

# **ABSTRACT**

## **OBJECTIVITY REVISITED: A STUDY OF THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA'S COVERAGE OF COLIN POWELL'S UN PRESENTATION**

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This thesis uses U.S. mainstream media's coverage of then Secretary of State Colin Powell's address to the UN Security Council prior to the Iraq War as a case study to examine the role of the principle of objectivity in U.S. journalism. In that address, Powell claimed that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. In that covering that event, the media to a large extent took Powell's statement at its face value, and led the American public believe that Iraq did possess WMD and that the threat was massive and imminent. Many critics blame objectivity for the media's failure and call for abandoning the long-standing principle. This thesis goes back into history and seeks the true meaning of objectivity from its roots. The paper answers the questions whether adherence to objectivity was the reason that derailed news reports from truth, and what objective reporting truly is.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## Introduction: Questions from a Journalist

January 26, 2004, about ten months after Operation Iraqi Freedom was launched, CBS correspondent Bob Simon gave a speech at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. During the lecture, he repeated his concern about one piece of disturbing reality. Why, he asked, after it had been revealed that the Bush administration lied to American citizens about Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction—a major justification leading to the invasion of Iraq, was there no noticeable protest among the public. Why, he asked, was the public today so tolerant of bold-faced lies from the government.

Maybe the public is more tolerant. Maybe people today are more nonchalant. Maybe they are too angry and too tired to respond—after all, it is too late, because the war had already started. However, as a renowned journalist, instead of blaming his viewers, Mr. Simon should look into the mirror and do some self-reflection. Instead of questioning the public, he should ask why the media failed to reveal the lies before a dozen nations were dragged into war and the rest of the world into the repercussions. Why did the media fail to bring to the public reliable information upon which informed and rational public opinion could have been formed? Why did the media fail to invite effective scrutiny and to start reasoned debates on the White House foreign policy towards Iraq when they were most needed?

Before the war against Iraq was fought, the American news media had lost its battleground. To list but a couple of the media's failures:

September 7, 2002, appearing before television cameras at Camp David, George Bush and Tony Blair cited a “new” report from the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that allegedly stated that Iraq was “six months away” from building a nuclear weapon. Immediately, millions of Americans saw Bush “tieless, casually inarticulate, but determined-looking and self-confident” (quoted in Macarthur), making a case for preemptive war. The claim went unchallenged, and it hardly mattered that no such IAEA report existed, because almost no one in the media bothered to check out the story (Macarthur).

In his press conference on March 6, 2003, in which he laid out his reasons for the coming war against Saddam Hussein, President Bush mentioned al Qaeda or the attacks of September 11 fourteen times in fifty-two minutes. No one challenged him on it (Cunningham).

The failure of U.S. mainstream journalism in its pre-Iraq War coverage was not an isolated case of a single event, individual journalists or certain media company. Instead, it is a repeated pattern observed at almost every moment when critical U.S. foreign policy was being brewed. Therefore, instead of examining journalistic practices in reporting this single event as if it is an exception, a more constructive

approach is to examine principles of journalism that guide its ethics and routines. Among all the principles in U.S. journalism, objectivity is one that has been holding a notable status for decades. It is a major norm in U.S. journalism worth the efforts of research and examination.

This thesis will start with a case study of U.S. mainstream news media reports of Secretary of State Collin Powell's speech at the United Nations Security Council on February 5th, 2003 as an example of journalistic practices in the run-up to the Iraq War. The thesis will evaluate the practices against the principle of objectivity. The goal is to trace the problems in U.S. journalism to the root from which the procedural standards and moral guidelines of journalism sprouted. As objectivity is a unique principle in U.S. journalism, this thesis examines practices by U.S. media only.

The reassessment of objectivity will start from the introduction of objectivity as a major norm into U.S. journalism. The thesis will study the social and historical contingencies that gestated this notion. If certain connections can be established between the rise of objectivity and some elements in history, it will be easier to decide what strength journalists were trying to draw from this philosophical conception, and why news media used it to relay legitimacy to the institution of journalism. This historical analysis will arrive at an understanding of objectivity at its origin—the objectivity that was first advocated by liberal intellectuals and embraced by professionals.

The objective of the thesis is to conduct a critical analysis of journalistic practices and the principle of objectivity and to arrive at a fair assessment of them.

## **Research Questions**

While Bob Simon was convinced that the public should be more responsive and progressive, this thesis starts with the belief that the media should be more responsible and effective in informing the public, especially during the wartime. The wartime presents stronger challenges to journalists, because journalists are more vulnerable to external pressures as well as to their own bias and stereotypes. In the prelude of war, the government needs to mobilize the entire nation to provide material supplies, labors, soldiers, and supportive public opinion for the coming war, all of which involve major sacrifices. To achieve its goal, the government would mount a massive propaganda campaign to justify the war and prepare the nation for sacrifices. While facing the propaganda onslaught, journalists are also easily caught in their own patriotism or nationalism, or simply the belief that all criticism towards the government should be suppressed during a time of crisis. In addition, the government and war opponents always attempt to lead the public to believe that critics of the war are endangering the troops, and undermining efforts of the brave soldiers. Fearing such backlash, the media could self-censor reports that could potentially make it look unpatriotic. Such was the case in the media coverage in the run-up to the Iraq War. The institution of

journalism, frequently hailed as the fourth estate of the United States democratic infrastructure, was disarmed almost instantly by the Bush administration in the government's propaganda campaign to sell fabricated justifications for the invasion of Iraq in order to solicit public support. Why, then, was there this huge discrepancy between what news media claims itself to be—truth-seeker, and what it turns out to be? Why was news reduced to abstracts of government briefings and journalists to official stenographers when the nation was in desperate need of sober journalism amid the heated aggression of the propaganda machine?

In fact, I do not doubt that journalists such as Bob Simon are sincerely concerned about the soundness of the American political system. I do not doubt that they whole-heartedly believe that they are making honest and ethical efforts to ensure that American journalism fulfills its social responsibility. Why, then, did the government successfully get its shrewdly constructed messages disseminated through the mass media without being closely scrutinized? Why did the ethical codes of journalism fail to prevent journalists from being used by the government as involuntary agents in its pre-war propaganda campaign? This collective incompetence of the news media as an institution is more worrisome than the occasional epidemics jostled up by individual black sheep such as Janet Cooke and Jayson Blair. Jeremy Iggers expresses this concern in Good News, Bad News:

...[T]he most fundamental problem is not the performance of journalists but the standards themselves. It is quite possible to be a very ethical journalist... and yet to produce journalism that is ineffectual, meaningless, or even irresponsible and destructive, when examined in the light of a broader conception of the ethical responsibilities of the news media. (5)

Iggers rightly points out that there are larger problems than individual journalists. Tracing the problems to the roots of journalism ethics, some scholars hold objectivity as the source of evil (Iggers 107, Cunningham, Schudson 1978 185, Strout quoted in Iggers 109). However, frequently these accusations raise more questions than they answer. Why did objectivity arise at the same time when public relations and government propaganda became new phenomena? Was there a relationship between these occurrences? If objectivity was called forth by journalism to fend off the corrosion of public agents, why does it prove an ineffectual weapon in the battle of journalism against special interests? If a causal relationship can be assuredly established between objectivity and the ills in journalism, why decades after its introduction into U.S. journalism, is objectivity still an actively advocated principle instead of a forlorn ancient spirit?

## **Literature Review**

Critics were prompt to notice and respond to the apparent negligence of the news media in the pre-Iraq War coverage. Silvio Waisbord expresses his worry in

Journalism, Risk, and Patriotism that the media in the post-9/11 era “opted to ignore dissent and avoided questioning the dangers of exuberant patriotism” (207). He calls for journalists to live up to the professional requirement of detachment and objectivity in order to fend off the influence of patriotic partisanship.

In September 11 and the Structural Limitations of U.S. Journalism, Robert W. McChesney notes the anti-democratic tendencies in the U.S press coverage of the war against terrorism. He notes that in every war campaign, the media system “proved to be a superior propaganda organ for militarism and war” (93). The problems, McChesney argues, lie with the structural limitations of U.S. journalism. The flaws of the structure of journalism include over-reliance on official sources and experts from the Washington establishment, and the tendency to avoid contextualization.

As does McChesney, Brent Cunningham discloses the same problems in U.S. journalism, and he blames these problems on objectivity. In Re-thinking Objectivity, he lists several crimes of objectivity:

- Objectivity excuses lazy reporting. Therefore journalists fail to push toward a deeper understanding of what is true and what is false.
- Objectivity exacerbates the tendency to rely on official sources, because it is the easiest, and quickest way to get the “balance.”
- Objectivity makes journalists reluctant to counter the President in fear of losing their access.
- Objectivity makes reporters hesitant to inject issues in the news that are not already out there.

The viability of objectivity in U.S. journalism was not a new interest found by critics in the war against terrorism. The controversy surrounding objectivity started at the very moment when it entered the establishment of journalism as a professional principle.

In The Virtuous Journalist Stephen Klaidman and Tom L. Beauchamp defend objectivity as an urge for journalists to stay uninfluenced by emotion or personal prejudice. To Jeremy Iggers, however, objectivity should be completely abandoned. He is grateful for the fact that objectivity is gradually fading away from journalistic ethics, but he is troubled by the lingering influence of the phantom of objectivity. In Good News, Bad News, he says: “Objectivity may be dead, but it isn’t dead enough” (91). He charges objectivity with misleading the practice of journalism in several significant aspects:

- Objective reporting can be irresponsible because journalists always hide behind sources;
- Objective reporting values certain discourses over others, and creates a hierarchy of news resources;
- Objective reporting focuses on facts and overt events while it devalues ideas and fragments experience.

However, it is hard to tell which objectivity Iggers is referring to in making these accusations, because he acknowledges that there is a discrepancy between

objectivity in the theoretical sense and objectivity that is put into journalistic procedures.

