Spring 1987

The Mass Media And Vietnam

Michael Uda
Carroll College, Helena, MT

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholars.carroll.edu/politicalsci_theses

Part of the American Politics Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholars.carroll.edu/politicalsci_theses/52

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Political Science and International Relations at Carroll Scholars. It has been accepted for inclusion in Political Science and International Relations Undergraduate Theses by an authorized administrator of Carroll Scholars. For more information, please contact tkratz@carroll.edu.
THE MASS MEDIA AND VIETNAM

THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND COMMUNICATION ARTS FOR HONORS CONSIDERATION

BY
MICHAEL JOHN UDA

HELENA, MONTANA
MARCH 24, 1987
This thesis for honors recognition has been approved for the Department of Political Science and the Department of Communication Arts.

Dr. [Signature]
Director
3/31/87

[Signature]
Reader
3/27/87

[Signature]
Reader
3/27/87
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. METHODOLOGY AND PURPOSE</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. THE POLICY MAKERS</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. THE MEDIA</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. THE DEMONSTRATORS</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. SOURCES CONSULTED</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

METHODOLOGY AND PURPOSE

The question many Vietnam scholars have asked is, "What went wrong with American policy in Vietnam?" Fewer have asked, "What impact did the mass media have on the way the public viewed the war?" Fewer yet asked the question, "What was the relationship between the government, the media, and the public in the way policy was formed, and the war was fought, and what were the relative impacts of each of these agents on the way the war was conducted?" This question shall be the focal point of this study. Each agent (i.e., the mass media, the public, and the government) shall be given individual attention. But to facilitate understanding of each of these agents, I should begin by defining each of them in operational fashion for the purposes of this analysis.

The government I shall be discussing is the United States Government. In particular, I will discuss the Executive branch and the Bureaucracy. The policy for the war was decided in large part by the presidents, their White House staffers, the State and Defense Departments, and the Central Intelligence Agency. All these players attempted to
influence the decision-making of the presidents' inner circle of advisors.  

I will be focusing on the elite members of the public, such as interest groups, who involved themselves in the Vietnam War to a level beyond that of most Americans. For this study, the public will be narrowed to study one of the most influential of interest groups: the student demonstrators. The demonstrators were one agent who competed for influence in the system.

The mass media shall be defined as the members of news-related gathering and disseminating organizations. This includes newspapers, news magazines, television and radio. The main focus shall be on television and newspapers.

The significance of these different agents for the overall communication-policy process is found in their interplay and the struggle for influence between them. To describe this complex interplay, we should begin with a basic definition of communication. Larry Samovar writes that the communication process is:

...a two-way, on-going, behavior-affecting process in which one person (a source) intentionally encodes and transmits a message through a channel to an intended audience (receivers) in order to induce a particular attitude or behavior.
The importance of this definition of communication is its focus on the aspect of intentionality in communication. Communication can certainly be unintentional, but unintentional communication brings in a wide variety of factors that are superfluous to the scope of the analysis herein presented. The idea of intention is important because it focuses on the deliberate attempt by the sender to change or affect the behavior of the receiver. Thus, all communication which will be discussed in this thesis will be assumed to be deliberate in intent and to have a specified purpose.

In a democratic system there is supposed to be a connecting factor between governmental decision making and the public. To be heard, the public must gain access in some way to people of influence in the system. The people who possess that influence have been called either "gatekeepers" or "opinion leaders". "Gatekeepers" are those who decide what are issues of enough importance to be considered "agenda" for wider consideration beyond the initial group agitating for access to the policy making channels. The gatekeepers also decide what will not be included in the societal "agenda". The "agenda" is what is considered by society to be a significant public policy issue. "Opinion leaders" can also be Gatekeepers. Opinion
leaders are those who decide not only the significance of an issue, but also try to influence the opinions of others about the issue. The press can be gatekeepers, opinion leaders, or both. More often they are the former, but are accused from time to time of being the latter. Regardless, the press plays a crucial role in the political system by deciding what the public should know.

Now, after all the elements in the system have been fleshed out, I will explain the system itself. In the United States we value the people's right to determine governmental actions. Systemic design allows us to explore both the nature of the interaction between the public and the government, and how decisions are made by the government. The system is the political communications system of the United States. The system consists of the interaction between the media, the public, interest groups, and the government. Thomas Dye offers this explanation of how political systems operate:

Another way to conceive of public policy is to think of it as a response of a political system to forces brought to bear upon it from the environment. Forces generated in the environment which affect the political system are viewed as inputs. The environment is any condition or circumstance defined as external to the boundaries of the political system. The political system is that group of interrelated structures and processes which functions authoritatively to allocate values for a society. Outputs of the political system are authoritative value allocations of the system, and these
allocations constitute public policy. ...Systems theory portrays public policy as an output if the political system. The concept of "system" implies an identifiable set of institutions and activities in society that function to transform demands into authoritative decisions requiring the support of the whole society.25 (see figure 1-1)

There are three important points that Dye makes that I wish to explore. First, the system adapts to challenges brought to bear upon it; in Dye's estimation these challenges originate in the environment. The environment is not part of the system itself but interacts with the system to create policy. However, Dye also says the system includes the identifiable institutions and activities in society that will turn demands into policies. This indicates to me the system includes such elements as the media and interest groups because their activities can serve to transform demands into policy by bringing pressure to bear upon the government.26 Moreover, the media can be considered a systemic agent because of its institutional nature. Interest groups could possibly be a be part of the environment, but for purposes of this study they will be treated as agents of the system. I will treat them in this as agents because, once organized, many interest groups have enough power they are functional actors within the system who must respond to environmental pressures such as public demand.27


Note#1—"Demands Occur when individuals or groups, in response to real or perceived environmental conditions, act to affect public policy."

Note#2—"Support is rendered when individuals or groups accept the outcome of elections, obey the laws, pay their taxes, and generally conform to policy decisions."
The second part of Mr. Dye's analysis I wish to discuss is the concept of the allocation of values in the form of public policy. In this study, the important point is that the communications between the various actors in the system determines what the policy output will be. For example, when the media and interest groups transmit supportive messages about governmental policy there is little chance the system will change regardless of environmental inputs. This is because generalized public opinion is often too vague to be acted upon by the government who implements policy change in the system. Thus, the environmental aspects can be less important than the interest groups and the media which operate within the political system. Therefore, the values which are allocated are often the values of the agents within the system.

The third aspect of Dye's systemic design I wish to examine is the functioning of the system as it processes inputs into outputs. If there were no inputs from the environment, would this mean the system would have no outputs? There would be outputs because the values of the agents in the system are also translated into policy. Interest groups, the media, and the government all have their own interests and beliefs, and they will compete within the system to produce a value allocation that results in an
output. Furthermore, Dye's analysis indicates the system's output is not the end of the transaction. The system will not stop once a decision is made. Environmental agents, such as the public, will interpret policy outputs as communicative acts. This will be called, for purposes of this study, "feedback". Other actors in the system will also respond to what the government, as the actual implementation mechanism in the system, has chosen to do in terms of policy.

The major difference between Dye's analysis and the model I will be using is that Dye is interested mostly in what is produced as outputs as an indication of the value allocation of the whole system. (see figure 1-1) I am most interested in the communicative aspects of what Dye terms inputs and outputs. (see figure 1-2) Referring briefly back to the beginning of this chapter, you will note I said intentionality is pivotal to this analysis of political communication. Therefore, the communication of inputs and outputs will be viewed as intentional messages sent to the governmental agent within the system to be implemented. As will be discussed in Chapter Three, nobody perfectly understands reality, and as a result, they may distort the messages they receive from others. This distortion can also be the result of deliberate attempts to focus the flow of communication. As will be discussed, factors such as fear of
Note #1 - Inputs include demands and supports as in Dye's model.
Note #2 - Output includes decisions and actions.
Note #3 - Interest groups get input from the environment but they usually do not have communication directly to the government.
Note #4 - The media gets information from the environment and interest groups, filters it, and transmits it to the government. The process by which the media filters reality is discussed in Chapter Three.
Note #5 - The government is the actual mechanism for implementing policy outputs. The feedback loop is assumed to be relayed to all actors in the system and to environmental elements such as the public.
public outcry about the War in Vietnam caused the government to filter all information they received from the environment, from the other actors in the system, and from its own channels of the communication.

The government's decision making and information using procedures will get particular attention because it is the mechanism within the system which enacts the policy outputs. Another point is that the agents in the political system did not always have equal power. At various points in time, one actor gained predominence over policy outputs. As we shall see, however, this was because other agents in the system were either not unified enough or not active enough to change the way values were allocated.

The media acted as a reinforcer for other agents in the system, and as a perpetuator of its own values. The media served as the major filter between the actors in the system, and between the environment and the system. Specifically, the way decisions were made by the government were affected by the media. Moreover, the public was affected by the way the media shaped their messages. The media in short, had a major impact in determining the flow of communication between the actors in the system, and the way policy inputs and outputs were determined by the various agents in the
environment and the system. This study will attempt to flesh out each of the elements in this system and explain some of the interactions within the system itself. The analysis will discuss the interplay between the system and the environment.

The question I wish the reader to be able to answer is, what was the role the media played in shaping the way the Vietnam War was pursued in terms of policy output? The way the media reported the War influenced the government, the public, and the interest groups who competed for control of the policy output of the system. It is my job to explain the way in which this occurred, and to answer some of the questions raised about the accuracy and responsibility of the media. The system was heavily influenced by the media, and determining its net impact on the way the Vietnam War was fought will be the ultimate purpose of this study.
End Notes—Chapter I


2 This is particularly the emphasis of Peter Braestrup's book Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet in Vietnam and Saigon (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1976).


4 Ibid.


7 Morgan, Dynamics, p. 137.

8 Ibid, p. 240.

9 Ibid.
This is an operational judgment on my part in order to focus on the mediums most frequently discussed.


Items such as unintentional non-verbal communication are difficult to measure in terms of the system. See Samovar, *Intercultural*, pp. 11-13.

This is so the system can be seen as self-perpetuating unit which responds to input as though it is deliberate. See Thomas Dye, *Understanding Public Policy*, 5th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Publishing, 1984), p. 40. (Hereafter referred to as Dye, *Policy*).


Ibid.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Morgan calls them "opinion-makers" but I prefer the term "leaders" because it separates gatekeepers and opinion


23 Morgan, *Dynamics*, p. 124.


27 Ibid.


29 This will be discussed in detail in chapter 5.

30 Morgan, *Dynamics*, pp. 132-133.


32 This is demonstrated by the fact the actors in the system also have values which they wish to see translated into policy outputs. For the War era governments, anti-communism was a strong value they tried to implement into policy. See David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Books, 1972), passim.

33 Ibid.

34 Thomas R. Dye in *Understanding Public Policy* calls these "outputs", but emphasizes that reaction to the output results in new "inputs" into the system. Moreover, as Merrill

35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
39 This will be discussed at length in Chapter 2.
40 For example for a time government gained a predominance over the system. See Loren Baritz, *Backfire* (New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1983), chap 3 passim. (Hereafter cited as Baritz, *Backfire*).
42 Ibid, p. 455.
43 Ibid.
CHAPTER II

THE POLICY MAKERS

On July 23, 1965, President Johnson formally announced the "Americanization" of the United States Vietnam Policy. Johnson had this to say about his decision to send large numbers of combat troops to that troubled Asian nation:

Most of the non-Communist nations of Asia cannot, by themselves and alone, resist the growing might and grasping ambition of Asian communism. Our power therefore, is a very vital shield. If we are driven from the field in Viet-Nam, then no nation can ever again have the same confidence in American promise, or in American protection. ...Nor would surrender in Viet-Nam bring peace, because we learned from Hitler at Munich that success only feeds the appetite of aggression. The battle would be renewed in one country and then another country, bringing with it perhaps even larger and crueler conflict, as we have learned from the lessons of history.

America's anti-communist rationale played a large part in determining the way America prosecuted the Vietnam War. Equally important, however, were the various communication breakdowns which led to decision making based upon incorrect premises and distorted views of reality. This caused the decision making to be of a generally poor quality. Ultimately such poor decisions contributed to the failure of the United States to "win" the Vietnam War, and created the negative
media coverage of the Johnson Administration.

The central question to be answered in this chapter is, what went wrong with decision making during the Vietnam War? Furthermore, how was the failure of decision making linked to the way the media reported the War? To answer these questions, I will explore four different areas of analysis. The first area to be discussed will be the communication setting for decision making in the Johnson Administration. Following this, I will discuss the manner and functioning of upward and downward communication channels, and how the communication that came through these channels affected the decision making process. The next area of discussion will be the way the decision makers shielded the public, the media, and to an extent themselves, from the realities of the War. Last, I will discuss how all of these factors distorted the War reporting, and how this distortion led to the media disputing the credibility of the White House.

The job of the president of the United States is an enormously complex and difficult one. Because of this, presidents rely on advisors and staff to help make decisions. Therefore, the process of presidential decision making is a group decision making situation. In addition, because the president's inner circle of advisors is small in number, the
White House policy process is what is known as a small group decision making setting. B. Aubrey Fisher defines the small group as: "...a collection of individual persons whose communicative behaviors--specifically acts [and] interacts...--become interstructured and repetitive in the form of predictable patterns". The importance of this definition is its emphasis on the predictability of interaction. Thus, patterns of communication in the small group do not rapidly change.

