

MEDIA PLAY

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I conducted a study about six years ago where I followed campaign coverage of the 1992 Presidential election in our country's major periodicals, The New York Times, Washington Post, Chicago Tribune, and the Los Angeles Times. At the time of the study, the incumbent George Bush was leading in the polls by a substantial margin over Bill Clinton. The information and patterns I discovered following the daily coverage of these major newspapers was quite enlightening.

The press that Bill Clinton received during his campaign overwhelmingly surpassed anything George Bush received. Almost daily, the aforementioned periodicals would contain large articles about the Clinton campaign. These articles entailed, where he stopped, where he spoke, basically whatever he did for the day. However, coverage of George Bush and his campaign stops or appearances were seldom if ever covered. The evidence led me to believe that the press wanted Clinton to close the gap. It looked as if they were trying to make a horse race out of the election. The closer the race the better the story. The better the story the better the sales. In this case, I concluded that the press was the most important factor in putting Bill Clinton in office.

The news media is a multi-billion dollar business with many players looking to get their piece of the pie. Unfortunately, in their efforts to sell more papers and attract more viewers they lose sight of the real task and responsibility at hand, delivering honest unbiased reliable information. With so many 24-hour news stations out there and daily periodicals, the competition to be first to cover a breaking story is immense. Journalists are rushed to get their product on the airwaves as quickly as possible, with no real effort placed on confirmation of facts.

In a story covered by *Sixty Minutes* on CBS, The Sun newspaper of England printed a story about the assassination of Robert Kennedy. Their theory was that the Iranians killed him. On the cover of the paper the title of the article was "IRANIANS KILLED ROBERT KENNEDY." In the article they showed a picture of the man who they claimed did it. The story was a complete lie. The man they fingered as the killer was nothing more than a photographer covering Robert Kennedy and is now suing the paper. The Sun is another form of the National Enquirer. Hence, anything read must always be taken with an extra grain of salt. The interesting thing about this lawsuit is that all the major news companies worldwide are speaking on behalf of the defendant. They want The Sun to get off! Their position is that if The Sun is found guilty it would open the door for future lawsuits against themselves. The thing that I find so difficult to comprehend is, if a journalist is doing his or her job collecting all the facts and reporting in an unbiased fashion, why would they ever have to worry about lawsuits.

The job of the news media is to report facts. The public should be able to look at events or issues with a clean set of glasses and form their own opinion. Today more than ever journalists are taking on the task of interpreter. They are taking facts and giving the public their spin on "what really happened." By writing their own version of history, the news media wields an enormous amount of power. I was speaking with a journalist recently regarding some of my concerns with this matter. His reply, "The public doesn't want to think for themselves, they are lazy, they want to shop for their opinions, and that's what we sell opinions." That statement which could have been taken from George Orwell's 1984, sent a cold Halloween chill down my spine. Thanks, but no thanks, I'll continue to read my "dry, boring" periodicals, and actually come up with my own opinions. We all live busy, complex lives as Americans; however, being able to think for oneself should not be discarded out of inconvenience.