John C. Merrill and S. Jack Odell try to reconcile the contradiction between the perfectionist connotation of objectivity as a philosophical conception and the fatal imperfection of human nature. They discuss objectivity as journalistic ideology at an epistemological level in Philosophy and Journalism. They insist: “[J]ournalists are interested in factual truth” (55), and they acknowledge that “objectivity and skepticism are intimately connected” and journalists are bound to encounter a variety of arguments regarding the impossibility of objectivity (52). Their work evaluates arguments supporting and objecting to philosophical skepticism—the view that no one could ever know anything at all about any object that falls into certain categories of knowledge (52), and provides a set of empirical canons with which journalists can practice their jobs. The canons Merrill and Odell prescribe are methods of induction, which include the method of agreement, the method of difference, the method of concomitant variation, and the method of residues (64-68). All these methods are based on evidence. The most important aspect of evidence is that it is context bound. That is, the object taken as evidence under one set of circumstance may not constitute evidence under another (68-69). It follows that the concept of truth involves contextual considerations. Merrill and Odell analyze a few existing theories regarding the concept of truth, including the correspondence theory, the coherence theory, and the pragmatic theory. They recognize that none of the theories can completely substantiate the existence of truth and provide flawless methods to pursue or verify truth. However, they conclude that by seeking truth from facts, journalists are not required to reach transcendental entities which are completely independent from the way human beings apprehend the world. A good journalist is supposed to know, instead, “those things which can be said to exist independently of any given perceiver, those things all rational agents count as facts” (74)

Richard Streckfuss has realized that many charges against objectivity originate from misinterpretation and over-simplification of this concept. In Objectivity in Journalism: A Search and a Reassessment, Streckfuss suggests that to have a fair understanding of objectivity, one needs to seek out its birthplace or check into its parentage (973). By studying the leading journalism journals, Streckfuss concludes that objectivity was not in the vocabulary of American journalism until the 1920s (974). Stressing that “objectivity was a child of its time and a creature of its culture” (975), he studies the major cultural forces that pushed for the establishment of an objective journalism. Included in his list of forces are distrust for human rationality, realization that facts could be manipulated, realization that democracy was flawed and threatened, and a belief in the scientific method (975-976). Therefore, objectivity, rising from these social contingencies, “meant finding the truth through the rigorous methodology of the scientist” (975), not “something simple-minded and pallidly neutral” (973).



About the birthplace of objectivity, Streckfuss shares some of Michael Schudson's views. In Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers, Schudson presents a brief history of American journalism. According to him, objectivity started to be advocated and embraced as journalistic ideology in the 1930s amid a picture of doubts and despair in the American society after World War I. The ideal of popular governance, built by the rhetoric of democracy, seemed to be disintegrating in the post war era. Liberal intellectuals began to realize that public affairs were retreating to remote centers, removed from the vision of private citizens. Governing, instead of being actively participated in by the citizenry, was practiced exclusively by the insiders (123). "Despair about democracy deepened in the 1930s with the growing strength of dictatorships in Germany and Italy and the apparent helplessness of American government in the early thirties to deal with the depression" (125). Baffled by the deepening political and economic problems, intellectuals, including newspaper editors felt helpless and lost. Schudson attributes the pessimism about the institutions of democracy and capitalism in the 1930s to a result of new psychological studies that cast doubt on rationality and reason (126). Once rationality and reason were believed to be inherent characteristics of human nature; psychology replaced them with subconscious wishes and repressed desires (126). Thus, the meaning of "public" and "public opinion" moved in an anti-liberal direction. The operation of popular will was no longer trusted. Public opinion was once the voice of "the middle class against an aristocracy in the early nineteenth century. By the early twentieth century, it was regarded by the middle class as the voice of some other, large mass of persons having no claims to the middle-class perquisite of education and middle-class virtue of rationality" (128). Therefore, the 1930s saw the middle-class develop a proprietary attitude toward "reason." Public opinion could no longer be trusted in the practices of democratic authority. It was regarded as something to study, to direct, to manipulate, and to control. The public was "defined as irrational, not reasoning; spectatorial, not participant" (134). The craft of public relations was developed as a profession which responded to, and helped shape, the newly defined public.

Public relations, which share an indistinct border with propaganda, shared the same rhetoric with news which both institutions used to justify their existence. The very first practitioner of public relations, Ivy Lee, cited Walter Lippmann with acclamation. He said, since no one could present the whole of the facts on any subject, and disinterestedness was impossible and bias unavoidable, all interpretations and opinions, including self-interested discourse, were equally entitled to a place in the democratic forum (135-136). Along with public relations, which stood for the efforts of special interests in private sectors to "rationalize" and manipulate the public, came wartime propaganda, which was to some extent the government's attempt to claim its ground in the battle of defining public opinion. The feelings of journalists toward American government propaganda were generally resentment and hopelessness. They

found themselves victimized by military censorship and advocacy, while on the other hand, serving as agents for the propaganda machine (141).

Public relations and propaganda undermined the old faith in facts. Journalists began to realize that facts could be deceiving and reality was more complex than could be merely reflected by discursive facts. The distrust of facts among journalists inevitably created an identity crisis in the institution of journalism—an institution based on the dissemination of facts as it was in the Penny Press era. It was in this self-conscious process of identity seeking and reconstruction that objectivity took control. Schudson had a more focused description of this process in his other writing: The Emergence of The Objectivity Norm in American Journalism.

While Schudson regards the rise of objectivity as the end of the Penny Press era, Dan Schiller, in Objectivity and the News, ties the emergence of objectivity to the decline of partisan journalism and the thriving of Penny Press in the 1830s, when the commercial penny papers combined advanced print technology with a street-sale distribution system as a way of expanding and cultivating a new public (7). This conclusion of his is based on the assumption that news objectivity was connected with the transformation of the newspaper into a commodity, thus the best period to study the development of objectivity in American journalism is when the newspaper became a capitalist institution. That is, “we must turn...to the penny press” (7).

To Schudson, Schiller’s view is clearly a misunderstanding of objectivity. In The Emergence of The Objectivity Norm in American Journalism, Schudson has a summarized, but focused analysis of the origin of objectivity. He reaffirms the finding that objectivity became an articulated and self-conscious moral norm in American journalism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (172-173). He agrees that concepts associated with objectivity, such as neutrality, faith in facts, accuracy, and fairness were found in journalistic practice before objectivity was reified and institutionalized. However, contrary to Schiller’s belief that a prevalent pattern of behavior gives rise to moral norms that generalize and eternalize the practice, Schudson brings attention to exceptions to this formula. “Most people like to eat ice cream,” he says, “but no one insists that those who do not like it have failed to live up to a moral requirement” (166). Hereafter, the question arises: “What circumstances lead people or institutions to become self-conscious about their patterns of behaviors and to articulate them in the form of moral norms” (167)?

To answer the question, Schudson examines the historical contingencies of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century against four conditions, two of which are Durkheimian conditions, concerning horizontal solidarity or group identity, two Weberian, having to do with hierarchical social control across an organization (167, 176-180). He concludes that the formalization of objectivity as a moral norm in American journalism was pursued by journalists in order to protect themselves from public scrutiny, to attach legitimacy to their institution, and “to endow their occupation with an identity they can count as worthy” (180).

Schudson considers Walter Lippmann the most forceful and wise advocate of journalistic objectivity. In his Public Opinion, Lippmann calls for almost a complete overhaul of the democratic system. His doubt about the established theory of democracy starts from his questioning of omnipotent citizenship and popular governance. To him, the democratic system at work is constructed on the assumption that everybody casting the ballot knows everything he is supposed to know in order to form a reasonable opinion upon the public affair he is voting for, and that his opinion is the fruit of perfect information and reasonable and logical thinking. Lippmann says this assumption is seriously flawed. People's attempts to know the world are disrupted by numerous complexities inherent in or external to human nature—"by censorship and privacy at the source, by physical and social barriers at the other end, by scanty attention, by the poverty of language, by distraction, by unconscious constellations of feelings, by wear and tear, violence, monotony" (49). When information reaches individual citizens, it has already been crippled, and when these individuals are processing the information they receive, they process it with their own experience, beliefs, and stereotypes. They hold the product at the end of this process as the reality. Lippmann calls people's perception of reality fiction, or pseudo-environment at best (10), and he senses real danger in this cognitive process—people act in response to that pseudo-environment but the actions eventuate in the real environment (10).

Following Lippmann's argument, another cornerstone of democratic theory is shaken. Truth—the diamond at the very core of democratic system become elusive and distant. Old-fashioned democrats put their faith in the eventual victory of truth in the competition of ideas in a free market of speech. However, Lippmann points out that this belief is founded on the unreliable assumption that either truth is spontaneous, or that the means of securing truth exist when there was no external interference (202). Since people's vision is obscured by external distraction and internal defection of human perception and reason, there is no guarantee human nature will always gravitate toward truth. Human beings' ordeal with knowing their environment is most hopeless in dealing with distant or complex matters, because when people lack the sources to check the information with their own observation, they are most vulnerable to misleading information sent to them by propagandists and public agents (Lippmann 46-57). The only recourse for the people seems to be the press: "Universally it is admitted that the press is the chief means of contact with the unseen environment."

However, Lippmann does not have much confidence in the press. His verdict on the news is almost relentless: "news and truth are not the same thing, and must be clearly distinguished" (226). To him, the press is merely one institution among many institutions in a democracy, and journalists are subject to the same confinements in seeking the truth as everybody is: "His (the journalist's) version of the truth is only his version...his own opinion is in some vital measure constructed out of his own stereotypes, according to his own code, and by the urgency of his own interest" (227).

The picture he depicts so far is dark, depressing, and hopeless. However, he points to the light at the end of the tunnel, which is to bring the method of physicists

into social science. The hope lies in the principles of science, the chief virtue of which is objectivity (257). Lippmann advocates the spirit of objectivity, which he regards as the gist of scientific principles, at a time when the ubiquity of human subjectivism was revealed and truth was farther from human knowledge than ever.

However, Lippmann's crusade to enshrine objectivity as the principle of journalism has been limping ever since. Not only has objectivity been ridiculed as unrealistic, but also it is held as the source of thoughts and practices that derail journalists from their pursuit of truth, such as in the case of the media's coverage of the Bush administration zeroing in on Iraq. Therefore, this thesis will analyze one case among the voluminous reports in the run-up to the War on Iraq to study the role of objectivity in this specific coverage and in journalism.

## **Scope of the Study**

This research will look at a selected set of media reports on events establishing the evidence that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMD), because WMD was the major rationale the government cited to justify Operation Iraqi Freedom. The argument and evidence offered by the government about WMD were questioned even when they were presented, but the media failed to see through the lies and to caution the public of the dubious nature of these government claims. Such an obvious failure should be subject to close examination.

In the campaign to solicit support for the Iraq War, the government made multiple efforts under various circumstances to stress its accusation that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. The final stroke was made by Secretary of State Collin Powell on February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2003, in his speech to the United Nations Security Council. The media absorbed the so-called evidence in Powell's speech, and embraced it heartily. Greg Mitchell describes the media's unquestioning acceptance of Powell's presentation as a depressing case of journalism shirking its responsibility: "Simply put, the Powell charade was the turning point in the march to war, and the media, in almost universally declaring that he had 'made the case,' fell for it, hook, line and sinker, thereby making the invasion ...inevitable."

