talk and share experiences and information with their peers and obtain expert advice on business, financial, and personal matters.[11] Chiapas resisters against abuse by the Mexican army and government were able to mobilize an international support base in 1995 to help them publicize their grievances and put pressure on the Mexican government to change its policies in the region.[12] The enlarged ability of Bolivian peasants protesting against World Bank privatization programs and user fees for water in 2000, and Indonesian students taking to the streets against the Suharto dictatorship in Indonesia in 1998, to communicate through the Internet produced a level of publicity and global attention that had important consequences: Bechtel Corporation, owner of the newly privatized water system in Bolivia that had quickly doubled water rates, backed off and the privatization sale was rescinded; the protests and associated publicity, along with the 1998 financial crisis, helped drive Suharto from office.[13]

Broader protest movements have also benefited from Internet-based communication. When the leading members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) attempted in 1998 to push through in secret a Multilateral Agreement on Investment that would have protected further the rights of international investors as against the rights of democratic bodies within states, the Internet was extremely valuable in alerting opposition forces to the threat and helping mobilize an opposition that prevented acceptance of this agreement.[14] Similarly, in the protest actions against the WTO meetings in Seattle in November 1999 and the IMF and World Bank annual gatherings in Washington, DC, in April 2000, communication via the Internet played an important role both in organizing the protests and in disseminating information on the events themselves that countered the mainstream media's hostile portrayal of these protests.[15]

However, although the Internet has been a valuable addition to the communications arsenal of dissidents and protesters, it has limitations as a critical tool. For one thing, those whose information needs are most acute are not well served by the Internet-many lack access, its databases are not designed to meet their needs, and the use of databases (and effective use of the Internet in general) presupposes knowledge and organization. The Internet is not an instrument of mass communication for those lacking brand names, an already existing large audience, and/or large resources. Only sizable commercial organizations have been able to make large numbers aware of the existence of their Internet offerings. The privatization of the Internet's hardware, the rapid commercialization and concentration of Internet portals and servers and their integration into non-Internet conglomerates—the AOL-Time Warner merger was a giant step in that direction—and the private and concentrated control of the new broadband technology, together threaten to limit any future prospects of the Internet as a democratic media vehicle.

The past few years have witnessed a rapid penetration of the Internet by the leading newspapers and media conglomerates, all fearful of being outflanked by small pioneer users of the new technology, and willing (and able) to accept losses for years while testing out these new waters. Anxious to reduce these losses, however, and with advertisers leery of the value of spending in a medium characterized by excessive audience control and rapid surfing, the large media entrants into the Internet have gravitated to making familiar compromises—more attention to selling goods, cutting back on news, and providing features immediately attractive to audiences and advertisers. The *Boston Globe* (a subsidiary of the *New York Times*) and the *Washington Post* are offering e-commerce goods and services; and Ledbetter notes that "it's troubling that none of the newspaper portals feels that quality journalism is at the center of its strategy…because journalism doesn't help you sell things."[16] Former *New York Times* editor Max Frankel says that the more newspapers pursue Internet audiences, "the more will sex, sports, violence, and comedy appear on their menus, slighting, if not altogether ignoring, the news of foreign wars or welfare reform."[17]

New technologies are mainly introduced to meet corporate needs, and those of recent years have permitted media firms to shrink staff even as they achieve greater outputs, and they have made possible global distribution systems that reduce the number of media entities. The audience "interaction" facilitated by advancing interactive capabilities mainly help audience members to shop, but they also allow media firms to collect detailed information on their audiences, and thus to fine-tune program features and ads to individual characteristics as well as to sell by a click during programs. Along with reducing privacy, this should intensify commercialization.

In short, the changes in politics and communication over the past dozen years have tended on balance to enhance the applicability of the propaganda model. The increase in corporate power and global reach, the mergers and further centralization of the media, and the decline of public broadcasting, have made bottom-line considerations more influential both in the United States and abroad. The competition for advertising has become more intense and the boundaries between editorial and advertising departments have weakened further. Newsrooms have been more thoroughly incorporated into transnational corporate empires, with budget cuts and a further diminution of management enthusiasm for investigative journalism that would challenge the structures of power.