The fact the group behaves in a predictable manner has implications for the way decisions are made in the small group. Scheidel and Crowell say the decision making in small groups operates in this fashion:

One member introduces an idea, and other members respond with agreement or disagreement, extension or revision. The idea is the object of discussion, and it develops over time to reflect the group's viewpoint. When an idea is developed to the point that it is an object of agreement by all group members, the group anchors its position on that idea and introduces new preliminary ideas progressing from that anchor point of agreement. The spiral process, then, involves "reach-testing from an anchored position of agreement."

Reach-testing underscores the concept that small groups decide upon new ideas on the basis of previous decisions. Ideas will thus be shaped to conform with previous decisions by the group. During Vietnam, as will be explored in detail later, the decision to become involved led to further steps
to increase involvement. Moreover, steps to deescalate the American involvement were excluded from serious consideration because they conflicted with the group’s previous agreement.

The group decision making process can be severely hampered by the networking pattern that is used by the group. Networking, Fisher explains, is the way in which

...members transmit and receive messages to and from one another... . In many instances, the communication network exists before the formation of the group. Generally some outside authority establishes the network to be used... . Groups within large organizations, for example, employ legitimate and formal networks established by legitimate authorities within that organization.6

In the executive branch of government, the National Security Council and the executive cabinet are pre-established communication networks.7

Networking helps determine the way messages are transmitted in the small group, and between whom they will pass.8 Stewart Tubbs indicates the wheel is a common form of group communication networking. Tubbs argues that people who want to control the discussion tend to use the wheel: "A person who dominates the discussion will sometimes create a network similar to the wheel".9 The wheel is designed so "the central person can communicate to any of them, [i.e. others in the group] but they must direct all their comments to the
Most recent President's have used the wheel network because they wished to control the communication in the group. This is partly a consequence of the recent Presidents' personalities, but also a result of the fact the public will hold the president responsible for poor policy decisions.

President Johnson in particular used wheel type networking. David Halberstam illustrates the way Johnson controlled the flow of communication:

Then he [Johnson] turned to the them [his advisors] and asked if there were any objections. He asked the principals one by one. The key moment was when he came to General Wheeler and stood looking directly at him for a moment. "Do you, General Wheeler, agree?" Wheeler nodded his agreement. It was, said someone who was present, an extraordinary moment, like watching a lion tamer dealing with some of the great lions.

This illustrates the manner of Johnson's communication in the group. He made sure information and communication was centered through himself. Moreover, Johnson used his dominance in the group to control the decisions which were reached by the group.

Communication suffers in the wheel-type network. Group members are not usually allowed unimpeded access to decision making input, and dissenters in the group may even be effectively shut out by the leader.
breakdowns also occur in the wheel because freedom of discussion, necessary for creative and effective decision making, is not encouraged by this type of network. The net impact of wheel networking is a negative one; it decreases the quality of decisions due to its restrictive nature. Wheel networking, therefore, caused the communication climate in the President's small group to be poor.

Another factor of communication affected the media's reporting of the Vietnam War's events; the factor of upward and downward communication. The executive branch contains numerous bureaucratic agencies. These agencies send information up through the hierarchy of government to the upper level of the president and his advisors. The president and his staff, meanwhile, send messages down to the lowest levels of the bureaucracy. This is known as upward and downward communication. Koehler, Anatol, and Applbaum describe the upward communication channel in organizations as the process of "...transmitting messages upward from subordinate to superiors". Downward communication is the means of "...transmitting messages downward from superiors to subordinates".

While the definition of upward and downward communication may be self-evident, the difficulties caused by
breakdowns in either channel are not. Koehler, Anatol, and Applbaum point out some of the difficulties involved with poor upward communication:

... employees are more likely to send pleasant messages upward than unpleasant ones; achievements are more often transmitted upward than information about errors or difficulties. Katz asserts that the "voice of the rank-and-file member of the organization is greatly attenuated as he attempts to get his message in line." Subordinates are more likely to screen-out information passed up the line when they believe this information "might reflect negatively" and hence, their chances for security or progress in the organization.21

This process, known as "filtering" distorts the accuracy of the information received by upper-level decision makers.

While this analysis is not specific to public bureaucracies, it generally reflects a desire of lower-echelon personnel to please their superiors. However, Hugh Heclo indicates that upward filtering might be a more severe problem in the federal bureaucracy:

In addition to the normal caution of public and private bureaucracies, the Washington system adds a special kind of political carefulness. This does not mean that various bureaucrats cannot be found identified with political patrons, in or outside the executive branch. It does mean that civil servants, especially those who want to remain civil servants, are likely to be extremely cautious about becoming politically identified by accident. To have a patron is one thing, to have one by rumor but not in fact offers all the dangers and none of the security.22

So in addition to the communication blockages caused by the
caution of lower-level employees in private organizations, the public bureaucracy adds the additional risk of becoming identified with a particular cause or person. This constrains the upward flow of communication to White House decision makers in two ways. First, the bureaucrat may wish to avoid being identified with a particular policy, and thus transmit information upward that reflects what is safe for them to say, rather than what they believe is the truth. Second, patronage-seekers may distort messages in order to further their careers.

Downward communication in the executive branch is thought to function fairly simply: the president makes a decision and sends it on down the hierarchy of the bureaucracy until it reaches the level at which it will be implemented. This description is an imprecise way of charting how downward communication actually functions in the federal bureaucracy. Filtering also enters into the flow of communication as the message works its way downward:

As messages pass from superior to subordinate, a filtering process is operating. K. Davis writes: "The idea of upward filtering to tell one's manager mostly what he wants to know has been extensively discussed in the literature, but the idea of downward filtering by which a manager tells his subordinates only what he thinks is important has been less developed [by communication scholars]."

Lack of trust of subordinates by superiors is the
primary cause of downward filtering. Culbert and Eldridge conclude that:

In general, management has not concerned itself with downward flow. Executive's justify the wisdom of their decisions by saying "You don't understand. If you had my information, you would have decided as I did." In other words, executives base their power on withholding, rather than sharing information.27

The executive withholds information from his subordinates on the basis that sharing information is sharing power. They simply don't trust those who work for them to use information in a way that does not threaten them.28

The concept that information is power is even more acutely demonstrated in the federal bureaucracy. Graham T. Allison illustrates this point in the following passage:

Political leaders at the top of the apparatus [the Executive Branch] plus the men who occupy positions on top of the critical organizations form the circle of central players. Ascendancy to this circle assures some independent standing. The necessary decentralization of decisions required for action on the broad range of foreign-policy problems guarantees that each player has considerable discretion. Thus power is shared.29

The power sharing equation of top-level bureaucrats encourages withholding information. The members of the foreign policy inner-circle compete with each other for power.30 They can use information from lower level officials in the competition.31 Thus, these top-level decision makers are careful to protect themselves from damaging leaks of
Distortion of information that comes up through channels damages the decision making process in the organization. One of the most important steps in the decision making process is gathering adequate and unbiased information. Fisher argues that effective group problem solving requires the group receive accurate information early on:

It is vitally important that members submit information important to a comprehensive discussion of the decision proposals relatively early in the group interaction. Information takes on its greatest significance during the period in which members are "testing ideas" and are engaged in conflict over them. During that period, members cannot so easily dismiss information on nonrational bases. During this idea testing period...members utilize information to support their own positions or to review critically the positions of other members that are opposed to their own. In this conflict phase, the critical testing of new ideas is at a maximal level and demands a generous information. But after this period of conflict and idea testing, new information tends to lose its impact.

In the case of Vietnam, the pre-1965 period could be classified according to Fisher's model as an "idea-testing" period where group members were in conflict over the shape of United States policy in Southeast Asia. High quality information should have been at a premium during this period. As will be demonstrated, such accurate reporting was not forthcoming because the reporting from below was biased from
above. The upward communication channels were focused in unproductive ways, and thus the quality of the decision making was diminished.

During Vietnam there were many problems which hampered effective upward and downward communication. One of the most serious was the deliberate distortion of upward communication to the President. Bureaucratic players competing for control of Vietnam policy shaped upward communication to favor their points of view. During Kennedy's Administration lower level bureaucratic personnel responsible for sending information up through channels were heavily influenced and even censored by their executive bosses. 36 David Halberstam offers this insight into the filtering which influenced War reporting:

As the War effort began to fall apart in late 1962 and early 1963, the Military Assistance Command in Saigon set out to crush its own best officers in the field on behalf of its superiors in Washington. ...It was not as if two different and conflicting kinds of reporting were being sent to Washington, with the White House able to study and arbitrate the difference. The Saigon Command systematically crushed all dissent from the field; the military channels did not brook dissent or negativism.

As will be shown, the military's inordinate control of War reporting influenced the way the War was fought and how the media came to report the War. 38

No player involved in Vietnam decision making shaped
the upward flow of communication more than Robert McNamara. McNamara was prone to look at reality in a quantitative fashion. Anything that could not be reduced to facts and figures was discounted in McNamara's analysis of the War. He wanted his subordinates, therefore, to supply him with this kind of data. Certain valuable types of information (i.e. the group cohesion of the Viet Cong, the hatred South Vietnamese possessed for American interference, etc.) were difficult to quantify. Qualitative judgments such as these which depended upon feeling, personal judgment, and historical reasoning had little place in McNamara's decision making schema.

While such non-quantified information may be vague, it might still have been invaluable in making policy predictions and recommendations to the President. Just because certain types of information cannot be reduced to numerical units does not mean they are unimportant. Moreover, McNamara's quantitative requirements led to the use of such highly questionable indicators of success as the body count. Thus President Johnson would receive inaccurate and distorted information because McNamara filtered the upward communication of his subordinates.

The net impact of filtering by McNamara and the
military was the elimination of dissenting information from channels which could have prevented America's decision to escalate its involvement. Negative War reporting from below had been virtually eliminated by 1965. The military then controlled the way the War was reported to the decision makers. The military had always wanted unlimited authority to prosecute the War, and they used the remaining positive war information to pressure McNamara and Johnson into escalating the War effort. As the aid and advisory programs failed, the military distorted information to show bombing would work. When bombing failed, the military said combat troops would work. The series of decisions which gradually led to the massive deployment of American combat troops in Vietnam were ones influenced heavily by downward filtering of upward communication channels.

Blockages in upward and downward communication also created leaks which eventually changed the public's view of the War and the Johnson Administration. The most troublesome source of leaks was from the field commanders in Vietnam. The dissenting officers turned to the media as an outlet for expressing their dissatisfaction with the way the War was being conducted. They also objected to the rosy picture the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations painted of how the War was proceeding. These sanitized versions of War
reporting, prepared and disseminated by the United States Military Assistance Command in Vietnam and the U.S. Embassy, were intended to shape the public's view of the War. The truth these officers observed in Vietnam was not the truth the military wanted to hear. Because they were denied access to normal upward channels of communication, these officers began to leak the disastrous nature of America's War effort to the media, and thus the public.

There is another way distorted upward and downward communication harms group decision making. Wood, Phillips, and Pederson point out that:

When members propose solutions prematurely, they prejudice the case. They predispose themselves to think only along certain lines. Once the group becomes solution-oriented, it is very hard to do the foundation building [understanding the nature of the problem] an effective group needs.

Trying solutions before the nature of the problem is accurately gauged virtually guarantees the group will fail to solve the problem. Many decision makers thought the source of the problem lay with North Vietnam's aid to the insurgency in the South. Among those who supported this view (early on at least), were the influential presidential advisors McGeorge Bundy, William Bundy, and Robert McNamara. Others believed the source of the problem was indigienous to South Vietnam; the unpopularity and despotism of the rulers, the
nationalistic impulses of Vietnam's people, and Vietnamese resentment of America's interference in their country's affairs. Moreover, this group felt these indigenous factors were more important in determining the strength of the Viet Cong than was the aid they received from the North. The group that felt North Vietnam's aid was the problem eventually gained the upper hand because they were also the agents in the system filtering the upward flow of communication. The information that could have led the decision makers to correctly identify the problem was filtered out. Thus, the incorrect problem came to be the problem addressed by the President's small group.

Inevitably, when the people who defined the problem tried their solutions, the solution failed. However, when the solution failed, rather than reevaluating the nature of the problem, the President's advisors would merely suggest doing more of the same to solve the perceived problem. The common foundation so essential to effective problem solving was never really laid during Vietnam, because those forced outside of the decision making process were those who understood the problem accurately. The information these dissenters possessed could have changed the course of policy, but the upward distortion of communication skewed the way the problem was defined. In this way, the efforts to end the
insurgency in South Vietnam can be viewed as futile. Doing more would not solve the problem because the policies never addressed the problem. Part of this failure to define the problem was due to the ideological bias of the decision makers, but filtering contributed heavily to the poor decision making of the Vietnam policy makers.

In addition, once President Johnson had decided on which course to take in Vietnam, dissenting information was unable to shift the course of policy. For example, once President Johnson made up his mind to send combat troops to Vietnam, he made only cursory attempts to expose himself to information which could have changed his mind. George Ball became the ritual "devil's advocate" to be listened to and then dismissed.

This meeting revealed what would be a consistent pattern of behavior for the President—to place the burden of proof only on those who sought a way out of, and not into the War. Johnson later cited such meetings as proof Ball had his day in court. But Ball never really had a chance. Johnson ignored Ball's recommendation because they were premised upon a different understanding of the problem than Johnson's. Ball believed the War could not be solved militarily because the insurgency was based on factors indigenous to South Vietnam. Johnson believed the aid from the North was key, and thus his solutions were always aimed
towards stopping the aid. However, the distortion of information from below had led Johnson to believe the aid was the pivotal factor, and Johnson accordingly shut out alternative views of the problem and thus alternative solutions.