This thesis will study mainstream U.S. media reports on Powell's speech in the U.N. Security Council. Examples will be drawn from news reports by CNN, ABC, CBS, and NBC on the broadcast side of the media. Fox News, although a major broadcast news provider, is excluded from this study. Although Fox News claims to be "Fair and Balanced," it is generally regarded as a niche media appealing to the relatively conservative viewers. Most other mainstream media organizations, on the other hand, are frequently accused of showing "liberal slant." In the case under study, as we are examining the relationship between the media and a conservative administration, the failure of the media to fulfill its role as a watchdog can be more evident, if we find evidence that members of the "liberal media" failed to properly

scrutinize the government's case. Instead, more friendly and supportive reporting by a conservative media outlet such as Fox would be less surprising and demonstrative. The New York Times will be studied as a case from the print media given its respectability and reputation as the leading newspaper of the nation. Most of the examples will be found in news coverage on Powell's speech during the period from February 5<sup>th</sup> to March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2003. That is, from the day the speech was made to the day the first exchange of fire of Operation Iraqi Freedom took place. The study will not be exhaustive. As CNN is a 24 hour news outlet, and the TV networks devoted large chunks of their airtime on February 5, 2003 to special reports on Powell's presentation, many of the incremental reports had minimum variation as intervals between filing were too short to allow major updates. The thesis selects one script from each group of similar reports that contain essentially the same set of information. This study does not include articles from editorial pages of The New York Times, as they are not required to abide by the principle of objectivity, and that their primary purpose is to provide opinions instead of news facts.

It is most urgent and necessary to put the media's performance under scrutiny in the deliberation process of foreign policy. Comparatively, the public has less access to information about situations in a foreign land than they do about domestic issues. They primarily rely on the media to bring them out of the dark. Walter Lippmann argues that people generally act upon a pseudo-environment which consists of the images, stereotypes and preconceptions in their minds and some new information adds to the existing notions (3-23). In terms of issues concerning foreign policies, the media can exert more power to add to, to alter, or to construct people's perception of the environment they are dwelling in and acting upon. This nearly almighty power was proven abused in that the media fed the public misleading information prior to the Iraq War.

Rather than scapegoating individual journalists for all the illnesses in journalistic practice, this thesis will look for problems stemming from the foundation of the edifice of American journalism. It is almost impossible to discuss American journalism ethics without mentioning objectivity. Describing objectivity as one of the major social norms in the United States, Donsbach says: "Objectivity is the chief occupational value of American journalism and the norm that historically and still today distinguishes U.S. journalism from the dominant model of continental European journalism" (quoted in Schudson 2001 165). Objectivity is a principle from which many professional codes directing journalistic practices evolved. Although it has been one of the most contentious myths ever since it was brought up, both those reproaching it and those advocating it agree that it is an influential factor in American journalism.

Given its long-standing historical heritage and irreplaceable notoriety, it is not surprising that objectivity takes the central stage again in the heated discussion about the proper role of news media in the crisis after September 11. It is called forth to fend off excessive patriotism and nationalism (Waisbord 206, Carey 79). It is also

condemned as the source of the ills that made journalists passive recipients of deceiving facts (Cunningham). Thus, objectivity shall be the pivot from which examination of journalistic ethics and professional codes starts. Whether viewed as an epistemological conception, or a practical guideline, objectivity is a notion that is as nebulous and slippery as it can be. Questions surrounding this norm of American journalism are numerous, and this thesis will try to explore and find the answers for some of them.

## **Chapter Organization**

The following chapter will go through the transcripts of CNN, ABC, CBS, and NBC news reports and news articles in The New York Times on Powell's UN speech. It will try to find elements in the journalistic practices through the analysis of the texts. Among all the aspects in the journalistic procedure, emphasis will be put on the following elements: the selection of sources and the level of credibility the news media ascribed to the sources, and the facts that were included and excluded in the news coverage. From the very moment that Powell made his speech at the UN, concerns about the credibility of the evidence Powell presented were expressed by liberal scholars and critics, but were largely ignored by the mainstream media. These concerns and counter-evidence will be referred to in order to illustrate the events and voices that were left out in the mainstream media. The objective of the second chapter is to examine journalistic practices through the analysis of news texts and to identify the problems in the practices.

The third chapter will study the historical roots of objectivity as a journalistic principle. The chapter will first pin down the birth point of objectivity, the answer to which reflects critical differences in theories regarding objectivity. Then it will study the historical and social context amid which objectivity arose as a professional norm in U.S. journalism. The social contingencies that give rise to objectivity will shed light on the mission objectivity was designated to bear as it was ushered into the profession.

The fourth chapter will reexamine the journalistic practices in the process of reporting Powell's UN speech against the theoretic framework about objectivity established in the third chapter. The objective of the chapter is to give a fair and contextualized assessment of objectivity and journalistic practices.

## **Conclusion**

No matter how much controversy journalistic practices have aroused, the importance of journalism in a democratic society generally goes without question, and it is precisely because of the critical role of journalism in ensuring the healthy

functioning of democracy that its failure to do so causes prevalent concerns across the society. As was stated before, most journalists are doing their job with integrity and are living up to their professional ethics. That is why they deserve feasible, ethical, and effective journalistic principles that can give them directions in their mission of informing the public and seeking the truth. This study is intended to add one more lamp along their journey.

## **Chapter 2: Powell's Presentation and the Media's Coverage**

### **Introduction: "We Were All Wrong"**

On February 5, 2003, Secretary of State Collin Powell made a speech at the United Nations Security Council presenting evidence to the council members that Iraq was hiding weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Powell gave that speech less than two months before the U.S. invaded Iraq. In the process of approaching the war, it was regarded as "a milestone on the road to war" (Jennings, *World News Tonight*, Feb 5), "another critical moment on the way to a possible new war with Iraq" (Roberts, *CBS News Special Report*, Feb 5), or the most important speech Powell had given in his lifetime (Mitchell, *Nightly News*, Feb 5). From the vantage point of hindsight today, however, what makes the speech stand out is probably not its historical significance, but that the American public was duped by the administration into believing that Iraq was producing and hiding illicit weapon stockpiles. More than two years after Bush declared the end of the war, the U.S. is still not able to find Iraqi WMD arsenals that Powell claimed to present "real and present dangers to the region and to the world." David Kay, former top U.S. weapons inspector testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee, and said: "It turns out that we were all wrong, probably in my judgment, and that is most disturbing."

Disturbing? Indeed. By saying "we," Kay includes the U.S. intelligence agencies, the Senate, "the Germans," and "many governments that chose not to support this war -- certainly, the French president." The U.S. media, fortunately or unfortunately, escaped the blame. However, in the process of deliberating and debating foreign policies, the public obtains most of the information from the media. According to Lippmann, people make decisions and take actions according to their perceptions of the reality, which are assembled with information they possess (3-23). The media should be responsible for a duped public, for the stockpiles of WMD that existed in many Americans' mind but could not be found in Iraq. While the media moves on to cover the aftermath of the war, to the presidential election, and to Janet Jackson, we need to look back at a moment of "a timid, credulous press corps that, when confronted by an Administration intent on war, sank to new depths of obsequiousness and docility" (Sherman).

The bulk of the media's coverage of Powell's UN address took place on February 5-6, 2003. The coverage started with previews of Powell's upcoming presentation, went into live special reports of the speech in the UN, and ended with reviews of and responses to Powell's case. A side story somewhat parallel to Powell's speech was that British politician Tony Benn interviewed Saddam Hussein just days



before Powell's appearance at the UN Security Council. In the interview, Hussein denied squarely that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. The U.S. media reported the two events and their related occurrences as a dramatic confrontation between the U.S. and Iraq, or Powell versus Hussein.

This chapter studies thirty-eight news reports on Powell's UN presentation and Hussein's interview from American Broadcasting Company (ABC), National Broadcasting Company (NBC), Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), Cable News Network (CNN), and The New York Times on February 5-6, 2003. These media outlets were chosen for their prominent status as the primary national news providers, and for their broad viewership. Fox News is excluded from the selection, because it is generally regarded as a conservative-leaning network, and it would be more or less expected that the coverage of the event by Fox News would be more friendly to the Bush administration. The selection leaves out repetitive reports, for example, CNN's twenty-four hour incremental reporting resulted in a number of news transcripts with mostly similar content. The study starts with examining the media's portrayal of Powell's speech in the previews and the reviews. Most of the news reports emphasized that the evidence Powell presented was supported by sophisticated intelligence technology and that the presentation was discreetly prepared. Another notable aspect in the coverage is the media's dramatic depictions of the two confrontational characters—Powell and Hussein—and selected figures in “each camp.” In comparison to the facts the media gave a large amount of attention, other facts that cast doubts on the administration's assertions were ignored or brushed off by the media. This chapter will bring these forgotten facts to light. The last part of this chapter will analyze the sources the media reports relied on.

## **The U.S. Made Its Case**

Hours before Powell appeared at the UN Security Council chamber, the U.S. press had swamped the UN headquarters with correspondents. The preliminary reports focused on the strategic importance Powell's speech had for the Bush administration to make the case for the war. ABC World News Now said: “Secretary of State Powell is hoping to convince wavering allies today that Iraq is defying orders to disarm” (Cho); “Secretary of State Powell could help tip the balance between war and peace today” (Cho). CBS Morning News read: “Secretary of State Colin Powell plans a high-stakes game of show-and-tell this morning at the United Nations” (Plante). NBC Today read: “This could be the final straw” (Gregory). CNN Daybreak described the upcoming speech as “high stake diplomacy on the eve of a critical presentation to the United Nations Security Council, where China has veto power” (King). American Morning with Paula Zahn remarked: “The Secretary of State will present the Bush administration's strongest case yet for taking action against Saddam Hussein's regime...the stakes for this presentation really couldn't be higher” (Bash). The New

York Times February 5th Late Edition read: “The impact of Mr. Powell’s presentation will determine how soon the United States will go to war to disarm Iraq, and whether it will enjoy broad international support to step outside the United Nations to lead a narrower coalition into combat” (Preston A1).

Before the presentation was made, correspondents of various news agencies had received a summary of the speech. Each of the broadcasters and the newspapers gave a preview of it with all the details they had in hand. NBC’s Andrea Mitchell’s report was a typical example of the previews:

Officials say Powell will present evidence, including satellite photos showing Iraq cleaned out suspected weapon sites identified by the U.S. before UN weapons inspectors could get to them; audiotapes of intercepted conversations, Iraqi officials bragging they were deceiving inspectors, even saying, ‘Should we mention the nerve gas?’; defectors’ testimony about Iraq’s attempts to restart a nuclear program, including attempts to purchase illegal materials as recently as December.

Analyzing the techniques to be employed in the presentation, the media highlighted several aspects they regarded as notable. The most prominent aspect that stands out in the news reports was that the speech would be supported by sophisticated technologies and detailed evidence. ABC Good Morning America described it as “a high-tech presentation that will detail the U.S. case against Saddam Hussein” (Raddatz). In CNN American Morning with Paula Zahn, anchor Paula Zahn started the report by saying “...he (Powell) will be armed with satellite photos and intercepted phone conversations, detailed proof, the U.S. says, that Iraq is hiding banned weapons.” Zahn followed this brief introduction by interviewing CNN’s military analyst, former North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Supreme Commander, General Wesley Clark:

Zahn: “How good is the detail in them (the satellite photos)?”