Over the past dozen years, sourcing and flak have also strengthened as mechanisms of elite influence. Media centralization and the reduction in the resources devoted to journalism have made the media more dependent than ever on the primary definers who both make the news and subsidize the media by providing accessible and cheap copy. They now have greater leverage over the media, and the public relations firms working for these and other powerful interests also bulk larger as media sources. Alex Carey, Stuart Ewen, John Stauber, and Sheldon Rampton have helped us see how the public relations industry has been able to utilize journalistic conventions to serve its-and its corporate clients'-ends.[18] Studies of news sources reveal that a significant proportion of news originates in public relations releases. There are, by one count, 20,000 more public relations agents working to doctor the news today than there are journalists writing it.[19]

The force of anti-communist ideology has possibly weakened with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the virtual disappearance of socialist movements across the globe, but this is easily offset by the greater ideological force of the belief in the "miracle of the market" (Reagan). The triumph of capitalism and the increasing power of those with an interest in privatization and market rule have strengthened the grip of market ideology, at least among the elite, so that regardless of evidence, markets are assumed to be benevolent and even democratic ("market populism" in Thomas Frank's phrase) and nonmarket mechanisms are suspect, although exceptions are allowed when private firms need subsidies, bailouts, and government help in doing business abroad. When the Soviet economy stagnated in the 1980s, it was attributed to the absence of markets; when

capitalist Russia disintegrated in the 1990s, this was blamed not on the now ruling market but on politicians' and workers' failure to let markets work their magic.[20] Journalism has internalized this ideology. Adding it to the residual power of anticommunism in a world in which the global power of market institutions makes nonmarket options seem utopian gives us an ideological package of immense strength.

These changes, which have strengthened the applicability of the propaganda model, have seriously weakened the "public sphere," which refers to the array of places and forums in which matters important to a democratic community are debated and information relevant to intelligent citizen participation is provided. The steady advance, and cultural power, of marketing and advertising has caused "the displacement of a political public sphere by a depoliticized consumer culture."[21] And it has had the effect of creating a world of virtual communities built by advertisers and based on demographics and taste differences of consumers. These consumption- and style-based clusters are at odds with physical communities that share a social life and common concerns and which participate in a democratic order.[22] These virtual communities are organized to buy and sell goods, not to create or service a public sphere.

Advertisers don't like the public sphere, where audiences are relatively small, upsetting controversy takes place, and the settings are not ideal for selling goods. Their preference for entertainment underlies the gradual erosion of the public sphere under systems of commercial media, well exemplified in the history of broadcasting in the United States over the past seventy-five years.[23] But entertainment has the merit not only of being better suited to helping sell goods; it is an effective vehicle for hidden ideological messages.[24] Furthermore, in a system of high and growing inequality, entertainment is the contemporary equivalent of the Roman "games of the circus" that diverts the public from politics and generates a political apathy that is helpful to preservation of the status quo.

It would be a mistake to conclude from the fact that the public buys and watches the offerings of the increasingly commercialized media that the gradual erosion of the public sphere reflects the preferences and free choices of the public either as citizens or consumers. The citizenry was never given the opportunity to approve or disapprove the wholesale transfer of broadcasting rights to commercial interests back in 1934,[25] and the pledge made by those interests, and subsequently by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) itself, that public service offerings would never be buried in favor of the entertainment preferred by advertisers, was never fulfilled.[26] The public is not sovereign over the media—the owners and managers, seeking ads, decide what is to be offered, and the public must choose among these. People watch and read in good part on the basis of what is readily available and intensively promoted. Polls regularly show that the public would like more news, documentaries, and other information, and less sex, violence, and other entertainment, even as they do listen to and watch the latter. There is little reason to believe that they would not like to understand why they are working harder with stagnant or declining incomes, have inadequate medical care at high costs, and what is being done in their name all over the world. If they are not getting much information on these topics, the propaganda model can explain why: the sovereigns who control the media choose not to offer such material.

Updating the Case Studies

In the case studies presented in chapters 2 through 6, we examine the differences in treatment of situations broadly similar in character, except for the political and economic interests at stake. Our expectation is that news as well as editorial opinion will be strongly influenced by those interests and should display a predictable bias. We would anticipate, for example, that an election held by a client-state government favored by US officials would be treated differently by the media than an election held by a government that US officials oppose. It will be seen in chapter 3 that in the important elections analyzed there this dichotomous treatment and bias was disp1ayed to an extraordinary degree.