In summary, the filtering of information that went up and down through the executive branch during Vietnam caused various problems for top level decision makers. Deliberate filtering caused the President to make his decisions about the War on the basis of biased information. The military particularly distorted information to support their view the War could be won through ever greater application of force. The military also caused its officers to leak dissenting information to the media because the normal channels were filtered by their superiors. Finally, the distortion of information led the decision makers to incorrectly define the problem. This meant solutions to solve the perceived problem failed because they did not address the problem.

Why did the Washington decision makers choose to shield the public, the media, and even themselves from reality? The main reason these men practiced deception was the fact they were in a very difficult quandary. On the one hand, if they did not use enough United States power to prevent the fall of
the Saigon government, they would be subject to attacks by the hard-line, anti-communists on Capital Hill. The Washington decision makers feared such attacks, because they remembered that the democratic party had been decimated by Joe McCarthy's "witch-hunts", which followed the "loss of China". On the other hand, the Washington decision makers knew that introducing troops into Asia could result in a lengthy, expensive, and bloody conflict. The decision makers felt that it would be difficult to keep public opinion behind such a war. So while the decision makers wished to avoid "losing" Vietnam, they wanted to do this with a minimum of American combat troops. Because they wished to avoid both losing and the use of combat personnel, they began to seek out and create War reporting that justified their hopes. In short, because the Washington policy planners wanted to walk the middle path between losing and all-out war, they shielded themselves, the media, and the public from pessimistic reporting that could have dramatically altered the course of the war.

Moreover, the way reality was being distorted by the optimists in the White House resulted in incremental steps toward increasing America's involvement. For example, when the bombing program failed to bring about the desired result—that of preventing the collapse of South Vietnam—the
decision makers decided to commit a limited number of combat troops. Many felt that this initial deployment would be enough, and the information that came through channels changed to reflect this view. At each decisive stage of the war—the advisory and aid stage, the bombing stage, the combat troop stage—the information that made its way into White House decision making processes was overwhelmingly optimistic at first. Then, as it became apparent that a certain policy had failed, the White House moved incrementally to the next step that would prevent a loss without angering the public. At each stage, moreover, the decision makers, eager to confirm their hopes that this would be the final necessary step to avoid a loss, shaped information from subordinates to conform to their hopes. Finally, the self-deception of top level foreign policy players led to decisions to increase the commitment, which led to more failure, and endlessly on.

How did the deception practiced by the White House affect the media’s coverage of events during Vietnam? It is important to note the President and his aids were not simply distorting the war reporting to protect themselves from unpleasant realities. They were also attempting to shape the way the public perceived the war. They manipulated the official version of the war until it became a stream of
upbeat reports about the efficacy of United States policy. As it became apparent the war was not going well, and negative reports began to surface from field commanders and reporters in South Vietnam, the policy was adjusted again to do more, and again the government attempted to control the public's information. When American combat troops were introduced, it became imperative to show the positive side of the war. Thus, as America upped the ante, the greater the need became for glowing field reports to keep the people on board with the policy.

When the media began to leak information which challenged the official Washington/Saigon line, the government began to try to control this information as well. The White House attempted to control the information that was reported in order to protect itself from contrary data being increasingly disseminated by journalists. For this reason, the Johnson Administration began to publish its own sanitized versions of the War. These reports were often justified by using the same deceptive statistics that were distorted by upward and downward filtering: what the reporters were told by the government was the same information that the government was using to justify its own actions. The briefings in Saigon, delivered by American Embassy personnel, became known as the Five O' Clock Follies by knowledgeable
American reporters. These journalists had been aware for some time of the discrepancy between what was reported by Washington and the reality of what was really going on in the Republic of South Vietnam. So the War "facts" were distorted by the men in Washington in order to deceive the American public, and to a large degree, themselves as well.

Those in the White House "on board" with the Vietnam policy (as President Johnson put it), shared a group-think mentality that led them to accept only those facts that reconfirmed their view of reality. They had structured their reality to conform to their views, and to justify this view, they sought out facts that dovetailed with their views. This process is a consequence to a certain extent of all small group decision making in the reach-test model elaborated by Fisher, but is uniquely a facet of Janis' group-think. Outside influences are shut off as the group isolates itself increasingly from contrary information that would challenge the group's beliefs and assumptions. As a result, only those facts which conform to the group's reality are accepted.

As it became increasingly apparent the Johnson Administration's view of the war was not adequately representing what was actually transpiring in Vietnam, the
officials in the White House themselves began to doubt their own assumptions. And as the official version of events came to be openly disputed, and anti-war protests became virulent, the Administration doubts grew accordingly. Robert McNamara, for one, began to doubt, and he commissioned the soon to be infamous "Pentagon Papers" which detailed, in all honesty, the failure of America's Vietnam policy. Lyndon Johnson, who had tried so hard to shape a reasonable policy, who had begun his duties in the White House wanting to avoid an Asian land war, was a broken man by the end of 1968. His communication strategies, as well as those of President Kennedy, had served to distort reality to the benefit of no one. The War was reported more adequately by the media, and such accuracy was resented by the inner circle because it challenged a view of reality that was shared, to a large extent by key Administration players. The "credibility gap" ultimately caused a more critical evaluation of American policy toward South East Asia, but only after a trail of lies and deception. Some of the deception was not deliberate; it was an attempt at self-delusion by a group of men desperate to impose their view of reality on the situation in Southeast Asia. The distortion of communication proved no less costly because it was not totally deliberate.
Examined from the systems perspective, the distortion of communication that came through channels was an attempt to keep other agents in the system from aligning themselves against the War. (see chapter five, figure 5-1) However, perhaps because of the government's deceptive practices, the alignment of public, media, and demonstrators occurred. This virtually guaranteed the ending of American commitment to Vietnam. In the system, the alignment was correct for the government to pursue its policy of escalation until 1968. After, this the system was aligned against the War. The government's poor communicative practices ensured the policy output would be poorly implemented. To hide their incompetence from the people and to reassure themselves they were right about the War, they attempted to shape the public's view of the war in a positive way. The government felt the media was key in getting the public behind the War effort, and so attempted to dominate this other actor in the system. The media pursued the truth as they perceived it, and in pursuing the truth and in relaying this truth to the public, the media helped the system function as it should: it produced the policy output of ending the War.
End Notes—Chapter II


6 Fisher, Decision Making, p. 16.


9 Ibid.

10 Ibid, p. 103.

11 See James David Barber, The Presidential Character.


18 Ibid, pp. 183-205.

19 Jerry W. Koehler, Karl W. E. Anatol, and Ronald L. Applebaum, Organizational Communication: Behavioral
Perspectives, 2nd ed. (New York: Holt, Rhinehart, and
Winston, 1981), pp. 8-9. (Hereafter cited as Koehler,
Behavioral).

20 Koehler, Behavioral, pp. 80-81.
21 Ibid, p. 97.
23 Ibid, pp. 175-197.
24 Ibid.
25 Richard E. Morgan, John C. Donovan, and Christian P. Potholm, American politics: Directions of Change, Dynamics of
Choice, 2nd ed. (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing,
26 Kenneth E. Davis, "Organizational Perspectives in
23. as cited in Koehhler, Behavioral, p. 86.
27 Samuel A. Culbert and Janice M. Eldridge, "An Anatomy
of Activism for Executives," Harvard Business Review 48
(1978): 140.
28 Koehler, Behavioral, p. 86.
29 Graham T. Allison, "Bureaucratic Power," in
Bureaucratic Power in National Politics, ed. Francis E.
Rourke, 3rd ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1978),
p. 182.
30 Ibid, passim.
31 Leon V. Sigal, "Bureaucratic Uses of the Press," in

32 Ibid, p. 204.
33 Fisher, Decision Making, pp. 143-144.
34 Ibid, p. 204
37 Halberstam, Best, pp. 251.
39 Halberstam, Best, pp. 244-253.
41 Ibid, pp. 314-316.
42 Baritz, Backfire, chap 3 passim.
43 Halberstam, Best, pp. 314-316.
44 Halberstam, Best, pp. 243-246 and pp. 343-348.
45 Janis, Groupthink, pp. 131-134.
46 Halberstam, Best, pp. 243-253
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
49 Baritz, Backfire, pp. 276-277.
Mostly those dissenters in the Kennedy Administration that Johnson or the Chiefs had conspired to get rid off (i.e. Paul Kattenberg, Averill Harriman, Michael Forrestal, Bill Truehart, and Rufus Phillips) see Halberstam, Best, pp. 449-460.

Leslie H. Gelb and Richard K. Betts provide this analysis of Johnson's small group communicative style:

One problem was the President's obsession with consensus and the consequent reluctance of junior-level personnel to challenge him. In any meeting on a critical decision he was notorious for browbeating his lieutenants into assent, going around the table and solemnly polling each one. Chester Cooper remembers fantasizing that when his turn came he would jolt Johnson by dissenting. "But I was removed from my trance," he said "when I heard the President's voice saying 'Mr. Cooper, do you agree?' And out would come a 'Yes, Mr. President, I agree.'"

President Johnson selectively exposed himself to information.
by ensuring that he got a verbal agreement from everyone present, and thus he shut out dissenting information. By shaping the flow of information he was receiving through such tactics as browbeating, Johnson distorted the decision-making process. See Leslie H. Gelb and Richard K. Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1979), p. 157.


63 George Ball explains the rationale of many in the Johnson Administration to bomb (which included McGeorge Bundy and Robert McNamara):

It was a Catch 22 and the quintessence of black humor. As though to demonstrate how harassed but ingenious men can turn logic upside down, my colleagues interpreted the crumbling of the South Vietnamese Government, the increasing success of the Viet Cong guerillas, and a series of defeats of South Vietnamese units in the field not as one might expect--persuasive evidence that we should cut our losses and get out--but rather as proving that we must promptly begin bombing to stiffen the resolve of the South Vietnamese Government. It was classical bureaucratic casuistry. A faulty rationalization as improvised to obscure the painful reality that America could arrest the galloping deterioration of its position only by the painful surgery of extrication. Dropping bombs was a pain-killing excercise that saved my colleagues from having to face the hard decision to withdraw.

64 Gelb and Betts, *Irony*, pp. 135-139.

65 Gelb and Betts offer this analysis of why Johnson tended towards the escalatory policies of those, who like the military, wanted to do more:

...Johnson seemed more wary of the Left than the Right. The McCarthyite nightmare could only come true if the United States lost Vietnam. But the nightmare could only come true only if the Doves and the Left gained ascendency, only if their opposition to the war spread to the middle and across to the Right. The Left and the Liberals were his friends and political allies, and that counted in itself. But more important, these groups were the only ones who would openly press for withdrawal, for "losing".

Because Johnson feared the right-wing backlash that might have ensued after the "loss" of Vietnam, he felt constrained to pay more heed to the Hawks in his administration; those who favored doing more, or escalation. See Gelb and Betts, *Irony*, p. 295.

66 Ibid.


68 Ibid, p. 87-93.

69 Ibid, pp. 87-134 passim.

70 Ibid, pp. 87-93.


72 Ibid.

This is known as the "sunk-cost" phenomena in decision-making. The idea is that if you have spent a great deal of time, effort and money on a problem, it is difficult to admit that the investment has been a waste and change policy. The "sunk-costs" in Vietnam became increasingly difficult for decision-makers to ignore as the War escalated. See Gelb and Betts, *Irony*, pp. 340-343.


Irving L. Janis, "Groupthink," *Psychology Today*,
November 1971, p. 44.


84 Ibid.

85 Ibid.


90 Janis, *Groupthink*, pp. 103-106.

CHAPTER III

THE MEDIA

There has been a significant debate involving the effects that the mass media has on public opinion. This debate has centered around the argument that, instead of merely reflecting the events around them dispassionately and empirically, the news media shape our perceptions of reality. A secondary but related argument is that the news media shapes the reality of what they report by conforming events to their ideological biases. I have separated these two facets of the argument that the media distorts reality because they seem to be analytically distinct. To say the media distorts reality is one thing; to say the focus is distorted due to ideological bias is another.

The discussion of these arguments will require several levels of analysis: first, is the charge the media distorts reality justified, and, if it is, does this mean the media has inherent perceptual biases? In other words, does the media carry ideological or psychological baggage that warps reporting of news events? Further, if both of the previous questions are answered in the affirmative, do these biases
flow from the individual reporters themselves, or are they a product of the organizations that employ the reporters? Second, does the Vietnam War bear testimony to distortion of reality by the media? Third, if the news media did indeed distort reporting, did it have an affect on how people viewed the war, and on how they reacted to it? Fourth, did the Vietnam War reporting change in any tangible sense the way the war was prosecuted, or on what strategies the enemy pursued? Fifth, did the war reporting in Vietnam contribute to the end of United States involvement in Vietnam? These five questions constitute the core questions often considered when Vietnam War reporting is discussed, but they do not represent all the possible related issues that could be examined. However, answering these five questions will provide clues to unraveling the most important questions related to the relationship between the media, the government, and the people of the United States during the War.