Clark: “Well, the detail will be excellent. I mean you could see a book from outer space. If you opened up a blanket and put a book on it, you’d see the book. Now, you couldn’t read the book, but you can see very small objects with good detail.”

After Powell finished his UN presentation, the press went into the analysis and response phase of the coverage, and the high-tech aspect of the speech was reemphasized. The following review of the powerful high-tech U.S. intelligence system was given by The New York Times on February 6.

The result was an extraordinary public revelation of the C.I.A.’s tools: defectors, informants, intercepts, procurement records, photographs and, unusually, comments of detainees seized in Afghanistan and elsewhere since Sept. 11. At any times, Mr. Powell said items of information from different sources corroborated one another. (Weisman A1)

In CBS Evening News on February 5, David Martin did a “Reality Check” of Powell’s speech. Referring to the satellite photos, he said: “That doesn’t prove

Saddam Hussein has chemical weapons, but it sure looks like he's hiding something from the inspectors."

The repeated emphasis on the high-tech basis of the evidence set Powell's presentation on a solid "scientific" pedestal, and raised the speech beyond doubt. The media appeared to be overwhelmed and taken in awe by the intelligence technologies in the coverage. The message for the public was that the evidence presented by Powell was supported by astonishingly advanced U.S. intelligence technologies, and Americans, who worship science and technologies religiously, had to believe in the evidence produced with science and technologies even if they did not have much faith in the government. It is very likely that to channel the media's attention to the technologies was a propaganda tactic. Even a reporter pointed out by planning Powell's presentation, the government had in mind what Americans wanted to see, "Americans like evidence. They want to see photographs. They want to see evidence of mobile labs that the Iraqis are moving. They want to see those telephone intercepts" (Richardson, Zahn, Feb 5).

The technologies were depicted in a way that made them appear beyond the comprehension of average people. Assessing the strength of Powell's case, The New York Times said: "[F]resh secret evidence was revealed, gathered in ways of which the public was only dimly aware—U-2 photographs in 1962, National Security Agency intercepts of Iraqi conversations in 2003" (Clymer A1). These languages created such a sacred and mysterious aura around the U.S. intelligence system that only an exclusive group of experts and insiders could appraise and interpret the information produced by it. The debate on whether Iraq possessed WMD was therefore, taken away from the general public, and carried out among the "insiders." When General Clark claimed in a firm tone, "there's no doubt from any of us who have been on the inside that...they do have an active program to conceal their capabilities and hush their scientists" (Zahn, Feb 5), he sounded to be implying: "we just know, because we are inside."

Among all the tools Powell employed, the audio intercepts were given most attention and most applause. ABC's Martha Raddatz commented: "This is highly unusual that the United States would release this kind of intelligence, these audiotapes. The last time this happened was in 1983, when they released tapes of the Soviets acknowledging they had shot down a Korean Airlines jet." Later that day, Raddatz made another remark in her review of Powell's performance: "A lot of this evidence is open to interpretation but the intelligence community believes the most compelling evidence is the intercepts because they are new and because it is the kind of evidence that is rarely released." CBS's John Roberts commented in Evening News: "But the most chilling moment came in this intercept in which an Iraqi officer tells a subordinate to erase all reference to nerve agents from over-the-air or wireless communications." David Martin further added: "The closest thing to undeniable proof was that intercepted conversation in which an Iraqi colonel dictated a message with an unmistakable meaning to a junior officers....When confronted with hard evidence like

that, Iraq can only claim the tape was fabricated.” NBC Nightly News referred to one piece of the intercepted conversations as “one chilling example” (Mitchell). CNN’s Paula Zahn called the National Security Agency (NSA), which produced the intercepts, “the most jealously guarded of all U.S. intelligence agencies.”

Emphasizing that the audio intercepts were the product of the crown jewel of the intelligence technologies and that the U.S. was very cautious about publicizing the information could have multi-faceted implications to the public. At one level, as was asserted by Clark, “it shows how seriously the administration takes this presentation of the evidence” (Zahn Feb 5). Most importantly, the administration’s evidence was elevated to an irrefutable status. In a more subtle way, it explained discrepancies between Powell’s indictments and the UN weapons inspectors’ findings.

On the same day when Powell made the speech, UN chief weapons inspector Hans Blix said: “We have had reports for a long time about these mobile units. We have never found one. We have not seen any signs of things being moved around, whether tracks in the sand or in the ground” (Preston and Weisman A1). To claim that the evidence Powell was going to provide was highly confidential and newly declassified could explain why UN inspectors were not aware of the jealously guarded intelligence, and imply that the information Blix had was outdated.

In addition, Blix was rather unhappy with the move the U.S. made, because he felt the U.S. did not make his job easy: “I would assume that he would—the U.S. would have given the sites to us rather than telling the Iraqis that here is where we think the inspectors should go” (Zahn, Feb 5). As a matter of fact, that the U.S. decided to present its own case in the UN was a sign that the Bush administration was impatient with the progress the UN weapons inspectors were making. It was a rather antagonistic stance the U.S. adopted against the UN weapons inspection teams, because Powell was actually sending a message to the UN: since you could not find anything, we had to act on our own. However, on the eve of its last try to seek another UN resolution to rally international support for its war, the U.S. certainly did not want to completely upset the UN. Therefore, one way to control the damage was to stress that the U.S. was reluctant to share the intelligence because the administration was concerned that it could jeopardize the “most jealously guarded” technology.

Besides a presentation supported by highly advanced and unmistakable intelligence technologies, the news reports also depicted a speech that was rigorously prepared. ABC World News Now said: “Secretary Colin Powell’s presentation is the result of days of negotiations over declassifying intelligence” (Raddatz). NBC Today reported: “Colin Powell and CIA director George Tenet were here late into the evening, practicing today’s presentation, scrubbing it to make sure that they can defend all of the charges” (Mitchell). Nightly News reemphasized the preparation: “Powell came prepared, with CIA Director George Tenet. Working together until late last night and over the weekend at CIA headquarters, the two men tried to build a case of Iraq’s deception and denial” (Mitchell). CNN correspondent Dana Bash noted: “Secretary Powell along with a lot of folks here at the White House have been sifting

through mountains, really mountains of intelligence, classified intelligence...” The New York Times conveyed the same message: “One official said Mr. Powell and the intelligence leaders met to refine the classified information they plan to release and to go over what to say about it ‘to make sure the materials are well prepared’” (Preston A1).

Most stories highlighted the detail that CIA director George Tenet would accompany Powell to the UN Security Council chamber, and described his appearance as symbolic. Martha Raddatz said in Good Morning America: “Joining Secretary Powell this morning will be CIA Director George Tenet in a sign of unity.” CBS’s Bill Plante reported in Morning News: “Powell will bring CIA director George Tenet with him to the Security Council to reinforce that the U.S. is speaking with one voice on the interpretation of the intelligence he’ll present.” CNN correspondent Dana Bash commented: “[S]omebody who will be sitting by Secretary Powell’s side today will be the CIA director, George Tenet. That will certainly be symbolic, to show that what the secretary is showing is real...”

So far in the media coverage, the administration’s case was based on highly advanced intelligence technologies, prudently prepared, and approved and supported by the intelligence community. These messages were most likely deliberately selected by the government press office to feed to the media in order to create such a picture.

## **A Historic Moment Revived**

It is quite remarkable that almost unanimously, all five news agencies compared Powell’s speech with Adlai Stevenson’s confrontation with the Soviet Union ambassador at the UN Security Council in 1962. Stevenson was then the U.S. ambassador to the UN. In his presentation, Stevenson showed photographs from U2 spy planes that demonstrated that the Soviets had stationed missiles in Cuba. The photographs provided irrefutable evidence that cornered the Soviet ambassador, and the Soviets removed its missiles in Cuba shortly after the diplomatic confrontation in the UN.

At the stage of previewing Powell’s presentation, comparison was mostly made between the techniques of these two events. NBC’s Andrea Mitchell referred to file footage Powell was going to use “as there was forty years ago when Adlai Stevenson showed aerial photos of Russian missiles in Cuba.” CNN’s Richard Roth reported: “He (Powell) will probably be wearing a microphone that maybe will enable him to move around the council chamber....Quite a change from Adlai Stevenson more than forty years ago during the Cuban missile crisis” (Roth). The New York Times read: “The example of hard evidence invoked frequently in this case has been the photographs Adlai E. Stevenson showed at the United Nations in 1962 to prove the existence of nuclear sites in Cuba” (Preston A1).

After Powell made his presentation, comparison between Powell's speech and Stevenson's presentation continued and similarities were drawn from the impact and strength of these two events. ABC, while failing to exploit the connection of these two events in its previews, made it up by devoting an entire news story to Adlai Stevenson with the headline "Remembering Another Dramatic UN Presentation: Adlai Stevenson Confronted USSR."

[W]hen he (Powell) made his presentation with his pictures, we thought, briefly, of another American official who used the Security Council to give a stunning performance. It was 1962, on the brink of war between the superpowers.

...

Ambassador Stevenson then showed photographs from U2 spy planes. There had never been a presentation like it. Three days later, the Soviets agreed to dismantle the weapons. It was a stunning moment. (Jennings)

The New York Times gave a similar reprise of the Stevenson moment in multiple articles:

Part of the impact of his materials was that they seemed in some ways to evoke the U-2 photographs presented by Adlai E. Stevenson in this same chamber in 1962 (Weisman A1).

The case Mr. Powell presented today regarding Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, however, was remorseless. In general, Mr. Powell's task was much harder than the one that Adlai E. Stevenson faced during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Mr. Powell was not able to show a series of photos to settle the debate, but he did spend almost 90 minutes discussing information from intercepted calls, satellite photos, defectors and spies. (Gordon A1).

A Stevenson moment?...In many ways, Secretary of State Colin L. Powell's presentation today echoed Adlai E. Stevenson's display of photographs of Soviet missile installations in Cuba in 1962. (Adam A17)

It is hard to second-guess whether reporters from these media happened to think alike and found similarities in a historical precedence, or they were cued by the White House. But one article from The New York Times did reveal that White House officials tried to help reporters understand the techniques to be adopted by Powell by comparing them with "hard evidence" used in Stevenson's presentation (Adam A17). Because the Stevenson report was a victory for the United States, and the evidence presented by Stevenson was proven true, it is quite understandable that the administration wanted favorable connections established between these two events to enhance the strength and credibility of Powell's evidence. The connection the media made between these two cases did make Powell's speech appear to be another smashing diplomatic victory for the United States in the UN against its enemy. A reminiscent revival of a glorious historic moment of this nation could also evoke pride in Americans. The comparison also reminded Americans that again, they were in a

critical situation facing immediate threat just like that posed by the Soviet Union in the Cuban missile crisis.