Worthy and Unworthy Victims

In chapter 2, we compare the media's treatment of victims of enemy states and those of the United States and US client states. Our prediction is that the victims of enemy states will be found "worthy" and will be subject to more intense and indignant coverage than those victimized by the United States or its clients, who are implicitly "unworthy." It is shown in chapter 2 that a 1984 victim of the Polish Communists, the priest Jerzy Popieluszko, not only received far more coverage than bishop Oscar Romero, murdered in the US client-state El Salvador in 1980; he was given more coverage than the aggregate of one hundred religious victims killed in US client states, although eight of those victims were US citizens.

This bias is politically advantageous to US policy-makers, for focusing on victims of enemy states shows those states to be wicked and deserving of US hostility; while ignoring US and client-state victims allows ongoing US policies to proceed more easily, unburdened by the interference of concern over the politically inconvenient victims. It is not a credible reply that difficulty in getting evidence on "unworthy" victims can account for the application of such a gross double standard, as an alternative press with meager resources has been able to gather a great deal of material on their mistreatment from highly credible sources, such as major human rights organizations and church representatives.[27] Furthermore, only political factors can explain the differences in *quality* of treatment of worthy and unworthy victims noted throughout this book, illustrated in chapter 2 by the more antiseptic reporting of the abuse of unworthy victims (even US women raped and murdered in El Salvador) and the greater indignation and search for responsibility at the top of the case of worthy victims.

That the same massive political bias displayed earlier in the coverage of Popieluszko and the hundred religious victims in Latin America continues today is suggested by the media's usage of the word "genocide" in the 1990s, as shown in the accompanying table. "Genocide" is an invidious word that officials apply readily to cases of victimization in enemy states, but rarely if ever to similar or worse cases of victimization by the United States itself or allied regimes. Thus, with Saddam Hussein and Iraq having been us targets in the 1990s, whereas Turkey has been an ally and client and the United States its major arms supplier as it engaged in its severe ethnic cleansing of Kurds during those years, we find former us Ambassador Peter Galbraith stating that "while Turkey represses its own Kurds, its cooperation is essential to an American-led mission to protect Iraq's Kurds from renewed genocide at the hands of Saddam Hussein."[28] Turkey's treatment of its Kurds was in no way less murderous than Iraq's treatment of Iraqi Kurds, but for Galbraith, Turkey only "represses" while Iraq engages in "genocide."

Mainstream Media Usage of "Genocide" for Kosovo, East Timor, Turkey, and Iraq

COUNTRIES DATES	1. NO. OF TIMES WORD APPLIED TO SERBS, TURK, ETC.2	NO OF EDS/ OP-EDS DOING THE SAME	NEWS ARTICLES	FRONT PAGE
1. Serbs Kosovo 1998–1999	220	59	8	41
2. Indonesia/ East Timor, 1990–1999	33	7	17	4
3.Turkey/ Kurds, 1990–1999	14	2	8	1
4.Iraq/Kurds, 1990–1999	132	51	66	24
5. Iraq Sanctions, 1991–1999	18	1	10	1

1. Mainstream media used in this tabulation, based on a Nexus database search, were the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Newsweek*, and *Time*.

2. The numbers in columns 2 and 3 do not add up to the total in column 1, which also includes letters "World Briefings" and summary items.

The table shows that the five major print media surveyed engage in a similar biased usage, frequently using "genocide" to describe victimization

in the enemy states, but applying the word far less frequently to equally severe victimization carried out by the United States or its allies and clients. We can even read who are US friends and enemies from the media's use of the word. Thus, with the United States and its NATO allies warring against Yugoslavia in 1999, allegedly in response to that country's mistreatment of the Kosovo Albanians, official denunciations of that mistreatment flowed through the media, along with the repeated designation of the abuses as "genocidal." The same pattern applies to the Iraqi regime's abuse of its Kurdish population—after it had ceased to be a US ally[29]—an enemy state, official denunciations, harsh sanctions, and parallel media treatment.