In answering the first question of whether the news media simply dispassionately reflect the events they report, or whether they shape the perceptions of people who view these reports, it is important to note that cognitive processing is inherent in human beings. The selectivity of perception is a component of cognitive processing. All human
beings selectively distort how they view reality. Samovar, Porter, and Jain offer this explanation:

We obviously cannot attend to all messages in our environment. We must be selective. Our selections normally are made unconsciously in fractions of seconds. The decisions we make about what will arouse and hold our attention and hence receive meaning are related directly to our culture.

This means the news media's representatives are biased because they are human. Merrill and Lowenstein say that

...the reporter is conditioned--by experiences, by intelligence, by environment, and by a host other factors. This conditioning, often completely unconscious, makes it impossible to be objective. He is in a sense a trapped person, destined to bring to his reporting his own perspectives, slants, and emphases. He is, in effect, conditioned to be nonobjective; he can be nothing else. Another assumption is that the reporter can be objective in the sense that he can represent the whole story. This too, is false. Every reporter must be selective. He cannot, even if he wishes, report everything.

So the media distorts reality because the humans in this occupation selectively perceive reality. However, selectivity of perception does not address whether the media's distortion is deliberate. Some media "watchdog" groups, such as Accuracy in Media (AIM) have claimed the media have a deliberate bias. They claim this bias is predominantly a liberal one. Merrill and Lowenstein agree with this statement to a point:

Most journalists would probably look on themselves as "liberals"--in the sense of being libertarians concerned with the free marketplace of ideas and information. They would insist that they were against
would-be and actual restrictors and censors of information that they feel the public has a right to know.

This is not a liberal bias in the classic left-of-the political center bias, but rather a bias which places emphasis on an unrestricted access to information and the free flow of ideas. This may be interpreted by conservatives as liberal because the left traditionally focuses less on respect for authority, and more on the accountability of authority. Yet as long as the news media disclose all relevant information, this does not constitute a "leftist" or liberal bias.

There does, however, seem to be substance to the notion that the media is dominated primarily by political liberals rather than by conservatives. Merril and Lowenstein support this argument when they say:

Writers in a sense, are word performers. Communicators engaged in radio and television news work are actually on the fringe of show business itself. All are creative people, and like other creative personalities in the arts, they tend to be more sensitive to the social ills that they observe and describe in the course of their professional work. They are also people who initially, at least, enter their profession as salaried employees; many become at the same time members of an AFL-CIO union, the American Newspaper Guild. For all of these reasons, it would be surprising if the average reporter were not more liberal than conservative, just as it would be surprising if the average trainee in banking were not more conservative than liberal.
The media, therefore, tends to be liberal because it draws creative personalities to itself, and because the media has strong ties to organized labor. Yet, simply because reporters tend to be liberal does not necessarily mean the news media report the news from a liberal perspective.

Nonetheless, the modern mass media has moved toward subjective reporting. If the subjective reporter is liberal, one could expect the subjective bias to be liberal also. The extent to which the modern media allows for subjective reporting is examined in this passage:

In the days when the publisher or editor fully controlled the content of his newspaper, it was the publication's responsibility to see that some fairness in reporting the news was maintained. Now this responsibility has shifted more than ever to the reporter. The newspaper has little control over the copy of syndicated columnists, who are increasingly taking more of the newspaper's space for interpretative stories on events of domestic and foreign interest. Television is able to exercise only limited gatekeeping on sound-and-film reports from its far-flung correspondants. Copy cannot usually be examined in advance; the filmed report often cannot be edited at all.

The charge the liberal media is not objective has a hollow ring to it, however. Most reporters are aware of their biases and scrupulously avoid interjecting their beliefs into stories. Moreover, absolute mistruths are subject to libel laws and various other legal punishments. Still further, the requirement for an objective media only requires all
information reported be based on fact. Most conservatives do not deny the stories published are factual; they resent that the stories are presented at all. They argue the liberal media excludes stories they do not agree with, and only report stories that correspond with the liberal political philosophy. However, as John Tebbel notes, "That they [the media] are 'biased against conservatism' is simply the view from the right. Rather they see the conservatives differently from the way conservatives see themselves—and the reverse is true." The implication of this is that the news media simply report the news from a different perspective than that of conservatives.

The conservatives also claim stories are distorted in the way they are reported by the mass media. Yet, there has been no proof that this is actually the case. The liberal bias in the media is undeniable to an extent; there are a higher proportion of liberals than conservatives in the media. In some ways this bias does flavor the news reporting. Yet to insist that unfairness is the inevitable result of this reporting is unjustified. Truth is, somewhat like beauty, in the eye of the beholder. If conservatives predominated in the news media, undoubtedly the bias of the media would be also somewhat conservative. Furthermore, the news media's biases do not necessarily reflect inaccuracy.
The selective perceptual mechanisms humans possess cannot be abolished. The liberal bias of the news media cannot be wished away. Both of these factors create the danger of bias. However, as long as the libertarian tradition of the free-market place of ideas exists, there is an opportunity for all views to be heard. The important point of fairness is not that one media bias is predominant, but that all sides of a question are represented. Finally, the news media are quick to point out they operate in the free-enterprise system. These news people say that if the public thinks they are being lied to or misled, they can simply stop watching or subscribing. This may also tend to regulate the behavior of news organizations.

Having granted that a certain degree of liberal bias does exist in the news media, I wish now to examine another aspect of the news media which would tend to distort reporting. This aspect is the organizational forces which mold the guidelines for news reports. One organizational pressure which adds to the media's shaping the flow of information is the competitive nature of news organizations. This is particularly, but not exclusively, true of the television industry. Since television operates in a free-enterprise system (although regulated by the Federal Communications Commission), ratings for programs are
important. As a consequence, much of the information transmitted tends towards the exciting and the dramatic.

Richard E. Morgan offers this observation:

The news, when viewed as "entertainment," requires giving the audience visual stories that will hold their attention, ...this accent on entertainment has been detrimental to the news, since it means that the reporting of complicated and lengthy stories is often so oversimplified that it becomes misleading or even incorrect. Visual "excitement" is substituted for a dispassionate assessment of what is happening.\(^{30}\)

Mankiewicz and Swerdlow further state that, despite good intentions, television's emphasis on entertainment distorts news reporting:

It [busing] is a perfect example of the dilemma of news producers. They want to present the news, they want to keep it in perspective, but they are also a part of television, an entertainment medium depending at all times—including news broadcasts—on attracting the largest possible audience to deliver to an advertiser. Since news is part of an entertainment medium, it must be entertaining.\(^{31}\)

Herbert Schiller argues that the dominance of entertainment programming was virtually assured by the government's laissez faire attitude toward television when the medium was in its infancy.\(^{32}\) Moreover, since all news organizations compete with another, there is a motivation to "scoop" the competition; to beat the competitor to the story. Therefore, the timeliness of a news story is important.\(^{33}\)

Since newspapers can be reread, they tend to be more
thorough in their reporting than television.\textsuperscript{34} The half-hour television news format demands brevity and simplicity be the yardstick for what is good copy.\textsuperscript{35} Sharansky and Van Meter think this is generally true:

\ldots the fifteen-or-thirty-minute time limit for newscasts requires film to be edited. In the process of editing, certain segments wind up on the cutting room floor. The public, which knows nothing of this, thus receives part of the story—often the most sensational part—with nuances and mitigating influences left out. Such subtle distortions of the news take place every day.\textsuperscript{36}

So the time limits of newscasts necessitates stories be edited. This means part of the story may never reach the public.

The media also acts as a "gate-keeper" in its function of determining what will be considered newsworthy.\textsuperscript{37} Gate-keeping refers to the idea that the heads of large news organizations—publishers, editors, and owners—decide what will or will not be disseminated to the public.\textsuperscript{38} Marshall McLuhan offers this cogent observation about the news media:

Fairly soon the press began to sense that news was not only to be reported but also gathered, and, indeed, to be made. What went into the press was news. The rest was not news. "He made the news" is a strangely ambiguous phrase, since to be in the newspaper is both to be news and to make news.\textsuperscript{39}

The implication of McLuhan's observation is that the news media themselves make the news; they decide what the
news will be. Lazarsfeld and Merton further state that "The audiences of the mass media apparently subscribe to the circular belief: 'If you really matter, you will be at the focus of media attention and, if you are at the focus of mass attention, then surely you must matter.'" So not only is the media aware of their ability to set the public agenda, the public seems to be unaware of the arbitrary nature of such selectivity. Therefore, the public unwittingly accepts the media's gate-keeping function.

Moreover, the public is often unaware that these news organizations are offering their interpretations of reality by deciding what is newsworthy. Furthermore, these decisions are made by the elite of the journalistic world:

Newspapers are people, and as such, they reflect, above all, the voices of their publisher's, powerful editors, and insofar as politics is concerned, the views of their political correspondents and columnists...they also speak with a collective voice that defines their character, style, and orientation to overriding matters of social, economic, and political concern. Newspaper publishers are power brokers...

Thus elites determine, to a large extent, what will be considered a significant problem and what will not. Donald F. Roberts provides this analysis:

...the news media have tremendous potential for directing our attention. We tend to assume that the events they cover are important, if only because they are reported in the media. That is, our awareness that mass-mediated messages reach millions of people and that they are produced by large organizations
whose avowed purpose is to ferret out and report significant events in the environment influences us to view much of what is reported as important—as worthy of our attention. There are two main difficulties which result from the media acting as a gate-keeper. Many of us are unable to check on the reliability of what is reported, and we are unable to determine what was not reported as opposed to what was reported. In short, the media serve as an intermediary between the public and reality. The fact these organizations, headed by elites, make decisions about what to report and what not to report, and the fact we are often at the mercy of these organizations in terms of reliability, means the media play a significant role in shaping our perceptions of reality.

In summary, the answer to the first question is that the media does distort reality. They do so because reporters, editors, and others involved in the news gathering and reporting business are human beings, and as human beings they are subject to human perceptual selectivity mechanisms. Second, it seems clear the media do have a liberal bias, both in terms of free-market idealism and in terms of being politically aligned with the left. Third, the fact that these organizations, especially television, compete for the advertising dollar, means they will be biased towards certain
types of events; usually those that are timely, dramatic, and violent. Fourth, the news media is concentrated in the hands of relatively few men; they set the policies which determine to a large degree what will be printed or reported. Fifth, the gate-keeping function of the news media means that these organizations will have impact upon what is considered to be of societal import. Finally, the biases of the news media that are primarily organizational--time limits and competition factors such as entertainment value, as well as the inevitable gate-keeping function--may mean the news media do not always report the news accurately.

The generalities that have been discussed to this point do not allow us to draw any firm conclusions about how accurate the media really is. However, if we look at a specific example of Vietnam War reporting, we can examine how good a job the media does in representing the reality of a particular story. While it would be desirable to examine all Vietnam War reporting for accuracy, this would be a monumental task and one which exceeds the scope of this study. However, I believe it is unnecessary to do such an exhaustive examination. The one incident which has garnered the most publicity as an example of the media distorting the Vietnam war, and the incident which critics of Vietnam War reporting point to as a paradigm example of the news media
misrepresenting the facts, is the news media coverage of the Tet offensive of January, 1968.

In discussing Tet, it perhaps would be best to first discuss the "facts" as we now know them about this crucial period in the Vietnam War. Second, I will discuss the arguments of those who criticized the media's performance in reporting this offensive. Third, I will discuss the response of those who say this criticism is incorrect. Lastly, I will attempt to glean some generalizations from this case study.

Loren Baritz offers this historical synopsis of what occurred during the Tet offensive of 1968:

At the start of the Vietnamese New Year celebration, during the early morning of January 30, 1968, about 80,000 regular troops and guerrilla's assaulted more than one hundred cities, towns, and villages. A small group blasted their way into the grounds of the American embassy in Saigon and fought for hours in the courtyard until they were all killed or wounded. Others attacked the major Saigon airport, the President's palace, and the headquarters of the general staff of the South Vietnamese army. In less than two weeks they were repulsed everywhere but in the ancient capital of Hue.

This battle was a turning point in the War in many respects. It signaled a willingness on the part of the National Liberation Front and the Hanoi government to conduct large scale offensive operations. Moreover, Tet was the beginning of the end of American commitment to the South
Most importantly, however, was Tet's part in turning the tide of public opinion against the War. Peter Braestrup argues the reason for public disenchantment was inaccurate and distorted reporting by the American press in Vietnam:

The conclusion of this lavishly documented work is that the American press (print and electronic) seriously misrepresented the crucial events of the Tet offensive. With historical hindsight, it is now clear that the offensive was an enormous gamble on the part of the North Vietnamese. They committed their main force units to an invasion of many cities and towns in the expectation that these units would be able to stay in those cities and towns; the people would rise to support them, the South Vietnamese army would give way, and, finally, the Thieu regime would topple in humiliation and confusion. None of these things happened.