All in all, nothing else could have pleased the Bush administration press office more than the following reviews given by The New York Times:

Overall, the picture that emerged today in the Council—and also on television screens across the nation and around the world—was that an administration that for many weeks had tried and failed to persuade skeptics of the urgency of the Iraq problem was now getting a chance to lay out its indictment of Iraqi conduct. It came in the form of a nearly encyclopedic catalog that reached further than many had expected. (Weisman A1)

And critics were scoffed at even before their voices could be heard.

Critics may try to challenge the strength of the administration's case and they will no doubt argue that inspectors be given more time.

But it will be difficult for the skeptics to argue that Washington's case against Iraq is based on groundless suspicious suspicions and not intelligent information. (Gordon A1)

A freshmen year journalism student would gasp at reading these words, because it was one of the rare moments that journalists took sides. Not only did they lay down their guards and embrace the claims by the administration with passion, but also they voluntarily dismissed and belittled the opponents' arguments before the arguments were made. The White House had unpaid spokespersons.

## **The Saint vs. the Devil**

Some reports depicted Powell's presentation as a court prosecution against Iraq: "It was the secretary of State as prosecutor today, Colin Powell appearing before a skeptical jury" (Roberts); "But you, the television audience, will be the ladies and the gentlemen of the jury, as the administration recognizes that it must still persuade the American people war is not only likely but now the best means of dealing with the dangers that Iraq poses" (Brokaw); "It almost sounds like a prosecutor in moot court today, on the job for Colin Powell, presenting this evidence and allowing the jury of the world to look at it and decide for themselves what they think" (Hemmer). The administration played along with this litigation metaphor.

Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of Defense: In our country, in courts of law it's been customary to seek evidence that could prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. That approach, of course, is appropriate, when the objective is to protect the rights of the accused. But in an age of weapons of mass destruction, weapons that can kill tens of thousands of innocent people, our goal has to be to take all reasonable steps to protect the lives of our citizens. (quoted in Pinto)

Senator John McCain: ...[T]he burden of proof that Saddam Hussein had got rid of these weapons rests with him, and they have certainly not proved that. (quoted in Sawyer)

The strategy of the Bush administration was that since it was hard for the U.S. to come up with solid evidence against Iraq, the burden of proof should be with Iraq. Before Hussein could completely prove that Iraq was not hiding weapons of mass destruction, he was guilty.

The media therefore, portrayed Powell as the prosecutor and Hussein as the defendant. And to the media, the verdict was already made—just look at the two people! On one hand, Powell was the one who was highly respected in the international community and the one with the most honor and credibility in the Bush administration; on the other hand, there was Hussein, a perverse, egoistic, and ruthless dictator, and a constant liar.

Before Powell stepped onto the stage, he had already received loud applause. NBC's chief foreign affairs correspondent Andrea Mitchell said: "What Powell has going for him is his credibility with these foreign leaders and his popularity here at home." CNN senior UN correspondent Richard Roth commented: "Powell perhaps (is) the most respected in the United States Bush administration, a figure around the world."

Some reports depicted Powell's confident appearance before he went to the UN Security Council Chamber.

Powell was in good spirit as he also left the United States mission to the UN. Asked by a reporter what he intended to do and say and whether Saddam Hussein, who claims he doesn't have weapons of mass destruction, can live by that, he said, "Show proof." You'll see him say "proof". (Roth)

The Secretary of State seemed very confident when he left the United States Mission to the UN could have been clutching a text of his speech. A reporter shouted whether Powell—what Powell felt about Iraq's insistence that it does not possess weapons of mass destruction, Powell said, "Prove it." (Roth)

Unidentified reporter: Mr. Secretary? Hi. Are you confident you will make your case, sir?

Mr. Colin Powell: You'll see. (Mitchell)

If Powell was treated by the media with respect and portrayed with dignity, Hussein was surely slashed remorselessly—he was a guilty man. Just days before Powell's speech, Saddam Hussein had an interview with former British Parliament member Tony Benn, and he denied that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. Each of the five news carriers reported Hussein's statement in brief, but only to rebut it immediately, and to denounce the interview as a shrewd propaganda scheme by Hussein with perfect timing to draw sympathy from the peace camp and to split the UN.



Right after quoting Hussein's statement "Iraq has no weapons of mass destruction whatsoever," ABC World News Now quoted Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld: "this is a case of, of the, the local liar coming up again...and people repeating what he said, and forgetting to say that he never, almost never, rarely tells the truth" (Pinto). In Good Morning America, Diane Sawyer interviewed "one of the leading voices on foreign policy on Capitol Hill," John McCain, Senator of Arizona. Sawyer played a clip of Hussein's interview, and McCain responded by recalling that Saddam Hussein had not accounted for the weapons of mass destruction he had in the Clinton administration, and asserted that he still had not accounted for them. NBC's Ann Curry asked Con Coughlin, whom Curry called "King of Terror": "Why is Saddam talking now? It's a propaganda exercise to stoke the anti-war movement, according to the author of a book on Saddam." Coughlin replied: "He wants to string out the whole UN process to the point where it's no longer possible for the West to take military action against him." CNN countered Hussein's statement with "hard evidence."

Well, that chemical warhead, the very same from a 122 millimeter missile, the very same as the dozen chemical warheads found almost three weeks ago by UN weapons inspectors in an ammunition dump south of Baghdad....Very interestingly, Saddam Hussein...says Iraq does not have weapons of mass destruction, challenges anyone to find them. (Robertson) "Very interestingly," Robertson did not mention that the warheads were empty.

The setup of Colin Powell vs. Saddam Hussein—the Saint vs. the Devil was most dramatically portrayed by CBS.

In CBS Evening News on February 5, a feature story with the headline "Inside the Mind of Saddam Hussein" did a psychological analysis of Hussein. In the story, CBS's Wyatt Andrews interviewed Ken Pollack from the Saban Center for Middle East Policy, and Dr. Jerrold Post at George Washington University, the former chief of profiling at the CIA. According to Andrews and the experts, Hussein was a delusional, extremely egoistic, and violent man, determined to have weapons of mass destruction.

Andrews: Is this man crazy?

Mr. Pollack: He's not irrational, but that said, Saddam Hussein can be delusional, frequently delusional.

Andrews: Dr. Jerrold Post, the former chief of profiling at the CIA, says Saddam's perception of victory in the '91 war made him more, not less, determined to have weapons of mass destruction.

Dr. Post: After his triumph in 1990-91, he was a world-class leader. World-class leaders have world-class weapons; big boys have big toys...

...

Andrews: So to those who know him, Saddam is clearly toying with the UN inspector...

CBS 60 Minutes II on February 5 presented a more fierce and relentless dissection of Saddam Hussein and his sympathizers in "the peace camp." In the story,

not only Hussein but also Tony Benn, the British politician who interviewed Hussein were completely discredited.

First, according to CBS's reporter Bob Simon, Benn was a "retired British Labor Party politician," "a British anti-war activist, who asked Saddam sympathetic questions," (The "sympathetic questions" Benn asked were questions such as "Do you have weapons of mass destruction?" "Do you have links with al-Qaida?"), and one of the "British lefties he (Saddam) invited to Baghdad." He remarked with sarcasm, "[I]f Tony Benn got the scoop of the year, it's no accident that Saddam chose him to do the interview." And Saddam "sure knows which British button to push" (Simon). The message was that Tony Benn was just a naïve pacifist who was coaxed into Baghdad and ended up serving as a western agent for Saddam's deceiving message. The interview Saddam agreed to give to Tony Benn was just part of an Iraqi propaganda strategy.

That was a message (that Iraqis don't wish for war but will fight if they are attacked) Tony Benn came a long way to hear. Saddam invited the retired British Labor Party politician to Baghdad to conduct this rare interview, to deliver his message directly to the people of the West. (Simon)

Not only Tony Benn, but also many of the anti-war activists were portrayed as gullible.

There are a lot of people in the peace camp in Europe and Russia and Japan who agree with every word that Saddam just said.

...

And that is the core of Saddam's charm offensive: that he and the Iraqi people have pitched their tents right in the middle of the global peace camp. (Simon)

Interestingly, similar to Powell, Saddam was noticed by his poised and confident manner.

You may be surprised to see that the Saddam Hussein facing war with the West today seems very much like the Saddam Hussein who faced Western armies in 1990: calm, poised and confident. He wants to tell you a story, and he wants to tell it his way. It's a story that you might not expect to hear from a man who's sitting squarely in the crosshairs of America's military might. (Simon)

But clearly, Saddam's confidence had entirely different meaning from Powell's confidence.

Fouad Ajami (Professor, Johns Hopkins University; CBS News Consultant): Well, part of the, the charm of Saddam Hussein, if you will, in a very perverse way, is his attempt to seem like the reasonable man.

Simon: Did you notice anything in his attitude, his body language, his voice that's different from what it used to be?

Ajami: No, I think he still had this absolutely ‘Mr. Reasonable Man’ image, and it’s part of this mystique, which is to do the most audacious things and yet pretend that they simply are very normal.

In the same program that day, CBS’s Dan Rather conducted an interview with Colin Powell. Rather started the interview with an introduction of Powell’s speech earlier in the UN Security Council:

The case against Saddam Hussein, the American ultimatum, was delivered forcefully at the United Nations today by Secretary of State Colin Powell. Using previously classified intelligence materials, Powell showed what he called ‘irrefutable evidence’ that Saddam has biological and chemical weapons....

In the interview, Rather asked no question related to the credibility of Powell’s speech, instead, he asked: “Listened closely to you today. Impossible to come away with any other conclusions: We’re going to war.” “And the possibility, some would say the probability, that even as we speak, he’s getting some of these chemical and biological weapons in the hands of terrorists, al-Qaida and otherwise.” “So unless something dramatic changes, we’re going to war?” If Tony Benn’s questions to Saddam were “sympathetic questions,” Dan Rather’s questions to Powell were endorsement questions. Rather asked questions on the assumption that Powell presented a solid case against Saddam and the only worry was that if the United States was going to war.

Rather than standing at a distant and neutral position as the media often claims itself to do and let the public decide who is telling the truth, the media stepped in and acted as the jury. The default position of the media was that Powell was one with honor and integrity and Hussein was notoriously treacherous and despicable. The U.S. press “all essentially pronounced Powell right, though they couldn’t possibly know for sure that he was. In short, they trusted him. And in doing so, they failed to bring even an elementary skepticism to the Bush case for war” (Mooney).

## **The Unheard and the Invisible**

To borrow Dan Rather’s words, if you listened closely to the U.S. media it was impossible to come away with any other conclusion: Iraq was hiding weapons of mass destruction. CBS news consultant Fouad Ajami said: “Saddam is in this awkward position that he is guilty until proven innocent, and he can’t really prove his own innocence” (Simon). However, so far—two years after the invasion of Iraq, the United States is still in an awkward position to justify its invasion of Iraq, because not only did the U.S. military fail to find any WMD even after they occupied Iraq, but evidence also showed that the case Powell made was mostly ungrounded.