On the other hand, Turkey and Indonesia have long been US allies and client states and recipients of military and economic aid. In consequence, and Just as the propaganda model would predict, the media not only gave minimal attention to the severe abuse of the Kurds by Turkey throughout the 1990s, and to the Clinton administration's lavish help to Turkey's implementation of that ethnic-cleansing program, they rarely applied the word "genocide" to these Turkish operations.

Similarly, the word was not often applied to the Indonesian mistreatment of the East Timorese, who were subjected to another wave of terror as Indonesia tried to prevent or defeat a un-sponsored referendum on independence in 1999. The United States, after helping Suharto take power in 1965 in one of the great bloodbaths of the twentieth century,[30] and after supporting his dictatorship for thirty-two years, also gave him crucial military and diplomatic aid when he invaded and occupied East Timor from 1975–31. In 1999, as Indonesia attempted to prevent the independence referendum in East Timor by violence, the United States maintained its military aid programs and refused to intervene to stop the killing, on the ground that what is happening "is the responsibility of the government of Indonesia, and we don't want to take that responsibility away from them" (as stated by Defense Secretary William Cohen in a press conference of September 8, 1999). This was long after Indonesia had killed thousands and destroyed much of East Timor. Shortly thereafter, under considerable international pressure, the United States invited Indonesia to leave the devastated country.

We have shown elsewhere that in 1975 and later the US media treated the East Timorese as unworthy victims, saving their attention and indignation for the almost simultaneous killings under Pol Pot in Cambodia. The victims of Pol Pot, a Communist leader, were worthy, although after he was ousted by the Vietnamese in 1978, Cambodians ceased to be worthy, as US policy shifted toward support of Pol Pot in exile.[32] The East Timorese remained unworthy in the 1990s, as the table suggests.

As the leader of the faction insisting on harsh sanctions against Iraq following the 1991 Persian Gulf War, the United States itself was responsible for a very large number of Iraqi civilians deaths in the 1990s. John and Karl Mueller assert that these "sanctions of mass destruction" have caused the deaths of "more people in Iraq than have been slain by all so-called weapons of mass destruction [nuclear and chemical] throughout all history."[33] A large fraction of the million or more killed by sanctions were young children; UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy pointed out that "if the substantial reduction in child mortality throughout Iraq during the 1980s had continued through the 1990s, there would have been half a million fewer deaths of children under five in the country as a whole during the eight year period 1991 to 1998."[34] However, as these deaths resulted from US policy, and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright declared on national television that these 500,000 child deaths were "worth it,"[35] we would expect the US media to find these victims unworthy, to give them little attention and less indignation, and to find the word "genocide" inapplicable to this case. The table shows that this expectation was realized in media practice.

The case for severe media bias suggested by the usage of genocide shown in the table is strengthened by the fact that, despite the great media attention to and indignation over the abuse of the Kosovo Albanians by the Serbs in 1998–1999, this mistreatment was almost certainly less

severe than that meted out to the Kurds in Turkey in the 1990s and to the East Timorese by the Indonesian army and paramilitary forces in East Timor in 1999. Deaths in Kosovo on all sides in the year before the NATO bombing were estimated by US and other Western sources to number no more than 2,000, and the Serb assault and expulsions that followed and accompanied the NATO bombing campaign also appear to have resulted in deaths in the low thousands (an intensive postwar search for graves had yielded some 3,000 bodies by August 2000, not all of them Albanian civilians or necessarily victims of the Serbs).[36] Deaths in the Turkish war on the Kurds in the 1990s were estimated to be 30,000 or more, a large fraction Kurdish civilians, with refugee numbers running to 2 to 3 million. In East Timor, where the Indonesian military organized and collaborated with a paramilitary opposition to a UN-sponsored independence referendum held on August 30, 1999, an estimated 5,000 to 6,000 East Timorese civilians were slaughtered even before the referendum vote that rejected Indonesian rule, which unleashed a furious Indonesian army-paramilitary assault on East Timorese.[37]