American journalists, however, widely reported that Tet was a victory for the North Vietnamese and their Viet Cong allies. According to Braestrup, while United States and South Vietnamese troops were mopping up the communist forces in almost every town, almost one-fourth of the press coverage focused on the siege at Khe Sanh. This siege marked some of the bloodiest fighting of the War, marked by house-to-house, street to street battle. Some reporters predicted a communist victory at Khe Sanh. Others said America was beginning to lose the War. Still others claimed the battle for Khe Sanh would last for some time. These comments were proved false soon afterword, when the United States prevailed at Khe Sanh. Further, while Walter Cronkite called Khe Sanh
a "microcosm" of the War in Vietnam, it was really an
atypical example because the communists were being routed
elsewhere after Tet.58

The results of the battle seem to bear out the
criticism of the American media's performance during Tet.
General Westmoreland, United States Commander in SouthEast
Asia, announced that 37,000 enemy had been killed as compared
to 2,500 Americans.59 Tet, numerically at least, was a
"great American victory".60 Even some Communists later
admitted that Tet had been a blunder.61

Braestrup explains the innacurate reporting of the
media as a consequence of several factors. First, he
maintains the media in Vietnam reported too often from Saigon
without venturing into the field to confirm their stories.62
Second, the press by this time was hardened by being fed
half-truths and outright lies by military sources. Because of
this, the media discounted much of what they were told by the
military.63 Robert Novak also suggests the media's leftist
bias caused them to report the War favorably toward the
communists.64

This exposition of the facts and errors in reporting
are not the entire picture, however. That the media did a
poor job of reporting Tet has become excepted as sacrosanct in some quarters. If taken in isolation from the historical context in which it occurred, the reporting would seem to leave much to be desired. However, a look at what the American people were being told before Tet by the Johnson Administration, and an examination of what most journalists reported, reveals that the conventional critiques of Tet offensive reporting unjustly malign the American media.

When Walter Cronkite first received news of Tet, he said, "What the hell is going on? I thought we were winning this War." This attitude typified that of many Americans who had been consistently lied to and manipulated by American Presidents since the beginning of the Kennedy Administration. 1967 had been a year in which the Johnson Administration had been particularly adept at covering up the real truth of the War in Vietnam: that we were not winning, that we were no closer to winning than when we had entered the War, and in fact, that all the American troops and money probably had made things worse.

By 1968 the public was increasingly suspicious about the credibility of the Johnson Administration's War reporting. The Johnson Administration had told the public for several years we were winning the War. The mere fact of the massive
communist attack during Tet raised the public's doubts to a new level of intensity.\textsuperscript{71} The public, in short, began to sense they had been lied to: "With all the assurances, with all the statistics of success, with all the wildly inflated body counts of enemy fatalities, how was it possible that the enemy could mount a nationwide attack of such magnitude?".\textsuperscript{72} As Baritz puts it: "The avenging angel of symbol manipulators was to have her due. The North had won the battle of the symbols, and LBJ and General Westmoreland were furious. They believed it was the fault of the American press."\textsuperscript{73} The loss of public support for the War after Tet cannot be blamed on the media, however. The fault lay with Johnson and Westmoreland.

In short, it was irrelevant what the media reported with regards to Tet. The attack itself was of symbolic importance to many Americans.\textsuperscript{74} In addition, the contention the media warped the reality of Tet does not really withstand scrutiny.\textsuperscript{75} In fact, Baritz argues that:

...the press was unwittingly correct. The illusions created by LBJ had led inevitably to public cynicism. He was responsible for the perception of failure during Tet. He had been playing a shell game with the public, and Tet revealed his deception, not his dexterity. The public turned against him, and against the War. For the first time, a majority of Americans over fifty years old were against the War, while the younger generation was slightly more hawkish.\textsuperscript{76}
against the War is a gross oversimplification. It is true
some reporters expressed their opinions about Tet and they
were proven incorrect. It is also true there was some shoddy
reporting. However, the media also reported the government's
optimistic assessments of the War. The press had not lied to
the American people about the capability of the enemy. The
press did not create the expectation of an imminent victory
in the mind of the public. The government committed these
acts of malfeasance. The press may have distorted the War
reporting somewhat, but their reports were mostly accurate.
We were not winning the War and Tet changed nothing in terms
of the military situation which would have justified any
other estimate. As previously stated, the mere fact the
North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong were able to undertake
such a large offensive was enough to disillusion the media
and the public about the War.

What generalizations can we draw about Vietnam War
reporting from the case study of the Tet offensive? Three
conclusions seem worthy of mention. First, the turning of
American public opinion was primarily due to the deceit of
the Johnson Administration, and not to the innaccuracy of the
American press. Second, the liberal bias of the media did not
distort the reality of Tet. The bottom line was there were
only two versions of the War they could report: we were
winning or we were not winning. The media reported what they saw and it was true: we were not winning. No amount of positive news reporting would have changed the fact we were not winning; in this sense any liberal bias was irrelevant. Third, the Tet offensive illustrates the overall pattern of interaction between the media and the government: the successive administrations perpetuating mistruths via the use of inaccurate and highly questionable data, and the media, having been lied to more than once, increasingly doubting what they were told by the American officials. Such was the origin of the American government's "credibility" gap.

The third question asked whether, if the news media distorted reporting, what impact such distortion had on the way the public viewed the War. We already have a partial answer to this question. The news media may have distorted the War reporting to some unspecified degree, but it did not lie to the public. The government told the lies that damaged the public's confidence in the War effort. Certainly the reporting of Tet did change many Americans' minds, but this did not flow from the mistruths of journalists, but from the revelation of the depth of deception perpetrated on the American public by their leaders.

There are studies which suggest the viewing of Vietnam
War reporting did change people's view of the War. Fredric Wertham argues the media's coverage of the Vietnam War inured Americans to death and destruction, and thus increased their acceptance of the War:

We have seen so many villages burn, so many soldiers going single file into the jungle, so many wounded being interviewed, so many helicopters taking off on desperate missions, that War is becoming routine and the corrosion of War commonplace. We claim to be concerned. But we view these scenes self-indulgently for their entertainment value and add them up subconsciously not to a yearning for peace but to a total belief in the morality of force.\(^{62}\)

Another perspective on the impact the War reporting had on the public is offered by Don Oberdorfer:

Large segments of the American public and particularly the non-governmental elite of businessmen, lawyers, bankers, editors and publishers and the like, the influential leaders of "private opinion" in the United States, had lost confidence in the War. These people had approved and tolerated the ever growing commitment of American troops and resources to South Vietnam, but time and events had strained their patience to a breaking point. After Tet, the promise of success had faded, the sense of futility and frustration had grown. The country would not go deeper into the quagmire without a clear and believable vision of success.\(^{63}\)

As these analyses demonstrate, many authors have claimed the War reporting shaped the perceptions of the public in this or that way. However, there is no conclusive evidence of the exact impact War reporting had on the American public. One conclusion that can be drawn is that after Tet, large segments of the American public who had previously supported
the War, lost confidence in the ability of the Johnson Administration to successfully prosecute the War. But this had more to do with Washington's deceit and self-deception than with the media's coverage of Tet.

The fourth question was, did the news media's coverage of the War change the way we fought the War? Moreover, did it affect the strategies the communist used to prosecute the War? The answer to the first question is yes, in the sense president's shaped their Vietnam policies in order to gain the most favorable media reaction. The War planners did this because they believed the media was a crucial element in shaping public reaction to the War. In short, the government created War strategies they believed would create favorable reporting, and consequently, favorable public opinion. However, very little attempt was made by these same administrations to discover what the public's opinion was. However, because the government believed the media would shape the public's opinion, they focused their attention towards influencing the media's opinion.

While both Kennedy and Johnson were aware of the importance of the media, Richard Nixon elevated control of the media to an art form. No one was more aware of the importance of having "good press" than Nixon, and he tailored
his presidency around this requirement. Former Nixon staffer John Ehrlichman illustrates Nixon's obsession with the press in this passage:

Before and during his presidency, Nixon manifested no illusions about his press problems, although his well rationalized reasons for journalists' dislike of him were unconvincing. All of his press world was divided into two parts, and the larger was made of his enemies. "They hate me," Nixon would say, "because I have beaten them so often." ... In simplest terms, he believed that they were liberal and he was conservative and most of the people out in the country believed with him, not them. The press couldn't stand that, and so they were his sworn enemies.

There are two important points about Ehrlichman's observation. The first is that Nixon believed himself to be at odds with the press; they were his "enemies". The second is Nixon's belief the public agreed with him and not the media. These beliefs of Nixon's shaped the way he conducted the War and the way he related to the media.

Nixon came into office with an acute understanding both of Johnson's failures with the media, and of the importance of getting the public behind the War effort. To this end, Nixon announced the "Vietnamization" of the War effort. Just as Johnson had "Americanized" the War, Nixon gradually gave it back to the South Vietnamese army. Nixon felt the reason that the War was so unpopular was because many of our troops were being killed. Therefore, Nixon believed the
public would back a policy of gradual withdrawal from Vietnam. Nixon slowly introduced his idea of "Vietnamization":

The third idea was quietly announced by the President in a May 1969 televised speech devoted entirely to Vietnam. He did not admit that he was reversing President Johnson's demand that the North withdraw its troops first. But that was the significance of his proposition "for a simultaneous start on withdrawal by both sides, for agreement on a mutually acceptable time-table, and for the withdrawal to be accomplished quickly."

While telling the public that he was deescalating the War, Nixon was also secretly bombing Cambodia. Nixon followed the bombing with a secret invasion of Cambodia. Nixon bombed and invaded Cambodia in the hope he could use this as a bargaining chip in the Paris Peace Talks with Vietnam. Nixon wanted to keep these military actions secret because he felt the media and public would be opposed to what appeared to be a widening of the War. When Nixon's secret actions were revealed by the media, the public reacted as adversely as Nixon had feared. Because of Nixon's distrust of the media he sought to prosecute the War in a secretive and escalatory manner, while at the same assuring Americans we were not going to be in Vietnam much longer. Nixon felt he could avoid the difficulties Johnson had experienced with the media and the public by pursuing these two contradictory policies. However, just as the public's expectation of victory had been caused by Johnson and ultimately led to his
downfall, Nixon's promise of deescalation clashed with the idea of American troops fighting in Cambodia.\footnote{102}

When the Cambodian operation came to the attention of the American people, Nixon's speeches reflected his belief that he, and not the media, spoke for the majority of Americans:

But as President of the United States, I would be untrue to my oath of office if I allowed the policy of this nation to be dictated by the minority who hold that view and who attempt to impose it on the nation by mounting demonstrations in the street. ...And so tonight--to you, the great silent majority of my fellow Americans--I ask for your support.\footnote{103}

Nixon attempted to control public opinion by circumventing the media and appealing directly to the American people. Whereas Johnson's Administration attempted to cover its failures in Vietnam with blizzards of deceptive statistics, Nixon justified his policies on the basis the majority of Americans supported his actions.\footnote{104} Nixon's belief he could do this at any time--justify his actions to the American people after the fact--led to blatant violations of the American people's trust.\footnote{105} Nixon tried to separate the public from the media, attempted to manipulate public opinion, and tried to conceal his War plans from the media and the public. All of these actions shaped the way the War was fought and how it was presented to the American public.
It is unclear whether the communists changed their War strategies to take advantage of American media coverage in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{106} There is little doubt, however, that the Vietnamese were aware that the United States' ability to prosecute the War depended upon the support of the American public:

It [the North] always relied on the American public's unwillingness to struggle on in the rice paddies forever, especially as the casualties increased. They could fight a War of attrition and succeed, as General Westmoreland attempted to but could not. The Vietnamese equation therefore could not be solved: the American military wanted to "win", while the North Vietnamese wanted to avoid losing long enough to force the American Administration to pay an increasing domestic price.\textsuperscript{107}

We cannot be sure how many of the tactics the communists used were directly geared for American public consumption. From enemy documents it seems clear at least some of the communist's actions were designed to draw media attention.\textsuperscript{108} Certainly Tet was designed to draw media attention, and the logical target was the American public.\textsuperscript{109} We do not know, however, if Tet was an isolated example or part of a propaganda War initiated by the North.\textsuperscript{110} However, if the communist's success depended on diminishing the American people's support for the War, a media campaign be one way to achieve such a result.\textsuperscript{111}

How much credit or blame can the American media be
assigned for the eventual outcome of the Vietnam War? Nixon's decision to "Vietnamize" the War was influenced by the media. However, the impetus for decreasing America's commitment was supplied by the public's dissatisfaction with the War after Tet. The media did not create this dissatisfaction; the Johnson Administration was responsible for the public's disaffection with the War. Moreover, Nixon initiated his secret operations because he feared the press would attack him the way it had Johnson if the Cambodian offensive became public.\textsuperscript{112} The eventual decision to disengage from Vietnam was a logical consequence of the policy of Vietnamization. The extent to which the media was responsible for pointing out government misconduct, malfeasance, and manipulation of the American people, is the extent to which the media contributed to the eventual end of America's involvement in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{113} 

The United States' Vietnam War policies were an unmitigated disaster. That the media reflected this belief is undeniable. They may have reflected it at times in a somewhat haphazard, ill-conceived, and distorted manner, but they did their job by getting the facts, as they saw them, to the public. The news media, for the most part, did not broadcast deliberate mistruths about the War. The War that was reported by the media was the War the media felt occurred. The media
did the job they were supposed to do, and partly as a consequence of their reporting, the United States finally did what they should have done much sooner; get out of South East Asia.

In this chapter I have discussed the way the media distorts reality from both an organizational and an individual perspective. The individual bias of most reporters is constituted of selective perceptual filtering mechanisms, liberal political perspectives, and free-market liberalism. The organizational biases, including emphasis on action, excitement, and violence, flow the competitive nature of the media. This leads to emphasis on the sensational over the routine, the dramatic over the mundane, and the active over the passive. The question remaining to be answered is, did any of these phenomena shape Vietnam War reporting?