Katrina Vanden Heuvel, editor of *The Nation* was one of the few who pointed out that nearly all of the evidence presented by Powell was largely circumstantial or

speculative when the event was unraveling. She said: “[T]here were other -- there were scores of those, as I said, of evidence out there that could have at least been used to push these administration officials who were misleading the nation into war” (Kurtz, Heuvel and Tumulty). It may be too harsh and unfair to simply say that the media purposefully lied to cover up for Washington politicians, and consciously helped them spread the misleading messages. The media simply reported some facts and left out others.

Hours before Powell spoke, UN weapons inspections chief Hans Blix denied or discounted four claims central to Powell’s indictment. Only ABC and The New York Times mentioned briefly Blix’s statement that he had seen no evidence to date that Iraq had tried to subvert his work, and the UN weapons inspectors had never found any illicit materials (Sawyer, Preston and Weisman A1). ABC’s Diane Sawyer asked anxiously: “How much has, has Hans Blix already hurt the U.S. case?” She got an assuring answer from the guest Senator John McCain that Blix could be “equivocal sometimes.” In most other reports, more attention was given to Blix’s warning to Iraq that it was “five minutes to midnight”. After Powell’s speech, Hans Blix was almost completely out of the picture.

Besides Hans Blix, there was Mohamed Elbaradei. Responsibility for the Iraq weapons inspection process lay with two organizations: the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which monitored Iraq’s nuclear activities, and the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC), which oversaw its biological and chemical programs. UNMOVIC, which was based in New York and headed by Hans Blix, got certain coverage; the IAEA, which was based in Vienna and headed by Mohamed Elbaradei, got little (Massing). Mark Gwozdecky, the IAEA’s top spokesperson, remarked: “Nobody wanted to challenge the President. Nobody wanted to believe inspections had anything of value to bring to the table. The press bought into that” (quoted in Massing). Jacques Baute, the head of the IAEA’s Iraq inspection team, complained that the agency had a hard time getting its story out. And that story, he explained, was that by 1998 “it was pretty clear we had neutralized Iraq’s nuclear program. There was unanimity on that” (quoted in Massing). The IAEA’s success in dismantling Iraq’s nuclear program was laid out in the periodic reports it sent to the UN Security Council—reports that remained posted on its web site (Massing). Apparently, very few news people bothered to check it out.

Regarding chemical weapons, Powell said in his UN speech that the Administration’s “conservative estimate” was that Saddam possessed 100 to 500 tons of “chemical weapons agent.” The original National Intelligence Estimate issued in October 2002 said: “we have little specific information on Iraq’s CW stockpile,” but it added that Saddam “probably” had 100 tons and “possibly” 500 tons (Corn). In addition, in September 2002 the Defense Intelligence Agency reported, “There is no reliable information on whether Iraq is producing and stockpiling chemical weapons” (quoted in Corn).

Powell claimed in his speech, “of the 122 millimeter chemical warheads that the UN inspectors found recently, this discovery could very well be, as has been noted, the tip of a submerged iceberg.” None of the media, however, noticed that Powell failed to mention that the warheads were empty. Only The New York Times, in its preview of the presentation, quoted Hans Blix as saying that it was unclear whether the empty munitions were “the tip of the iceberg” of chemical warheads or the “debris” of their destruction (Preston and Weisman A1).

Even the pinnacle of the U.S. intelligence system, the most hailed evidence Powell brought to the UN—the intercepted telephone conversation between Iraqi officers, was questionable. Charles J. Hanley of the Associated Press did a reality check behind Powell’s case in August 2003, and here is his finding about the audiotapes.

Two of the brief, anonymous tapes, otherwise not authenticated, provided little context for judging their meaning.... Powell’s rendition of the third conversation made it more incriminating, by saying an officer ordered that the area be “cleared out.” The voice on the tape didn’t say that, but only that the area be “inspected,” according to the official U.S. translation.

Powell also claimed that the headquarter told the field officer, “Make sure there is nothing there.” This instruction appears nowhere in the transcript (Mitchell). And the official U.S. translation simply lies on the State Department’s Web site (Mitchell).

If the hidden facts were hard to find, and the media only made an understandable blunder, something that was out there was also neglected. Powell employed all kinds of ambiguous words in his address that should have set off alarms in any first-year journalism student. Over and over, he attributed his charges to the likes of “human sources,” “an eyewitness,” “detainees,” “an Al Qaeda source,” “a senior defector,” “intelligence sources.”

In terms of Hussein and his assertion, the media conducted stringent psychological analysis and background checks. The conclusion was that Hussein was mentally perverse, and that he lied before, so he could lie forever. Powell, on the other hand, was depicted as one with credibility and integrity. The media, however, did not mention that Powell lied, too, and lied to the media.

A dip into the history shows that it was not the first time that the White House packaged Powell as the “star performer” to win favor from the press. In the first Gulf war, General Powell served as the spokesperson of the warfare in Washington, feeding officially processed information to journalists who were starved for “really nutritious news” (Taylor 42). The U.S. military, back in 1991, realized Powell’s international affinity and charm with the press. “As a black American, he had a considerable advantage in presentational terms to the Arab world and his performances were such that the media began to tout him as America’s first possible black president” (Taylor 40).

Powell did not disappoint his colleagues in the White House and the Pentagon. He played along with sugar-coated words such as “collateral damage” and

“interdiction,” which were euphemisms sanitizing the reality of civilian casualties. When he said an operation was “effective,” he did not necessarily mean that a target had been destroyed (Taylor 43).

[W]hen General Powell announced on the first full day, that of the 1,000 or so missions flown by that time, “80% of them have been effective,” it was amidst a climate that in retrospect was almost bound to mislead....what he meant was that only 20% of the air missions had needed to be called off for technical, weather-related or other reasons. He did not mean that 80% of the bombs dropped had actually hit their targets but, because he made no mention of misses, the impression was of an overwhelming and unprecedented degree of bombing accuracy. (Taylor 44)

It seemed the media did not quite learn from their experience, because years later, Powell was again put on stage by the administration, and the press again embraced him as the most popular and honest political figure.

## Who's Fault?

Why did the media “happen” to report whatever the White House wanted the public to notice, and “accidentally” leave out those the White House was desperate to keep in the dark? Some journalists feel they were innocent.

In CNN Reliable Sources, a self-reflective program that conducts discussions assessing the media’s performance in handling major political issues, host Howard Kurtz asked a rather constructive question: “Should the press have been more aggressive, more skeptical, in challenging the administration's claims before the war?” However, when Katrina Vanden Heuvel at The Nation charged the mainstream media with acting as “conveyer belts for this administration's manipulation, its cherry-picking of evidence, its hyping of evidence,” Tumulty of the Time said: “...but it is really hard to do unless you actually have some facts on your side. And certainly Colin Powell's presentation in front of the UN was absolutely riveting television.”

Kurtz also jumped to the media’s defense.

But what are you supposed to do when the president goes on television day after day and says we have this evidence? You say conveyer belt. I mean, we have to report what they're saying.... I have talked to reporters who have covered intelligence for 25 years, and it is hard to get the facts in a situation with a hostile country.

While Kurtz and Tumulty were defending the innocence of U.S. journalism, they actually mapped out certain key practices of journalism. Kurtz says: “We have to report what they’re saying.” Actually, it is more than only “to report,” because besides passively reporting official statements and briefings, the media actively seek leaks and comments from White House insiders and from other official sources, and treat them as authoritative information. Reporters plunge into the news gathering process with

the attitude that officials ought to know what it is their job to know (Fishman quoted in Mermin 18). Contrary to the cynical image of journalists, “they will recognize an official’s claim to knowledge not merely as a claim, but as a credible, competent piece of knowledge” (Fishman quoted in Mermin 18). According to numbers from the media analyst Andrew Tyndall, of the 414 stories on Iraq broadcast by NBC, ABC, and CBS from last September to February, all but thirty-four originated at the White House, Pentagon, and State Department (Cunningham).

Of the thirty-eight news transcripts from ABC (eight), CBS (nine), NBC (six), CNN (eight), The New York Times (four), thirty-two individuals were explicitly identified as sources of information, including anonymous sources such as “a White House official” (Preston and Weisman A1), and “a senior State Department official” (Weisman A1). Among these thirty-two individuals, twenty were current or former government officials, only two were UN officials—Chief UN weapons inspector Hans Blix and UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, five are foreign politicians, and three are “unofficial” researchers. Eleven individuals were interviewed on air for opinions or expert insights. Among them, six are current or former government officials, including Colin Powell. The other interviewees include British politician Tony Benn, author of the book Saddam: King of Terror, Con Coughlin, and three “unofficial” researchers. Apparently, the “unofficial” experts could provide independent views in balance of those given by government officials. However, a background check of the six “unofficial” sources will reveal their numerous ties and links with the White House.

James Steinberg, who was cited on NBC Today, is a scholar in the Brookings Institution, “one of Washington’s oldest think tanks.” He himself served as Deputy National Security Advisor to President Clinton; Director of Policy Planning Staff in the U.S. Department of State, and Deputy Assistant Secretary for Regional Analysis, Bureau of Intelligence and Research in the U.S. Department of State.

Tony Cordesman, who was cited in ABC World News Tonight, is a member of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), an organization led by John J. Hamre, former Deputy Secretary of Defense. His biography on the CSIS web site says:

Professor Cordesman has formerly served as National Security Assistant to Senator John McCain of the Senate Armed Services Committee, as director of Intelligence Assessment in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and as civilian assistant to the Deputy Secretary of Defense. He directed the analysis of the lessons of the October War for the Secretary of Defense in 1974, coordinating U.S. military, intelligence, and civilian analysis of the conflict, and he has served in numerous other government positions, including in the State Department and on NATO International Staff.

Cordesman is also the military consultant for ABC.

Ken Pollock, who was interviewed on CBS The Early Show, is the Director of Research at the Saban Center for Middle East Study, a division of the Brookings Institution. His background is no less glorious.

Previous Positions: Director for Persian Gulf Affairs, National Security Council (1999-2001); Director for Near East and South Asian Affairs, National Security Council (1995-1996); Iran-Iraq Military Analyst, Central Intelligence Agency (1988-1995); Director for National Security Studies, Council on Foreign Relations (2001-2002).

Jerrold Post, interviewed in CBS Evening News, professor at George Washington University, had “a 21 year career with the Central Intelligence Agency where he founded and directed the Center for the Analysis of Personality and Political Behavior, an interdisciplinary behavioral science unit which provided assessments of foreign leadership and decision making for the President and other senior officials.”

Fouad Ajami, CBS News Consultant, Professor at Johns Hopkins University, has not served in any government position, but “Condoleezza Rice often summons him to the White House for advice, and Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, a friend and former colleague, has paid tribute to him in several recent speeches on Iraq” (Shatz).

Only Gary Milhollin, quoted by The News York Times, Director of Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control, does not have apparent and direct ties with the administration.

Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky described the relationship between the mass media and official sources as symbiotic.

The media needs a steady, reliable flow of the raw material of news. They have daily news demands and imperative news schedules that they must meet....Economics dictates that they concentrate their resources where significant news often occurs, where important rumors and leaks abound, and where regular press conferences are held. (Herman and Chomsky 18)

There are economic interests for the media to heavily rely on official sources, because it is cost-efficient and it helps journalists save time. Officials sources can usually assure a fast and steady stream of information, and the communications offices of various government branches can cater to the media's needs. They send out press releases that can be easily converted to news copies, draft talking points and sound bites for the spokesperson, and work with journalists' deadlines. In addition, journalists can go to these communications offices or spokespersons for “one-stop shopping” instead of hovering around for scattered pieces of information. However, unlike overtly profit-driving enterprises, pure economic benefits cannot be used by the media to justify its reliance on official sources. Walter Lippmann notes the press is in an awkward situation, because “the community applies one measure to the press and another to trade or manufacture” (204). The media found comfortable ideological justification for its symbiotic relationship with the government in its claim of being objective (Herman and Chomsky 19).



A simplified explanation of objectivity is the separation of facts from values and interpretation (Iggers 96). That is, journalists should refrain from issuing their personal opinions and beliefs in their news reporting activities, and keep their duties strictly to reveal “facts.” It is quite improper for a reporter to say “I think” or “I believe,” but it is completely legitimate to say “a White House official says,” or “Secretary of Defense believes.” It is not acceptable for journalists to issue their analysis of White House policy decisions outside the realm of editorial pages, but it is a common and respectable practice to include and honor experts’ views in news programs. Most of the experts are current or former high-ranking officials whose perspectives are regarded as insiders’ views. The rest are from unofficial institutions whose appearance in the news gives more “independent” flavor to the news organization. However, as noted above, many of these “independent” experts are on the government payrolls as policy consultants, or they belong to institutions that receive research funding from the government (Herman and Chomsky 22). They have incentives and inclinations to express views consistent with those being expressed inside the government (Mermin 29). In addition to appearing occasionally on news programs to issue their expert views, some of these official experts or unofficial experts enjoying kinship with the government are actually on the media companies’ payrolls serving as consultants or analysts. Tony Cordesman is the military consultants for ABC. Fouad Ajami is a CBS News consultant. CNN has Wesley Clark, former NATO Supreme Commander as their military consultant. NBC’s military analyst is General Norman Schwarzkopf, commander of Operation Desert Storm.

To be fair, news organizations do not discriminate among official sources. To maintain an objective image, they give equal exposure to opinions from both Republican and Democratic officials, and they endeavor to provide a balanced picture consisted of both supporters and opponents. This strategy does help the media to appear as a neutral and open forum for policy debates. However, by doing so, the media limits debates within the boundary of bipartisan disagreements. The farthest it can go is to “index the range of voices and viewpoints...according to the range of views expressed in mainstream government debate about a given topic” (quoted in Mermin 4-5).

In the media’s coverage of Powell’s UN speech, apparently, the press facilitated a balanced discussion among politicians from both parties. However, no one issued significant doubt on the evidence Powell presented. Instead, most politicians, including Democrats, claimed that Powell presented irrefutable proof. The discussion about whether the U.S. should launch a war against Iraq was mostly based on the assumption that Iraq constituted considerable danger to the U.S. national security, and a war against Iraq would be ideologically justified. The disputes between the two parties were mostly about topics such as whether the U.S. should get sufficient international support before going into war, whether the U.S. was militarily prepared to win the war, and whether the U.S. was prepared to deal with the aftermath of the

war. No discussion was heard about the political righteousness of the war or the cost of the war to Iraqi people.

The media that facilitates debates within the parameters set by the government is problematic in that contrary to the image the media claims of being independent from the government, it acts, “for the most part, as a vehicle for government officials to criticize each other...declining to report critical perspectives expressed outside of Washington” (Mermin 7).

As the media justifies its practices with the principle of objectivity, critics both within and outside of the profession of journalism are blaming objectivity for leading journalistic practices astray. Steven R. Weisman, the chief diplomatic correspondent for The New York Times concedes that he felt obliged to dig more when he was an editorial writer, and did not have to be objective (quoted in Cunningham). Brent Cunningham, professor of journalism at Columbia University issues a self-reflective reassessment of objectivity. Referring to himself as one of the news workers, he says: “[O]ur pursuit of objectivity can trip us on the way to ‘truth’,” because “objectivity excuses lazy reporting...It exacerbates our tendency to rely on official sources, which is the easiest, quickest way to get both the ‘he said’ and the ‘she said,’ and thus, ‘balance.’” Cunningham’s criticism of objectivity is qualified, because “it is not a call to scrap objectivity, but rather a search for a better way of thinking about it.” Jeremy Iggers, however, is an absolute and determined opponent of objectivity: “Even though few journalists still defend the idea of objectivity, it remains one of the greatest obstacles to their playing a more responsible and constructive role in public life” (Iggers 91).

Iggers claims: “Underlying the edifice of journalistic objectivity is an unquestioned faith in facts” (104). However, the notion of being objective is in deep trouble when the selection of facts is a subjective process (104). Iggers also questions the nature of facts as “a given in the nature of reality,” instead they are “shared interpretations of reality produced by the interaction of newswriters and authorized knowers” (105). The logic of Iggers is clear: if the foundation of journalistic objectivity is faith in facts, and facts are actually socially constructed and subjectively selected, objectivity is groundless.

Cunningham cautiously specifies his target of criticism as “a simpleminded and lazy version of objectivity,” which implies that objectivity could mean more than what it is interpreted in journalistic practices. Even Iggers alludes to the fact that objectivity is often taken in a simplistic way (96). What was objectivity meant to be, and what was lost in the translation? The next chapter will explore these topics.

## **Chapter 3: Objectivity Revisited**

### **Introduction: A Long-Standing Myth**

Objectivity has been the most long-standing myth in U.S. journalism. In his recent work, Michael Schudson cites Wolfgang Donsbach approvingly: “Objectivity is the chief occupational value of American journalism and the norm that historically and still today distinguishes U.S. journalism from the dominant model of continental European journalism” (quoted in Schudson 2001 165). To both Schudson and Donsbach, the notion of objectivity marks U.S. journalism as a unique model, and its strong influence on U.S. journalism never fades. Even Iggers, who pronounces objectivity dead, has to admit: “although the idea (the principle of objectivity) itself may be widely discredited, its legacy is a professional ideology that shapes journalists’ daily practices” (91). However, as Schudson notes, objectivity was an ideal that seemed to disintegrate as soon as it was formulated (1978 157).

This chapter will start with summarizing some of the most frequently heard charges against objectivity. Most of the time, these charges raise more questions than they answer. To examine the soundness of these charges, this chapter will study the notion of objectivity from its origin. It will search for the era which witnessed the birth of objectivity as a professional norm in U.S. journalism. This specific era was marked by particular social turbulences that gave rise to objectivity. As a response to these historical contingencies, objectivity was called forth by social activists and journalists to redefine the social meaning of the institution of journalism. This chapter will identify these historical contingencies and analyze their impact upon journalism. At its conclusion, this chapter will define the missions objectivity was given at its origin.

### **A Misleading Guideline**

Among the flaks the notion of objectivity has been receiving, two charges are heard frequently. One is that objectivity causes passive and lazy journalism, because objective reporting focuses on apparent facts and overt events and fails to push for a deeper understanding of what is true and what is false (Iggers 106, Cunningham, Schudson 1978 184-185). The other is that the tradition of objective reporting reinforces official viewpoints, making reporters mere stenographers for official statements (Schudson 1978 185, Iggers 107, Cunningham). As was discussed in the previous chapter, the U.S. media’s coverage of Powell’s UN speech accusing Iraq of possessing weapons of mass destruction presented another dismal picture of passive

reporting by official stenographers. This picture, of course, is not new to U.S. journalism. A similar theme has been repeated for decades, and every time the picture became too discordant, objectivity was held as the culprit. In 1950, when Senator Joseph McCarthy's theory had its grip on U.S. politics, Richard Strout of the *Christian Science Monitor* wrote:

The business of "straight reporting" never gives the reader much chance to catch up. If the reporter had been given the freedom of interpretive reporting customarily followed by the great dailies abroad, he could have commented as well as reported. He would have been a historian as well as a photographer with words. But he would have violated one of the dearest rules of American journalism. (quoted. in Iggers, 58)

The "dearest rules of American journalism" Strout sarcastically alludes to, is objectivity.

While the war on Iraq was still waging, Cunningham was one of the few who reflected on the media's lackluster performance in the pre-war reports. He writes with regret: "In a world of spin, our awkward embrace of an ideal can make us passive recipients of the news." The ideal is objectivity.

Frustration with objectivity among practitioners of journalism has shaken the deep-rooted foundation of this conception. In 1996 the Society of Professional Journalists dropped "objectivity" from its code of ethics. Many journalists and critics are completely disappointed with the role objectivity plays and squarely blame it for irresponsible journalism.

However, so far, none of the strong opponents of objectivity has offered a viable alternative. Therefore, questions arise: if objectivity is uprooted from U.S. journalism, what alternative principle can we produce to fill the void? If objectivity is gone, what elements in U.S. journalism can defend journalists from the erosion of propagandist, partisan advocates, or corporate lobbyists who are eager to add their own spins into media reports?

The fact that decades of debates on journalistic ethics always revolve around objectivity says that it is a concept of such depth and complexity that to either uncritically embrace it or to completely abandon it would be a mistake. It is a principle that could have redeemed journalistic values and dignity but never fulfilled its mission. As a professional norm, it bestowed on journalism the ultimate mission of seeking truth, and promised to provide journalists guidelines in their pursuit of truth, but when put into practice, it went askew. Therefore, critics always look at objectivity with mixed feelings. They resent it because many ill practices seem to stem from it, but they also regret the fact that the full meaning of objectivity was lost in the transition from theory to practice.

This contradictory feeling is fully exemplified in Iggers's writing. Iggers is one of the most forceful critics calling for evicting objectivity from journalism. He also notices that in the process of translating the fundamental theory on the mission of the press into ethical principles and further into procedural rules, things have been filtered

out in exchange for pragmatic convenience. Therefore, the end product—the pragmatic guidelines may disagree with the original intention.

To examine the fairness of charges against objectivity and to give a just appraisal of this most debated doctrine, we need to trace it back to its origin, because after all the years, this concept is shrouded in the dust of misunderstanding. More importantly, at its inception, objectivity was created to cope with the particular social changes that marked the era, and “those conditions, though now mostly ignored, are with us still” (Streckfuss 974).