The double standard reflected in the politicized use of "genocide" is applicable to the treatment of news events more broadly, with the media regularly focusing on the abuse of worthy victims and playing down or neglecting altogether the plight of unworthy victims. As an illustration, we may consider the contrasting media treatment of the alleged killing of some forty Albanians by the Serbs at Racak, Kosovo, on January 15, 1999, and the Indonesian army-militia killing of "up to 200" East Timorese at Liquica in EastTimor on April 6, 1999.[38] The former was seen as useful by US officials,[39] who were trying to ready the US and Western publics for an imminent NATO attack on Yugoslavia. Although the facts in the Racak killings, which occurred in the course of fighting between the Serbian military and Kosovo Liberation Army insurgents within Yugoslavia, were and remain in dispute-and recent evidence raises further doubts about the NATO-KLA account of events there[40]—the deaths were immediately denounced and featured by US and NATO officials as an intolerable "massacre." The US mainstream media did the same and gave this reported massacre heavy and uncritical attention.[41] This helped create the moral basis for the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia that began on March 24, 1999.

The Liquica killings of East Timorese seeking refuge in a Catholic church by Indonesian-organized militia forces were indisputably a "massacre," apparently involved many more victims than at Racak, and it took place in a territory illegally occupied by a foreign state (Indonesia). It was also neither a unique event nor was it connected to any warfare, as in Kosovo—it was a straightforward slaughter of civilians. But US officials did not denounce this massacre—in fact, active US support of the Indonesian military continued throughout this period and up to a week after the referendum, by which time 85 percent of the population had been driven from their homes and well over 6,000 civilians had been slaughtered. The U.S. mainstream media followed the official lead. For a twelve-month period following the date of each event, the mentions of Racak by the five media entities cited in the table exceeded mentions of Liquica by 4.1 to 1 and mentions of "massacre" at the two sites was in a ratio of 6.7 to 1. The greater length of accounts of the Racak event elevates the ratio to 14 to 1 as measured by word count. Newsweek, which mentioned Racak and its "massacre" nine times, failed to mention Liquica once.

Thus, with the cooperation of the media, the Racak killings were effectively used by US officials to ready the public for war, not only by their intensive coverage but also by their taking the official allegations of massacre at face value. In the same time frame, the media's treatment of the indisputable massacre at Liquica was insufficient in volume or indignation to mobilize the public, in accord with the US policy of leaving the management of events in East Timor to the US ally Indonesia.

Legitimating Versus Meaningless Third World Elections

In chapter 3 we show that the mainstream media have followed a government agenda in treating elections in client and disfavored states. In El

Salvador in the 1980s, the US government sponsored several elections to demonstrate to the US public that our intervention there was approved by the local population; whereas when Nicaragua held an election in 1984, the Reagan administration tried to discredit it to prevent legitimation of a government the administration was trying to overthrow. The mainstream media cooperated, finding the Salvadoran election a "step toward democracy" and the Nicaraguan election a "sham" despite the fact that electoral conditions were far more compatible with an honest election in Nicaragua than in EI Salvador. We demonstrate that the media applied a remarkable dual standard to the two elections in accord with the government's propaganda needs.

This same bias is apparent in the press treatment of more recent elections in Cambodia, Yugoslavia, Kenya, Mexico, Russia, Turkey, and Uruguay. Cambodia and Yugoslavia were the only two of these seven ruled by a party strongly objectionable to us policy-makers, and it is in these cases that the New York Times warned of serious problems: As regards Cambodia, it asserted that "flawed elections are worse than none" and that "the international community must proceed cautiously, lest a rigged election give Mr. Hun Sen a veneer of legitimacy."[42] In reporting on the Yugoslavian election of September 2000, in which US officials intervened openly to prevent the reelection of Slobodan Milosevic, the *Times* and media in general repeatedly warned of the possibility of fraud and a rigged election.[43] In the case of Kenya, where us policy toward the ruling government was ambivalent, here also the Times was skeptical of election quality, noting that "holding elections is not enough to assure democratic government" and stressing the need for "an independent electoral commission less bound to political parties" and "independent broadcast media, allowing opposition voices to be heard outside election periods."[44]

But in the other four elections, organized and won by governments strongly favored by the US State Department, there were no suggestions that "flawed elections are worse than none" and no featuring of the threat of fraud; the importance of an independent electoral commission and broadcast media was not pressed, and in each case the election was found to be a step toward democracy and hence legitimizing.

