

January 5, 2004

2004 Travers Ethics Conference
Media, Democracy, and the Informed Citizen

Sponsored by:

UC Berkeley Col. Charles T. & Louise H. Travers Program on
Ethics and Government Accountability
UC Berkeley Political Science Department
UC Berkeley Institute of Governmental Studies
The Commonwealth Club of California

Friday, April 30, 2004
Lipman Room, 8th floor Barrows Hall
University of California, Berkeley

The belief that successful democratic governance requires citizens who are well informed about the issues of their time goes back to James Madison and the constitution. Insofar as popular government requires information that is accurate, critical, and widely available, journalists play a key role in the political education of citizens, and therefore in the ability of those citizens to hold their government accountable for public policy. The media, in short, is there to serve the citizens. Is journalism fulfilling its responsibilities to citizens in the United States? Or, as some have argued, is it increasingly becoming the province of private commercial interests at the expense of the democratic process? This one-day conference will examine these questions through three topics: media sources, campaigns and the media, and war and the media.

Keynote Speaker: Jay Harris, University of Southern California and Santa Clara University

Panel 1: Media Sources: Infotainment?

This panel will explore the impact of media sources on the availability of comprehensive and objective information relating to government, policy, and general social issues. Is there media source bias? Are certain sources more comprehensive or objective than others? What is the effect of the internet on individual consumption of news relating to government and politics? How does media source competition effect political news coverage? Is news becoming another source of entertainment?

Chair: Shannon Stimson, University of California, Berkeley

Confirmed speakers:

John Zaller, University of California, Los Angeles

Douglas Kellner, University of California, Los Angeles

Panel 2: Campaigns and the Media

Thanks to modern media, more political information is available to the public than ever before. Yet this information is increasingly managed and tightly controlled by the candidates and their organizations, and although the number of media outlets has increased, media ownership is being greatly consolidated. This panel examines these inherent tensions and other aspects of the

relationship between media and political campaigns in a democracy. How do the mass media affect people's perceptions and evaluations of politics, the candidates, and their campaigns? How do they affect citizen involvement in democracy and the accountability of elected officials to the public? What are the roles and responsibilities of the mass media in a democracy? How do media affect democratic practice at both the elite and popular level?

Chair: Susan Rasky, University of California, Berkeley

Confirmed speakers:

Lance Bennett, University of Washington

Barbara O'Connor, Sacramento State University

Michael Finnegan, Los Angeles Times

Panel 3: War and the Media

Issues involving embedded journalists, journalism and patriotism, and what is perceived by some as a lack of critical media coverage of recent events have driven the topic of media coverage and war increasingly into the limelight. This panel will address a number of timely questions including: How has the role of the media in covering war changed since Sept. 11th? What, if any, is the proper role of patriotism in the media during a time of national crisis? Has role of the media as critic been compromised during US actions in Afghanistan and Iraq? If so, what are the implications and what can be done to change coverage? In an area like humanitarian intervention, where there is little public awareness and often no critical national interests clearly at stake, how does the media decide what to present as top story news (Kosovo) and what not to (Sudan)?

Chair: Amy Gurowitz, University of California, Berkeley

Confirmed speakers:

Mark Danner, University of California, Berkeley

Frederico Rampini, La Repubblica, Italy, and University of California, Berkeley

Debra Saunders, San Francisco Chronicle

John Koopman, San Francisco Chronicle