To a certain extent, these factors did influence reporting, but it would be impossible to determine the degree to which any one factor led to distortion. However, the Tet offensive seems to point out the media's tendency to focus on dramatic stories to the exclusion of other aspects of reality. The siege at Khe Sanh was simply a better story than the mopping up of communist forces by U.S.-A.R.V.N forces immediately following Tet. Moreover, the way the media
treated Khe Sanh as a representative example of Tet highlights the agenda setting function of the media. In short, there is no doubt some distortion took place.

In fairness there is more to the story than simply comparing what the media said to what really happened. The government consistently lied to and manipulated the press and the American people. When the monstrous nature of this calumny was exposed, both the media and the American people became disenchanted with the War and its planners. The overwhelming conclusion I have come to is the media was not to blame for our "loss" of Vietnam. Our government, and particularly our presidents, were responsible for our disastrous involvement in Vietnam. The media did their job well enough that the public got the idea that their leaders were lying to them. Because of the media, the public began to realize we were not winning the War, and that perhaps our best alternative was to withdraw. Some have attacked the liberal media for America's loss in Vietnam. The charge is false; the media did not lose the War in Vietnam. The American presidents and the national security elite lost the War by choosing to fight it in the first place. By and large, the American mass media did their job in uncovering the truth of the Vietnam War. The people responded as they should to being told the truth: they got angry and they ended the War.
From the perspective of the model I offered in chapter one, three main conclusions seem to bear mention. The first conclusion is that the media relayed the information they got from the public to the government fairly accurately. The media was mostly correct in its reporting of Tet. The government created the controversy about the War, not the media. Secondly, the political communication system aligned itself against the War when a majority of actors in the system chose to oppose it. (see Chapter Five, figure 5-1). When the media, the public, and the interest groups aligned themselves against the War, the system adapted to this challenge by deescalating America's Vietnam commitment. Finally, the system produced the desired output despite the government's attempt to control the communicative processes. Not only did the media perform its function, the system worked as it should.
End Notes—Chapter III

1 Seymour J. Mandelbaum has devoted much time and attention to the relationship between the public and the media. See Seymour J. Mandelbaum, _Community and Communications_ (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1972).


6 Ibid, p. 110.

7 John C. Merrill and Ralph L. Lowenstein, _Media, Messages, and Men_ (New York: David McKay and Company, 1971), p. 231. (Hereafter referred to as Merrill, _Messages_).


9 Merrill, _Messages_, p. 98.


11 Roy C. Macridis argues this in his chapters on Conservatism and Democracy and Socialism. See Roy C. Macridis, _Contemporary Political Ideologies: Movements and


13 Merrill, Messages, p. 112.


15 Ibid, p. 112.

16 Mankiewicz, Television, pp. 90-91.

17 Merrill, Messages, pp. 137-200.


19 Bruce Herschensohn for example thinks the Media's uncovering of President Nixon's relationship with Robert Vesco is an example of liberal bias. However, it was not the actual report which Herschensohn objects to, but the fact the story was uncovered. In effect, Herschenson is objecting to the media doing its job. See Herschensohn, God's, p. 44.


America).


22Most of the evidence the media deliberately distorts the news to their liberal viewpoint is very weak. For example, Herschensohn says that because people in the media admit that objectivity is only a goal, and cannot be a reality, this means they are biased. Herschensohn offers this analysis: "Dan Rather compared objectivity to "the Ten Commandments, a goal worth reaching for but impossible to live up to." I think there is a great difference between saying objectivity is a difficult to reach goal, and saying I believe the news should be distorted. See Herschensohn, Gods, p. 41.

23Ibid.

24Tebbel, America, chap. 22 passim.

25Mankiewicz, Television, chap. 3 passim.

26Ibid, p. 77.

27Ibid.

28Ibid, p. 72.


30Mankiewicz, Television, p. 72.

31Herbert Schiller, Mass Media and American Empire (New
33Mankiewicz, Television, pp. 74-75.
34Ibid.

44 Ibid, pp. 380-381.

45 This is particularly the emphasis of Peter Braestrup's book *Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet in Vietnam and Saigon* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1976. (Hereafter referred to as Braestrup, Story).


50 Morgan, *Dynamics*, p. 251.


52 Braestrup, *Story*, pp. 120-122.


55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
57 Morgan, Dynamics, pp. 251-252.
58 Baritz, Backfire, p. 179.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid, p. 279.
62 Braestrup, Story, pp. 233-235.
63 Oberderfor, Tet, p. 333.
65 Baritz, Backfire, p. 180.
66 Oberdorfer, Tet, p. 150.
68 Baritz, Backfire, p. 180.
69 Gelb and Betts, Irony, p. 172.
70 Baritz, Backfire, pp. 181-182.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
74 Oberdorfer, Tet, p. 332.
75 Baritz, Backfire, p. 180.
76 Ibid.
77 Oberdorfer, Tet, p. 331-334.
Ambrose, Globalism).

79 Baritz, Backfire, p. 181.
80 Ambrose, Globalism, p. 305.
83 Oberdorfer, Tet, pp. 280-281.
84 Gelb and Betts, Irony, p. 332.
86 Gelb and Betts, Irony, p. 330-331.
88 Ibid, pp. 143-151.
89 Ibid, pp. 143-144.
90 Baritz, Backfire, pp. 200-212.
91 Ibid.
92 Gelb and Betts, Irony, pp. 349-350.
93 Ambrose, Globalism, pp. 310-312.
94 Baritz, Backfire, p. 203.
95 Ibid, pp. 203-209.
96 Ibid.
97 Ambrose, Globalism, p. 310.
98 Baritz, Backfire, pp. 203-209.
99 Baritz, Backfire, pp. 201-219.
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid.
102 Ambrose, Globalism, pp. 329-330.
103 Theodore Windt, Presidential Rhetoric 1961-1980
105 Baritz, Backfire, pp. 227-230.
106 Oberdorfer, Tet, pp. 55-60.
107 Baritz, Backfire, p. 278.
108 Oberdorfer, Tet, pp. 55-60.
109 Ibid, pp. 207-209.
110 Gelb and Betts, Irony, pp. 349-351.
111 Ibid.
112 Baritz, Backfire, p. 204.
CHAPTER IV

THE DEMONSTRATORS

Theodore White, the noted historian, has this to say about the young Americans who converged upon the 1968 Democratic Convention:

The crazies sprout everywhere in today's world, but in America one of their covering titles is "Yippies" (for Youth International Party). ... The crazies—who are not stupid, only crazy—have learned the power of the mimeograph machine to rouse press attention, to entice television coverage to their happenings.¹

A common criticism of Vietnam era reporting is that the media was used by the anti-war activists to gain coverage of activities such as demonstrations, sit-ins, and marches.² It has also been charged the media over represented the views of protesters to the exclusion of other equally valid views about the War.³

In order to discover the manner in which the media covered the anti-War demonstrators, some preliminary questions need to be discussed initially. These preliminary questions are: (1) what type of events drew the most media coverage; (2) did the media give equal time to all public factions; and (3), how did media coverage of youth activist
compare to that given to government groups? Answering these questions will provide some insight into the general character and quality of media coverage. These generalizations relate to three main categories of inquiry. First, did the media report domestic events during the War in a fair and unbiased manner? Second, did the youth movement have an inordinate effect on the way the news was reported? The final question is, did the peace movement cause the end of the Vietnam War? If so, did the news media help the peace movement achieve its goal of ending the Vietnam War?

The first preliminary question had to do with what type of events drew media attention. As has already been discussed in Chapter Three, the media tends to focus on the dramatic over the routine, the unusual over the mundane, and the active over the passive. Student demonstrations seemed to fit all of these criteria for media coverage. \(^4\) Certainly protest activities such as marches, sit-ins, and rallies gained a considerable amount of media attention. \(^5\) However, attention to some specific cases of media coverage will allow us to discern the way these events were covered.

A few paradigm examples should suffice to highlight the crucial elements of coverage: the Washington Peace March of 1967, the Chicago Democratic Convention of 1968, and the Kent
State demonstrations of 1970. All these events had extensive media coverage, although the Kent State demonstration only received national attention after National Guardsmen opened fire and killed four demonstrators. In each of these cases the event was dramatic; in the case of the Washington Peace March the largest group of anti-War protesters assembled until that time marched on the nation's capital. In Chicago, the anti-War protesters, riding the crest of the new found wave of American anti-War feeling following the Tet offensive, drew 30,000 supporters to their cause. Many observers felt the demonstrators at the Convention were sure to clash with the security forces at the disposal of Mayor Richard Daley. At Kent State, the focus on the tragic death of four students, and the investigation of the incident, lent a rarefied atmosphere of courtroom melodrama to the press coverage. Moreover, all these events carried the additional element of a risk of violence. In Washington, the large number of demonstrators gathered to oppose the War seemed to provide a considerable risk of conflict with the Capital's various security agencies. In Chicago, both sides had stated their willingness to use force. At Kent State, there was the question of student reprisals against the National Guard because of the shootings. These types of dramatic and violent events tended to draw the most coverage.
Does this mean the media skewed the reality of domestic reporting during Vietnam because they tended to report such events? The most common argument critics of the media during this period employ, is that the media gave so much attention to these events they could not give equal time to other views about the War. Furthermore, these critics say the media's inordinate focus on these events created the image that anti-War demonstrations were more representative of national sentiment about the Vietnam War than they were. These arguments cannot be supported from a realistic view of the job of the news media. The media cannot go out and find all people with opposing views to those they present. To do so would be creating the very kind of media "events" that the critics of the news media have accused the journalistic community of. Moreover, the charge that news people create journalistic events is spurious. John Tebbel argues the news media does not create the news:

Similarly, another recent critic talks about "newsthink", defined as "the rhetorical bias of the news media in favor of turning a non-event into 'news'". This notion stems from the invention by Professor Daniel Boorstin of "pseudo-news," to describe, one supposes, something that is not hard news. When a man calls a press conference to announce something, it is said, that is pseudo-news because it has been caused to happen and is only news when someone says it is. This is still another flight from reality. If a man calls a press conference and reporters are there to hear him say something, that act in itself is news. Whether what he says is trivial, unnecessary, or irrelevant must remain a matter of individual judgment, but the fact it is reported makes it news. Reporters and editors are the
It is true the news media did not give equal time to each and every possible view on the War, but neither did they carry the burden of fairness to ridiculous extremes by creating equal representation for non-existent or unimportant views.

The next question to consider is, how did coverage of the protesters compare to coverage of the government officials, politicians, and security personnel? Was the media biased in favor of the demonstrators, and what effect did the presence of the media have on the demonstrations they covered? Some critics have charged the fact the news media reported the War in Vietnam critically, while reporting the anti-War movement in a more positive light, proves liberals in the media tried to deliberately scuttle America's Vietnam War effort. As noted in Chapter Three, the media, like the public, began to doubt the War because the decision makers in Washington skewed information about the War. The optimistic government assessments were proved patently false by the Tet offensive of 1968, and the news media began to openly doubt the United States ability to win in Vietnam. So, in a sense, it is true the media criticized the War effort. It is also true the media tended to present the protesters' views in a more favorable manner as the War progressed. However,
neither criticism of the government nor coverage of the demonstrators proves a deliberate intent on the part of the news media to destroy America's Vietnam policy.

It was not coincidental that the increasingly favorable reporting of the anti-War movement's viewpoint occurred at the same time criticism of the government grew. The news media simply began to look more favorably on the anti-War movement's arguments when the pro-War advocates in government proved repeatedly inaccurate in their predictions. Moreover, the notion the press was "nice" to the protesters while being "mean" to Johnson, smacks of the worse kind of casuistry. Like most Americans, the news media were initially behind the War. David Halberstam notes that "We believed in what the United States stood for, and why we were over there". The media changed their minds because they felt they were manipulated and lied to by the American government. It is likely some of the media's outrage over having been deceived worked its way into War reporting and coverage of the demonstrators. However, this does not mean the media misrepresented the merits of either the pro or anti-War positions. It merely means reporter's judgments about the War changed to fit what they saw as reality.

Furthermore, merely because the media disagreed with
the War administrations about the situation in Vietnam does not mean the media misrepresented the War to the American public. The media had good reason to be critical of the government, and the media's reporting exposed the calumny and disingenuousness of the War administrations to the American public. The media was not to blame for the government lies.

There is some truth in the claim the media treated protesters in a more positive fashion than the government forces the protesters clashed with. However, the media's sympathy had little or nothing to do with the fact the protesters were brutalized by police. A description of what occurred during the Oakland "street-battle" of 1967 illustrates the possibility the media's presence protected demonstrators from police violence:

At midnight, after reporters had left and things were thought to be quieting down for the night (the official permit ran until midnight Sunday), soldiers and federal marshalls began to clear the plaza in a deliberate, brutal manner. Soldiers would inch forward until their toes were literally under the crossed legs of sitting demonstrators, then federal marshalls would reach through the line of soldiers and grab the protesters. They were eager to use their clubs and the worst victims, according to every witness, were women. The scene at times was one of pure horror, women beaten senseless and then dragged off into the dark with bloody, broken faces.

What this incident serves to illustrate is that the media's sympathies naturally went out to the protesters because of the violence committed against them by police.
There were instances where the protesters participated in violence, but the protesters seldom initiated it, and they virtually always got the worse of it. Moreover, as the above passage indicates, the media did occasionally shape the way events occurred; sometimes they prevented the authorities from engaging in vicious demonstrator bashing.