In the case of Mexico, long subject to one party (PRJ) rule, but supported by the US government over the past several decades, the Times has regularly found the Mexican elections encouraging, in contrast with past fraudulent ones which, at the time, the editors also contrasted ably with those in the more distant past! It has featured expressions of benevolent intent and downplayed structural defects and abuses. Thus, in its first editorial on the 1988 election that brought Carlos Salinas de Gortari to power, the Times noted that prior elections were corrupt (the PRI "manipulated patronage, the news media and the ballot box"), but it stressed that PRI candidate Salinas "contends" that political reform is urgent and "calls for clean elections."[45] The editors questioned whether "his party" will "heed his pleas" a process of distancing the favored candidate from responsibility for any abuses to come. In the editorials that followed, the *Times* did not suggest possible ongoing electoral fraud' "manipulated patronage" or media controls and bias, although this election was famous for a convenient "computer breakdown" in the election aftermath, which turned Carlos Salinas from an expected loser into a winner. Just three years later, however, at the time of the 1991 election, the editors stated that "as long as anyone can remember, Mexican elections have been massively fraudulent" as it prepared readers for new promises of a cleanup.[46] But all through this period and later, the *Times* (and its media rivals) did not focus on fraud or call these elections rigged; in both news stories and editorials they portrayed these deeply flawed elections as steps toward democracy and legitimizing.

In the 1983 Turkish election, held under military rule, with harsh censorship and only three parties "led by politicians sympathetic to the military government" allowed to run, the Times found that "'Turkey Approaches Democracy."[47] Similarly, in Uruguay's 1984 election, under another military regime that jailed the leading opposition candidate and also refused to allow a second major candidate to run, but organized

by a government approved by the US State Department, the *Times* once again found that "Uruguay is resuming its democratic vocation…the generals are yielding to the infectious resurgence of democracy in much of Latin America."[48]

The Russian election of 1996 was important to the United States and its allies, as Boris Yeltsin, the ruler who was carrying out their favored policies of privatization and the integration of Russia into the global financial system, was seriously threatened with defeat. The Yeltsin government had presided over a 50 percent fall in national output and large income declines for 90 percent of the population, while the hugely corrupt privatization process provided windfalls to a small minority, including an important criminal class. The social welfare and health care systems had disintegrated under Yeltsin's rule, contributing to a startling rise in infectious diseases and mortality rates. Just before the 1996 election campaign, Yeltsin's popularity rating was 8 percent That he could win reelection in such circumstances suggests-and reflects-a seriously flawed election.

However, with the Yeltsin regime strongly backed by the US government and its Western allies, the *New York Times* once again found this election "A Victory for Russian Democracy" and so did the US mainstream media in general. For that paper of record, electoral flaws were slighted or ignored, and its editors declared the very fact of holding an "imperfect" election "a remarkable achievement."[49] The same bias was evident in reporting on the March 2000 Russian election, won by Yeltsin's anointed heir and former KGB operative Vladimir Putin. Putin had built his popularity by conducting a brutal counterinsurgency war against Chechnya, and his electoral success rested heavily on the fact that the powerful state TV and radio stations campaigned furiously on his behalf and denigrated and gave no broadcasting time to his opponents. A September 2000 expose of the Putin election campaign by the expatriate *Moscow Times*, based on a six-month investigative effort, uncovered compelling evidence of election fraud, including ballot stuffing, ballot destruction, and the creation of 1.3 million "dead souls" inflating the election rolls.[50] The US mainstream media, however, never found any evidence of fraud at the time of the election, and they have been reluctant to report the findings of the *Moscow Times* study.[51] Putin is another "reformer" like Yeltsin, supported by the West, so that it follows once again that for the mainstream media a flawed election—hardly admitted to be flawed—remains better than none.[52]

The KGB-Bulgarian Plot to Assassinate the Pope

During the Reagan era (1981–88), there was a concerted effort to demonize the Soviet Union, in order to support a major arms buildup and a new, more aggressive policy in the Third World and globally. The Soviet Union was described as an "Evil Empire" and accused of sponsoring international terrorism as well as abusing its own and client-nation peoples.[53] When the would-be assassin Mehmet Ali Agca shot Pope John Paul II in Rome in May 1981, this provided the basis for one of the most successful propaganda campaigns of the Cold War era.

Although the pope's assailant was a Turkish fascist and member of a violently anti-left party in Turkey, after a seventeen-month stint in an Italian prison Agca "confessed" that he had been hired by the x and Bulgarians. This confession was convenient, fitting well the interests of the dominant Italian parties anxious to discredit the powerful Italian Communist party as well as the Reagan administration's "Evil Empire" campaign. It was extremely suspicious for other reasons, coming so belatedly, and after numerous visits to Agca by Italian secret service representatives, judges, and papal agents, all with a political ax to grind, and with the secret service notorious for ideological extremism and willingness to doctor evidence.[54]

But the mainstream media accepted this story with astonishing gullibility-the possibility of coaching and pressure on Agca to name the KGB and Bulgarians, much discussed in the Italian media, was almost never mentioned as even a theoretical possibility. And the weakness of the alleged Soviet motive, the sheer stupidity of the enterprise if Soviet based, and the complete lack of confirmatory evidence was almost entirely ignored by the

media (as described in chapter 4). When the case was lost in an Italian court in 1986, despite a substantial Italian government investment and effort, for the us mainstream media this merely reflected the peculiarities of the Italian system of justice; the continued absence of hard evidence led to no reassessment of the case or reflections on their own role.

In the years that followed, two developments threw some light on the case. One is that the Soviet and Bulgarian archives were opened up, and Allen Weinstein of the Center for Democracy gained permission from Bulgarian authorities in 1991 for members of his investigative commission to look at the Bulgarian Interior Ministry's secret service files. After a stint in Bulgaria, Weinstein returned home having failed to locate any confirmatory evidence of Bulgarian or KGB involvement. The *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Newsweek*, and *Time*, each of which had reported Weinstein's initiative and impending trip to Bulgaria in 1991, all failed to inform their readers of his negative findings.[55] Later in 1991, at Senate hearings on the confirmation of Robert Gates as head of the CIA, former CIA officers Melvin Goodman and Harold Ford testified that the CIA's analysis of the Bulgarian Connection had been seriously compromised and politicized in support of the Reagan era anti-Soviet propaganda campaign. Goodman testified that not only had the CIA found no evidence of Soviet or Bulgarian involvement in the shooting, but that based on the CIA's "very good penetration of the Bulgarian secret services" its professionals had concluded that a Bulgarian Connection did not exist.[56]

This testimony, which was a brutal *coup de grâce* to the claims of a connection, put the media on the spot. It was now clear that in their enthusiastic support of the plot they had seriously misled their readers and performed badly as news purveyors and analysts, although serving well the propaganda needs of their government. But as in 1986, after the case against the Bulgarians was dismissed in an Italian court for insufficient evidence, none of them felt any obligation to explain their failures and apologize to their readers. They reported the CIA revelations tersely, with some still claiming that while the connection had not been proved it had not been disproved either (ignoring the frequent impossibility of proving a negative).[57] But in general the mainstream media moved quickly on without reassessing their performance or the fact that they and their media colleagues had been agents of propaganda.

The New York Times, which had been consistently supportive of the connection in both news and editorials, not only failed to report Weinstein's negative findings from the search of the Bulgarian files, it also excluded Goodman's statement on the CIA's penetration of the Bulgarian secret services from their excerpts from his testimony. The Times had long maintained that the CIA and the Reagan administration "recoiled from the devastating implication that Bulgaria's agents were bound to have acted only on a signal from Moscow."[58] But Goodman's and Ford's testimony showed that this was the reverse of the truth, and that CIA heads William Casey and Robert Gates overrode the views of CIA professionals and falsified evidence to support a Soviet linkage. The Times was not alone in following a misleading party line, but it is notable that this paper of record has yet to acknowledge its exceptional gullibility and propaganda service.

VIETNAM, LAOS, AND CAMBODIA: Vietnam: Was the United States a Victim or an Aggressor?