In assessing the media's accuracy in reporting police-demonstrator conflicts, the questions to ask are: did the protesters demonstrate, did violence occur, and were the demonstrators often the victim of this violence? It seems to me the answer to all of these questions is yes. The question of accuracy as regards the protest movement does not seem to revolve around the facts, but around the creation of pseudo-events.

John Tebbel does not think there is much substance to the charge the media creates pseudo events by deciding to cover activities such as demonstrations, but other observers disagree. Theodore White, for example, blamed the media for pandering to the demonstrators and even inciting the police to violence:

The Chicago police had been provoked as no other police force had been provoked; but they had reacted exactly as Messrs. Dellinger, Hayden and Davis should have known they might—with brute and unrestrained force. If the Chicago police won the battle of the streets, the Mobilization, exactly as it had planned,
won the greater victory—that of public opinion. Like the American Army in Vietnam, fighting the Viet Cong, the police had never been instructed in the nature of political or guerilla Warfare, whose purpose always is to convert neutrals into allies by provoking the indiscriminatory retaliatory violence of superior forces. I find it difficult to criticize, morally or technically, the strategy and disposition of the Chicago police on Wednesday night. ...Yet politically, on the stage of the watching world, they brought disaster on all they were charged to defend.39

The media, in the eyes of White, was used by a faction who controlled the demonstrators to destroy the Democratic Convention of 1968.40 This "controlling" element was fighting the political battle of the guerilla, and in White's estimation, the police were poorly suited to win the political battle.41 The media portrayed the cops as thugs, just as the "controllers"—David Dellinger's National Mobilization to End the War in Vietnam—knew they would.42

White criticizes Dellinger and his ilk for inciting violence among those who wished initially to avoid conflicts with the Chicago police.43 White describes the Mobilization group in this fashion:

There are, last, always in any mob and the most critical part of it, those who seek to control, to move, to marshall and mobilize it—to fuse it under their own direction and conscript the innocents, gawkers and crazies alike into an unthinking mass of bodies whose emotions, once captured, will make them the unwitting instruments of a few. It is necessary for any control group to have, at once, a cause and an adversary.44
While White is sharply critical of the Mobilization for causing the violent confrontation between the demonstrators and the police, there are alternative explanations for the violence which occurred during the Convention. Thomas Powers, for example, denies the protest groups were controlled in the fashion described by White:

Opponents of the War found it always difficult, and often impossible to agree on the best way of opposing it. One reason for this dissension was the fact that the War was actually a secondary issue to many of the organizations most active in trying to end it. From time to time all these groups could be coaxized into uneasy and temporary agreement on a single slogan or course of action, but most of the time they were pulling in their own directions for their own reasons.  

Powers argument directly addresses the weakest point in White's assessment of the violence at the Chicago Convention: it is simplistic. True Dellinger, Hayden, and Davis were there, but White himself admits the well-intentioned "innocents" of the McCarthy camp, who rejected violence, predominated among the anti-War groups present in Chicago. Moreover, White offers no explanation for how these non-violent innocents could so easily be manipulated into clashing with police.  

Still further, White does not even take into account the behavior and actions of the "blameless" police. Can human beings be excused from culpability for their behavior?
because they were goaded? Does taunting justify cruelty and brutality? The answer, of course, is no. The police were responsible for their behavior. Yet White does not hold the police accountable at all. Instead, he blames the violence on a small minority of demonstrators and assigns them some mystical power to incite pacifists to violence.

The last point to be made here is that the media did seem to cover the protesters quite frequently. CBS News, for example was criticized for the amount of air time it gave to demonstrators, particularly during the Chicago Convention. Richard Salant, President of CBS News, addressed such questions during a staff hearing on the Causes and Prevention of Violence. One question, put to Salant by a committee member, was "Do you believe there is a basis for the assertion that television has given more coverage to the extremist minority leader than the moderate minority leader? Mr. Salant's response was:

No, I don't really. I think it only seems that way because the extremist irritates so many people that when you have seen him once you think you have seen him a thousand times. We made a study in the four weeks of the long, hot summer, the climax of the long hot summer in 1967, to see how--whom we had on, how many times. If you put--there are always difficulties of definition but we placed militants on one side and the moderates, public officials and so on, on the other side. The figures came to 10 appearances for the militant. Sixty-five for the other side. I am worried about that imbalance."
Mr. Salant's testimony makes it abundantly clear that the charge the network's were a "hostage" to radical elements in the United States was untrue. In fact, Mr. Salant was worried that his network's coverage was too moderate.

At the beginning of the chapter this were several generalizations I promised to address. The first generalization had to do with whether the media did its job in a fair and unbiased manner. The answer to this question is not clear cut because the terms are somewhat vague. The terms "fair" could mean operationally, "even-handed". Obviously, there are those who felt the media was used and manipulated by the student movement to present a skewed view of the sentiment of Americans. Those from this perspective would undoubtedly say the media failed this test of even-handedness. As pointed out previously, however, how would one insure the media's "even-handededness"? If the non-activists do not present their viewpoints, is it the responsibility of the media to create news events in order to present all of these views? And where would one draw the line as to which groups should or should not be included? Obviously there are difficulties with this notion of "fair" reporting. If one argues that "fairness" should mean that all major viewpoints on an issue are given air time, it would seem from Mr. Salant's testimony the media fulfills this
criterion. So in any workable, pragmatic sense, the media is fair in its handling of the news.\textsuperscript{55}

The term "unbiased" also presents problems. Does unbiased mean "free of prejudice"? If so, it is an impossibility.\textsuperscript{56} Is "unbiased" merely a restatement of "fairness"? If so, it would seem the networks meet this standard. Perhaps a definition of unbiased would best be termed "objective"; in the sense that reporters should eliminate their own biases as much as possible.\textsuperscript{57} Such a definition, if it is to be meaningful, must include some standard by which to weigh what is reported against reality. This "reality-check" mechanism allows for comparison of what is reported to what actually occurred. This definition of "unbiased" would be met by the news media in most instances of Vietnam War era domestic news coverage.\textsuperscript{58} The reality check criterion shows the media did its job. Was there a large group of young people in this country opposed to the War? The answer is yes. Did the police and other law enforcement agencies commit violence against these youths? Again the answer is yes. Did the news media shirk its responsibility by not broadcasting the violence of protesters? As far as can be determined they did not.\textsuperscript{59} The media can be said, pragmatically at least, to have been both unbiased and fair in their coverage of the Vietnam War era
demonstrators.

The next generalization involved the extent to which the protest movement had an inordinate effect on the way news was reported during the Vietnam War. One could suppose "inordinate" to mean "disproportionate": as in, did the youth activists gain an unequal access for their views as compared with their numbers and the views of the rest of society and their numbers? This calculus is unworkable because there is no way of being absolutely sure what percentage of views constituted what kind of a viewpoint, and what part of the population was represented by which viewpoint. Moreover, how do you discern the impact of years of socialization in favor of the status quo as compared to the impact of a relatively few years of minority-led anti-status quo rhetoric? Moreover, the whole question of numerical equality for viewpoints, if taken at its most basic level, would deny the right of any organized minority to have a disproportionate effect on society. Clearly, in our society we value the rights of individuals to organize themselves. Looked at in terms of pure numbers, inordinate effect cannot be determined. If all Americans have the right to organize to be heard, the inordinate effect charge is unjustified. The protesters simply gained the coverage they deserved due to their skill in organizing.
The final generalization has to do with whether the Vietnam War era protesters had any efficacy in achieving an end to the Vietnam War. There are those who claim the student movement actually had little or no impact on the outcome of the War. Thomas Dye offers this analysis:

Mass opinion never supported the Vietnam War. When elites supported these Wars in their early stages, the United States "escalated" its participation—despite little enthusiastic support by less-educated groups. The United States withdrew from both Wars (Korea and Vietnam) and sought negotiated settlements after elites, not masses, made a dramatic shift in opinion. Elites agreed on escalation in the early phases of the Vietnam War, and they agreed on withdrawal in its later phases. The only disagreements occurred over how quickly we should withdraw. The student anti-War protesters had no significant effect on the course of the War. After a careful analysis of change in elite and mass opinion on the War, John E. Mueller concludes: "the protest against the War in Vietnam may have been counterproductive in its impact on public opinion; that is, the War might have been somewhat more unpopular if protest had not existed." Disagreements over the speed of withdrawal occurred within elite circles. Elites were not responding to mass opinion in their decision to withdraw.

Dye's analysis would tend to render moot the generalization about whether the student movement was helped by the media to end the Vietnam War. If such protest was actually counterproductive, if anything, coverage of protest harmed the struggle to end the War.

However, there is disagreement with Mr. Dye's
conclusion. Thomas Powers feels the movement did help end the Vietnam War. He feels the anti-War movement created controversy about the War which otherwise may never have existed. This controversy led to an eventual national consensus about the War:

...the anti-War movement in the United States created the necessary conditions for the shift in official policy from escalation to disengagement. Opponents of the War often argued about whether it was necessary to work "within the system" or in the streets, but in fact success depended upon pursuing both strategies simultaneously. Without those few intellectual leaders who first opposed the War on the grounds of policy or morality, there would have been no broad movement; without a movement, national division over the War would not have reached a crisis point in 1967; and without the crisis, there would have been no effective political challenge to Johnson's power at the one moment he had to back away from the War, or commit the country to a vastly increased effort with dangerous potential.67

I believe Powers' assessment is closer to the truth than Dye's for several reasons. First, Dye's definition of elites would presumably mean those with decision-making power in the system; those who are predominantly educated, male, white, and affluent.68 What if the protesters had decided to work within "the system" that is, within the established avenues of political power? As young, educated, white, affluent males, how would they substantially differ from the elites of Dye's analysis?69 Second, if mass opinion never supported the War, does this mean that the anti-War protesters represented mass opinion? Public opinion polls showed a
majority of Americans supported U.S. involvement in Vietnam until after the Tet offensive. The anti-War protesters had publicly announced their opposition to the War long before Tet. Thus it seems unlikely the protesters represented mass opinion. Finally, whereas Dye does not offer a rationale for why elite opinion shifted against the War, Powers' analysis indicates the anti-War movement may have been the catalyst for the shift in elite opinion.

The media's impact on the anti-War movement's success was to help create the divisiveness in the country, which Powers felt was necessary to instigate the domestic crises of 1967. The media may have also reinforced the anti-War movement's views by its pessimistic War reporting in Vietnam. The Tet offensive is commonly cited as a time when opinion shifted against the War in Vietnam for the first time. Such information could only have reinforced the anti-War movement's message that it was time to leave. Whether the public accepted the anti-War movement's rationale for ending the War is irrelevant. The important point is that the public eventually demanded the War be stopped.

What are the implications of the media-public-protest movement-government relationship as regards the democratic process? If society can be said to be composed of competing
factions, as suggested by the hyperpluralist and pluralist models of government, each of the actors present in the system did their job. The protest movement, as an organized interest group, did their job of voicing their opinion, and doing it well—to the extent their activities received extensive media coverage. The press, reporting about reality, did their job also; they gave the public the truth as they saw it. The government was forced to react to both the interest group pressure brought to bear by the protesters, and the shift in elite opinion that occurred later in the War. If America's involvement in Vietnam was wrong in any sense, from its inefficacy to its immorality, the competing interests groups forced the government to do the right thing: end the War. In this sense the Vietnam War era relationship between government, the media, and the protesters can be seen as almost a classic study of American democracy functioning as it should. As Thomas Powers put it:

In the end the government abandoned its policy because its domestic cost was too high, its chance of success in Vietnam too slim. There was little reason to fight on, every reason to find a way out. The opposition was not alone responsible for this shift in policy, but if there had been no opposition the shift would not have happened when or in the way that it did.

The end of American involvement in Vietnam means, as I have previously said, the system worked as it should: the government responded to the pressures placed on it by the
other elements in the system by ending the War. The strength of the anti-War movement resulted from its gradual alignment with the media and the public in opposition to the War. What can be said of the media is that it helped this alignment by revealing both what was said by the government and by the protesters. It showed the government was not telling the truth about the War, which aided the anti-War movement's message to the rest of the American people. Nevertheless, the alignment necessary to end the War came about through the efforts of the media and the demonstrators. Through the vigilance of these agents within the system, the system was made to work for all.
End Notes—Chapter IV


5 Herschenhosen, Gods, pp. 48-68 passim.


7 Powers, War, p. 184.

8 White, *President*, p. 287.

9 Ibid, p. 264.


12 White, *President*, pp. 262-266.


14 Frank Mankiewicz and Joel Swerdlows, *Remote Control*: 106

15 Ibid., p. 75.
16 Herschenhosen, Gods, p. 54.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
23 Ibid, pp. 266-271.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 By "casuistry" I am using Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary definition of: "False application of principles especially with regard to morals or law". See Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, Mass.: G. & C. Merriam Co., 1980).

28 Ibid.


32 White, *President*, p. 286.


34 Ibid, p. 87.

35 Ibid.

36 Powers analysis adequately demonstrates this. See Powers, *War*, passim.


38 White, *President*, pp. 233-301.

39 Ibid., p. 300.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.


44 White, *President*, p. 287.


46 White, *President*, p. 287.
48 Ibid, p. 300.
49 Staff Report To The National Commission on the Causes
   and Prevention of Violence, by Milton S. Eisenhauer Chairman
   (Hereafter cited as Staff Report, Violence).
52 Ibid,
53 Michael Herr, Dispatches (New York: Alfred A. Knopf
54 This is an operational definition.
55 The Staff Report Index carries the index for Mr.
   Salant's statements which seem to indicate a fair
   representation of all views. See Staff Report, Violence, pp.
   445-448.
56 In the sense no one can be totally without bias. See
   Merrill, Messages, p. 112.
57 This is also an operational definition.
58 Tebbel, Media, pp. 380-381.
59 Tebbel's conclusion is that the Nixon Administration
   only claimed this occurred. He blames Patrick Buchanon for
   Nixon and Agnew's attacks on the press for favoring the
   demonstrators. See Tebbel, Media, pp. 383-381.
60 Another operational definition.