In chapters 5 through 7, we show that media coverage of the Indochina wars fits the propaganda model very well. The United States first intervened in Indochina immediately after World War ii in support of French recolonization, after which it carried out a twenty-one-year effort (1954-75) to impose a government in the southern half of Vietnam that us officials and analysts consistently recognized as lacking any substantial indigenous support, and in opposition to local nationalist-though Communist-forces that were understood to have a mass base us leaders operated on the belief that their overwhelming military might would not only enable them, but entitled them, to force submission to a minority government of us choice.

By normal word usage this would make the US effort in Vietnam a

case of "aggression." The mainstream media, however, rarely if ever found US policy there to be other than highly moral and well intentioned, even if based on miscalculation of its costs—to us (see chapter 5). The media readily accepted that we were protecting "South Vietnam"—a US creation ruled by a dictator imported directly from the United States—against somebody else's aggression, vacillating in their identification of the aggressor between North Vietnam, the Soviet Union, China, or the resistance in South Vietnam engaging in "internal aggression"! It is compelling evidence of the propaganda service of the mainstream media that throughout the war they accepted this basic propaganda assumption of the war managers, and from that era up to today, we have never found a mainstream editorial or news report that characterized the U.S. war againstVietnam, and then all ofIndochina, as a case of aggression.

After the United States terminated the military phase of the war in 1975, it maintained and enforced an eighteen-year boycott ofthe country that it had virtually destroyed. According to Vietnamese estimates, the war had cost them 3 million killed, 300,000 missing, 4.4 million wounded, and 2 million harmed by toxic chemicals; and its land was left ravaged by bombs and Rome plows as well as chemical weapons. With 58,000 killed, the U.S. death toll from the war was under one-tenth ofI percent ofits population;Vietnam"s death toll was 17 percent ofits population, and onlyVietnam"s people were attacked by chemical warfare and had their countryside devastated.

Nevertheless, U.S. officials and the mainstream media continued to view the U.S. role in the war as creditable, the United States as the victim. President George Bush stated in 1992 that '"Hanoi knowstoday that we seek only answers without the threat of retribution for the past."59 That is, the Vietnamese had done things to us that might justify retribution on our part, but we only seek answers regarding our men missing in action.60 New lOrk Times foreign affairs commentator Leslie Gelb justified classifyingVietnam an '"outlaw"" on the grounds that '"they had killed Americans."61 This reflects the common establishment view, implicit in Bush"s comment, that nobody has a right of self-defense against this country, even ifit intervenes across the ocean to impose by force a government that the people ofthat country reject.

U.S. Chemical Warfare in Indochina

It is also of interest how the media have treated the massive use ofchemicals during the Vietnam War and the horrifying aftermath for the victim country. In 1961 and 1962 the Kennedy administration authorized the use of chemicalsto destroy rice crops in SouthVietnam-in violation of a U.S. tradition as well as international law (Admiral William Leahy, in response to a proposal to destroy Japanese rice crops in 1944, stated that this would '"violate every Christian ethic I have ever heard of and all known laws of war"").62 Between 1961 and 1971, however, the U.S. Air Force sprayed 20 million gallons of concentrated arsenic-based and dioxin-laden herbicides (mainly Agent Orange) on 6 million acres of crops and trees, besides using large quantities of the '"super tear gas"" CS and vast amounts ofnapalm and phosphorus bombs."} An estimated 13 percent of South Vietnam's land was subjected to chemical attacks. This included 30 percent of its rubber plantations and 36 percent of its mangrove forests, along with other large forest areas, destroyed by toxic chemicals in programs that included multiple "large-scale intentional effon[s] combining defoliation with incendiaries to produce a forest fire in South Vietnam."[64] A 1967 study prepared by the head of the Agronomy Section of the Japanese Science Council concluded that US anticrop warfare had already ruined more than 3.8 million acres of arable land in South Vietnam, killing almost 1,000 peasants and over 13,000 livestock.[65] This policy of attempting to force enemy capitulation by destroying its food supply was not only contrary to the rules of war,[66] it was notable in that it "first and overwhelmingly affected small children.[67]

Laos was also subjected to chemical attacks in 1966 and 1969, directed at both crops, and vegetation along communication routes. And in Cambodia, some 173,000 acres of rubber plantations, crops and forests were