Ibid.

Ibid, p. 133.


Ibid.


Powers, *War*, chap. 5 passim.

In terms of the system offered in chapter one of this study.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

The numerous films and books about Vietnam, and in particular the recent controversy surrounding Oliver Stone's film, Platoon, seem to give credence to the notion America is fascinated by the Vietnam War. Because Vietnam was the first war fought during the maturity of the electronic medium, much controversy has revolved around the role the media played in the Vietnam War. It has been the task of this study to examine the role of the media in the Vietnam War from a political communications perspective.

The first part of this chapter summarize my findings regarding each of the actors involved in the political communications system: the decision makers, the media, and the public. Next I will discuss and elaborate the role the gatekeepers and opinion leaders played in the Vietnam era political communication system. Afterwards, I will offer some conclusions about the model I proposed in Chapter One, offer some recommendations for further study, and finally, I will provide my insight as to the media's role in the Vietnam War and in the United States political system in general.
Chapter Two discussed the decision maker's communicative behaviors. The decision makers' communication environment was a key element in determining the way the Vietnam War was fought. The communication setting created factors which inhibited the ability of the War planners to make proper decisions. The first key factor which inhibited effective communication was the networking employed by the presidents in their consultations with close advisors. The networking of communications through the wheel—the communication set-up designed to focus all communication to and through the leader—served to shut off free and adequate discussion of all policy options. Furthermore, early on, when the decision to avoid American combat troop deployment could have been made, the channeling of information prevented the openness necessary for effective decision making.

Another key inhibiting factor that hampered effective decision making was the filtering of both upward and downward communication. Upward filtering occurred for basically two reasons: because orders from superiors demanded a certain type of information be provided, or because the subordinates were either rewarded for such filtering or were scared of the consequences of not filtering. The net result was that honest information was not in ready supply. Optimistic war reporting
served no one's interest in the long run. It destroyed an American president, it harmed the legitimate interests of the State Department and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and it created hostility by some, especially conservatives, toward the news media. The downward filtering was imposed by certain key administration players upon their subordinates in order to reconfirm their views of reality. Filtering also served to justify their reality, and the logical policy outgrowths of it, to the American people and the president. The downward filtering imposed by the Chiefs of Staff, for example, caused positive assessments of the war to be given to the President, and to justify the use of military power to solve a political conflict. The filtering was sometimes deliberate, and sometimes not, but overall its net impact was to distort reality, and to justify policies that otherwise would have been discredited.

The media is the major part of this study, and it is prominently mentioned in the other sections discussing the various actors in the system. In Chapter Three, the main issues discussed were fairness and accuracy. From what was discussed, it was clear that the media was fair in at least the pragmatic sense. Overall, they accurately reported what happened during Tet Offensive of 1968, which critics have pointed to as a paradigm example of biased and distorted war.
reporting. Analysis suggests the Administration, not the media, was responsible for the public rejection of the Vietnam War. The media simply revealed the government's deception, and this turned the public against the War.

In addition, the media's liberal bias did not have an apparent impact on the way the War was reported. It has been pointed out that most reporters, like most Americans, initially believed in the War effort. As it became clear the Johnson Administration was not being truthful in its War reporting, the news media began to doubt the War. The Tet offensive served as the case study for analyzing the accuracy of war reporting. There were errors in interpretation by the media, but the overwhelming truth of Tet was reported. Despite government denials the communists were capable of such an attack, the communists mounted this massive offensive. This may have caused a large segment of American people to have grave doubts about the United State's ability to win the War.

Vietnam War reporting contributed to ending the War. The media contributed by disclosing the disastrous nature of the War, and the failures and deceits of President Johnson's Administration. However, the media cannot take full responsibility for causing the public opinion shift that
occurred after Tet. This was largely achieved by the deceptive practices of the Johnson Administration. The media reported the war accurately: we were not winning the war, and in 1968 we were no closer to winning the war than we were in 1965. The media did their job by disclosing government fraud and duplicity, and by helping people to realize the futility of America's Vietnam War efforts.

Chapter Four focused on the questions of whether the media fairly reported the demonstrator's activities and viewpoints, and whether the media was used by the protesters. The media was found to have been fair in that they presented what was there to report. The media did not create the type of pseudo events they were accused of. Moreover, the charge the media was used by the protesters was found to have no substance. The media reported that during the 1968 Democratic Convention, the Chicago police brutalized demonstrators. Despite Theodore White's assertion the violence was orchestrated by elite members of the protesters, there is no substantive evidence this was the case. Moreover, the statements by the President of CBS news indicate the media treated the various segments of public opinion even-handedly.

Furthermore, the media's shift against the war coincided more with changes in the balance of American public
than it did with the demonstrator's actions. The overall impact of the demonstration movement, and the reporting of that movement, seems to have been to create a controversy about the war which culminated in various crises during 1967. During this period, Johnson and his aids began to question their own views about the war for the first time. It is possible, even likely, that the Vietnam War era activists prevented a further, possibly disastrous escalation of the War.

The next area to be discussed is the importance of gatekeepers and opinion leaders during the Vietnam War. These included both governmental and non-governmental actors. The gatekeepers were those actors in the system who decided which issues were worthy of discussion as part of a public agenda. The media served this role primarily, as they brought issues to the attention of the public as selective reflectors of reality. But the government also served a type of gate-keeping function: it tried to keep the war off the public agenda. The student activists served as opinion leaders in the sense they heightened the consciousness of other Americans to the war as an issue. The opinion leaders were those who tried to form public opinion one way or another. The government tried to interject itself into the political communications system as an opinion leader in favor
of the war. This move ironically backfired and ultimately resulted in the government being forced to back away from its commitment to Vietnam. The protesters were clearly opinion leaders of some importance; they shaped attitudes toward the war, and their negative view of the Vietnam War eventually won out.

The model of the political communications system has provided some valuable insight into the Vietnam era. The system and the environment created many challenges to the government in its function as the mechanism responsible for producing policy outputs. The main challenge produced in the environment was the growing opposition to the Vietnam War. The opposition was reflected by the growing strength of anti-War interest groups, the media's skeptical attitude about the War and its favorable coverage of the anti-War demonstrators, and the general turning of public opinion against the War. In response, the system eventually changed its output by ending the War.

The allocation of values in the system in the form of policy decisions was dominated by the agents in the system. For example, early on when the government was able to control the communications about the War effectively, and thus to show the War effort was proceeding well, the opposition from
the media and the demonstrators had little affect on policy outputs. This was partly due to the fact that there was little disagreement in the early stages of the War between actors in the system. The media basically supported the government's War policies, and the student protesters had not yet been able to gain considerable access for their viewpoints. The overall conclusion I have come to is that when the majority of actors in the system were either against or for the War effort, the system gradually adapted its policy output to reflect this alignment. (see figure 5-1) Finally the feedback within the system was distorted by the government in an attempt to control the policy inputs. When this attempt was revealed, the communications from the environment and from the other actors in the system, the media and the demonstrators, turned against the government. So while the government shaped the feedback it gave to other parts of the system, this feedback did not allow the government to allocate values as it saw fit. As mentioned previously, however, when the majority of elements in and out of the system initially backed the War, as they did before Tet, the government was able to allocate values the way it wanted.

The filtering of information between various elements in the political communication system of Vietnam played a major role in determining systemic outputs. The government
Political Communications Alignment Model (Figure 5-1)

Pre-1968 Alignment

Note #1 - The input from the public was mostly supportive of the War effort.
Note #2 - The media also mostly supported the War before 1968.
Note #3 - The Demonstrators were excluded from the alignment and thus from the policy output.
Note #4 - The government's alignment with the media and the environment equaled escalatory War policies.

1968 Alignment

Note #1 - The input from the public was by this time to either end the war or escalate.
Note #2 - The media turned against the War after Tet of 1968.
Note #3 - The Demonstrators were increasingly powerful political force during 1968 as evidenced by the strength of the democratic peace candidate Eugene McCarthy.
Note #4 - The government still implemented the policy, but it was forced to begin the deescalation of the conflict in 1968 and until the end of the War.
filtering that occurred in upward and downward communication distorted the information the decision makers received. This led to poor policy, which resulted in the media disseminating negative War reporting based on information supplied by bureaucratic dissenters. The government's filtering also was an attempt to shape the opinions of all the other agents in the system and the environment. This attempt by the government to control the manner and type of communications by the other actors in the system can be seen as the government trying to control the policy output process.

Filtering by the media had minimal affect on the system. The media's biases were irrelevant in gaining strength for the anti-War protesters or in rallying public opposition to the War. Government's attempt to shape both feedback about policies and input from the environmental factor of the public caused Americans to eventually reject the War. However, the media did reinforce the other agents' communications in the system. They transmitted the government's message the War was going well; and for a time, most of the public believed it. When the Tet offensive occurred, they reported the massive attack by the communists which contradicted previous government messages. The media also reinforced the message of the protesters; that we should get out of Vietnam. President Nixon, because he believed he
needed to control the public's outcry against the War, transmitted a message to all the other elements in the system that we would soon be withdrawing from Vietnam. The media reported this message, and later it reported the contradictory message we were widening the War by invading Cambodia. Again, the other elements in the system became outraged. The media also sought to perpetuate its own values in the system by insisting on the public's right to know. By doing this, they gained strength for the anti-War interest groups, and helped create public dissatisfaction with the War.

The demonstrators, as an organized interest group, opposed the War in Vietnam. The coverage of these protest activities by the media helped to align the public against the War. This alignment of the media, the public, and the anti-War demonstrators forced the government to change policies and begin the slow process of disengaging from the Vietnam conflict. The most important generalization that can be drawn about the political communications system of the Vietnam War is that when the majority of actors were in favor of the War, the War was prosecuted in an escalatory spiral: aid and advisory operations preceded bombing, which had preceded combat troop deployment. When, after the Tet offensive, the majority of actors with affect on the system were opposed to the War, the process of deescalation
began. (See Figure 5-1)

There are some areas for further research in this area of political communications. First, does this pattern represent the way American democracy generally works? If the job of the social scientist is to make generalizations about reality, such further explorations would seem to be a worthwhile endeavor. Another area which could be researched is how this system design fits in with current models of American democratic decision making. Particularly interesting would be a comparison of how this model compares to either elite, pluralist, or hyperpluralist models of government. The last area I believe research needs to be done is in the realm of public opinion. The public also needs to be examined as a force in the decision making process independent of other actors in the system. Although isolating the public out as an independent agent in the political communication would be difficult, such an analysis would allow us to gain a more direct insight into the function of perception in democratic societies.

I believe the media played a very important role in the Vietnam War. The media reflected public opinion about the War very accurately. Before 1968, when the majority of American's were in favor of the War, so was the media. When the public
began to express doubts about the War, so did the media. Moreover, when the media was incorrect in its assessments it was largely because the media was fed distorted information by the Government. The decision makers in the government tried to keep the public on board with policy by controlling what the media reported. The media became fed up with the government's deception after Tet, and journalists began to seriously question our commitment to Vietnam. The undeniable fact is that the media reported what the public needed to know: we were not winning the Vietnam War.

The domestic coverage of demonstrators also showed the media's accuracy. The media reported there was a significant protest movement. The media's acceptance of the protesters' views grew as the War effort in Vietnam failed to live up to the billing promised by the government. The media also reported the protesters were beat up by the police and there is no doubt this happened. The Chicago Democratic Convention of 1968 illustrates the media's accuracy: it may have reported what happened in a somewhat dramatic fashion, but the media did present the reality of the situation. Moreover, there is no substance to the charge the media was used and manipulated by the demonstrators. The anti-War demonstrators sought coverage, but this does not deny such events were news. Finally, it was demonstrated that the media did not
skew reporting by giving more coverage to demonstrators than to other groups.

My final judgement is that American democracy functioned about the way it should. The interest groups organized to end the United State's involvement in a disastrous War. The media served the public's right to know so well the deception of the United States government was exposed. This led to the outrage of the public which helped end the War. Only the government failed in its democratic function; to serve the interests of the people. It is true the majority of Americans backed the War effort initially. However, we cannot know how much of this support was shaped by the deceptive information fed by the government to the media and the public. Finally, when the truth was revealed, and the public and the other actors in the system turned against the War, the government finally began to disengage from it. Still, it was five years after Tet when the last American combat troops were pulled out of Vietnam. The deception of the government served no one's interest in the long run. It damaged the government's credibility and cost 56,000 Americans their lives. One can only hope that in the future our government will practice openness and honesty in their communications with the media and the public. Since, we cannot guarantee this, we need a strong media who will serve
the public's right to know. In this way, we can ensure there will be no more Vietnams in our future.
End Notes—Chapter V


2 This is the basis for Peter Braestrup's book *Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet in Vietnam and Saigon* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1976), passim.


7 Ibid., p. 244.
SOURCES CONSULTED


Cooley, Charles H. "The Significance of Communication." in


130


1975.