## **When Was It Born?**

Some journalism historians have tied the emergence of objectivity to the decline of partisan journalism, which took place in the 1830s, when the penny press started to flourish (Schiller 7). This assertion is sustained by the view that news objectivity arose in a predominantly commercial context. According to this view, objectivity was connected with the transformation of the newspaper as a pure partisan propaganda tool into a commodity (Schiller 7). As a consequence of this transformation, major newspapers could amass profits from advertisers instead of relying on subscription fees and subsidies from political parties they had been affiliated with. This change in the economic structure of the news media both enabled and compelled newspapers to modify their political stances. The penny papers did not have to cater to the political interests of any group, because they were “subservient to none of its readers—known to none of its readers—and entirely ignorant of who are its readers and who are not” (Bennett, quoted in Schudson 1978 21). More importantly, large circulation was required to attract advertising, and newspapers were forced to report “news,” which was flat facts free of political opinions “to serve politically heterogeneous audiences without alienating any significant segment of the audience” (Carey quoted in Schiller 3).

This theory regarding the sprouting of objectivity is flawed in several aspects. First, the belief that objectivity surfaced with the emergence of the penny press alludes to the assumption that objectivity is equal to separating facts from values. This assumption leads to a fatal misinterpretation of objectivity. “Facts, in this view, are assertions about the world open to independent validation. They stand beyond the distorting influences of any individual’s personal preferences” (Schudson 1978 5). Therefore, according to this view, objectivity is a commitment to the superiority of facts to values, which “are individual’s conscious or unconscious preferences for what the world should be” (Schudson 1978 5). This belief distorts the epistemological connotation of objectivity, because objectivity, which was unequivocally advocated as a systematic method first by Walter Lippmann, is a breakaway from the naïve realism. The latter was based on the belief that facts are beyond human interference and

therefore are the ultimate index of truth. We will discuss the basis of Schiller's theory in-depth and in detail later in this chapter.

Second, the argument that objectivity grew purely out of changes in the economic structure and profit mode of the media system rids the principle of its moral implication and regulative power. Schudson asks a critical question about the "commercialization" assumption: "[I]f economic self-interest made objectivity the news industry's obvious best choice, what purpose was served by moralizing a practice that would have survived regardless" (2001 166)? The objectivity described in the commercialization hypothesis is costless, and it fits into the market system seamlessly. In that model, everyone would have been pleased: A heterogeneous audience was served. Nobody would or could have legitimate reason to be offended by flat facts, and newspapers were benefiting from increased viewership and amassing profit from advertisers. However, the fact that objectivity had to be aggressively advocated and defended implies that it was not simply a natural outgrowth of a popular and profitable practice, and that its observance had to be enforced in the form of professional code of ethics indicates that it was costly to follow.

Third, that objectivity has been at the front line of debates regarding journalistic ethics proves that at least one fact is undisputable. Rather than being practiced as a habitual routine, objectivity is a concept that prods conscious contemplation and discussion among journalists and critics. Schudson clarifies the distinction between "norms" and "prevalent pattern of behavior."

Norms are "obligations" rather than "regularities"...Perhaps the prevalence of certain behaviors contributes to their moral authority. Many habits, however, are widespread but have no prescriptive force...One of the distinctive features of norms as prescriptive rules, rather than norms as prevalent practices, is that they are self-consciously articulated. (2002 166-167)

In Streckfuss's study of all of the published proceedings of the annual meetings of the American Society of Newspaper Editors from its founding in 1923 to the 1930s, it was revealed that the words *objective* and *objectivity* were not used with any regularity until late in the 1920s (Streckfuss 974). Iggers asserts that the term objectivity was unknown to journalists before World War I (62). Other research of publications scrutinizing journalistic practices and scholarly writings regarding journalism during that period produced similar results (Streckfuss 974). It can be concluded from these findings that journalists and journalism critics were not conscious of and concerned about being objective until the late 1920s, although objective reporting may have been practiced to a certain degree prior to that period.

## **The Times They were a Changing**

Commercialization proves an insufficient explanation of the rise of objectivity. The sharp increase of attention given to objectivity in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century indicates that the emergence of objectivity was a revolutionary and forceful process rather than a smooth and evolutionary one. There were certain elements in that period that could not be encompassed by the existing structure of journalism and adjustment was called forth in the institution to adapt to the changing social conditions.

The United States after World War I, according to Schudson, was a society filled with despair, disillusion, and skepticism. The doubts among leaders in journalism and other fields alike pointed directly to the worth of democratic market society and its internal logic (1978 122). These sentiments among the intellectuals, on the surface, were triggered by political and economic crisis in Europe and the United States, but their roots lay in people's questioning of certain fundamental assumptions about human nature. As was established in the Enlightenment, rationality was to be found in the general public, as it was a generic and inherent characteristic of human nature (Schudson 1978 126-127). This assumption painted an ideal picture in which human beings acted upon rational judgments of their environments. Irrationality was abnormal and sporadic, and should be corrected if the human race as a whole was in its naturally rational state.

A series of psychological studies in the 1920s, however, subverted the theory about human rationality. The new school of thoughts says that human nature consisted of subconscious wishes, repressed desires, rooted behavioral tendencies, and habitual predispositions (Pound quoted in Schudson 1978 126-127). With this hypothesis, human decisions and behaviors, rather than based upon reasoning, was led by primitive and unpredictable instincts, illusions, or erratic emotions. This change in belief, which Schudson describes as devastating, had ramifications in several related directions.

First, the belief that the public would be able to picture the reality and act upon it if they are given random facts and opinions of all sorts was seriously undermined. One popular theory supporting the rationale of the First Amendment is the metaphor of the market place of speech. It posits that free trade of ideas is the best test of truth (Smolla). The metaphor carries with it the optimism that the reasoning public will eventually gravitate towards truth and reject falsehood. However, if human behaviors shall be explained not by reason but by unconscious drives, there is no reason to believe that truth is better equipped than falsehood in any public grappling.

If rationality was not an inherited characteristic of human nature, the ability of the public to reflect on and comprehend the reality was in significant doubt. Walter Lippmann expresses such concern at the beginning of Public Opinion: “[W]hatever we believe to be a true picture, we treat it as if it were the environment itself...the world as they needed to know it, and the world as they did know it, were often two quite contradictory things” (4). The discrepancy between what is imagined to be and what is, according to Lippmann, was one of the causes of human wrongdoings: “They started for the Indies and found America. They diagnosed evil and hanged old women.

They thought they could grow rich by always selling and never buying” (4). To Lippmann, irrationality is a pattern rather than abnormality: “the casual fact, the creative imagination, the will to believe, and out of these three elements, a counterfeit of reality to which there was a violent instinctive response” (10).

As Lippman perceives it, while the belief in man as a rational being was significantly discredited, the core value of democracy, which put faith in the rational and efficient operation of popular will, was completely knocked off its perch. To Lippmann, there are too many barriers to overcome before the public can be trusted with the power to govern. First, “there is no prospect...that the whole invisible environment will be so clear to all men that they will spontaneously arrive at sound public opinions on the whole business of government...” and “it is extremely doubtful whether many of us would wish to be bothered, or would take the time to form an opinion” (127).

The definitions of the public and public opinions, which were once the basis of democracy, were experiencing a major shift. The public was celebrated in the rhetoric of 19th century American democracy as the essential participants of democracy, who debate and deliberate public affairs and public policies and make judgments according to their rational understanding of the reality. However, many scholarly writings in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century associated the public with “crowds” that were subject to the influence of prejudices and primitive instincts (Schudson 1978 127). Accordingly, public opinion was losing its luster and authority.

If, however, public opinion was the voice of the middle class against an aristocracy in the early nineteenth century, by the early twentieth century, it was regarded by the middle class as the voice of some other, large mass of persons having no claims to the middle-class perquisite of education and middle-class virtue of rationality. (Schudson 1978 128)

It is remarkable that in both of the ages when social revolutions of certain types were being generated, public opinion was associated with subaltern groups, with the counter-cultures, and was dreaded by the privileged groups.

Once defined as “crowds”, the public was regarded as a metamorphic and unpredictable mass that should be alienated and excluded from public affairs (Schudson 1978 127). Rationality was seen as no longer a trait inherent in human nature, instead it was described as an acquired virtue through middle-class education and professional training (Schudson 1978 128). Thus the middle-class appropriated rationality as a privileged and exclusive quality of its group. Public opinion, as the collective expression of the public, was taken by the middle-class as the outcome of an irrational group mentality—a mentality that needed to be studied, directed, manipulated and controlled. The development of public relations in the early part of the twentieth century as a profession was such an attempt by the elite to reshape the public and to direct public opinion.

Public relations became a burgeoning profession by the 1930s. Journalists as well as critics were taken aback by the rampant presence of this new profession.



Stanley Walker, city editor of the *New York Herald Tribune* observed with mockery that the public agents in New York outnumbered the journalists, that schools of journalism produced more public relations agents than newspapermen, and that half or more of the news items in the daily press originated in public relations work (quoted in Schudson 1978 137).

The great corporations have them, the banks have them, the railroads have them, all the organizations of business and of social and political activity have them, and they are the media through which news comes. Even statesmen have them. (Lippmann 218)

On the political front, public administrators and legislators approached the tact of public relations with caution but embraced it fully as the U.S. was more and more engaged in World War I. Although the Congress passed legislation in the beginning of the twentieth century ostracizing the practice of public relations within the government, the looming shadow of the war made the need more urgent than ever to control and maneuver public opinion away from its isolationism towards support for the U.S. involvement in the war. As the United States in the era of Woodrow Wilson, who fought an election under the slogan “He Kept Us Out of the War” (Carruthers 34), was still observing the war from a neutral stand and most U.S. citizens wanted to keep away from the warfare, a full-scale psychological mobilization was a war the government had to launch before military involvement. The established model of public relations in the business sector proved handy for the government.

“The First World War was the first war in which propaganda was a vital, and thoroughly organized, instrument” (Carruther 29). American journalists, caught off-guard in this tide of governmental manipulation, fell victims to military censorship as war correspondents, on the one hand; on the other hand, they themselves served as agents of the propaganda machine (Schudson 1978, 141).

James Keekey, managing editor of the *Chicago Tribune* and publisher of the *Chicago Herald*, represented the United States on the Inter-Allied Board for propaganda; Walter Lippmann for a time served as a captain of military intelligence and directed the editorial side of American propaganda in Paris; Charles Merz, later to be editorial-page editor at *The New York Times*, was a first lieutenant intelligence officer with Lippmann. (Goody and Watt quoted in Schudson 1978 141-142)

## **Journalism in Crisis**

The rise of public relations and political propaganda threatened the very existence of journalism—its belief, its professional routine, its ideology, and its identity.

As pointed out by some scholars, the faith in facts started long before objectivity became a norm in the newsroom. Even journalists in the period of partisan

newspapers, like objective journalists, typically rejected inaccuracy, lying, and misinformation (Schudson 2001 165). The penny press, newly divorced from political parties, gloated at its new societal role as a major institution for the organization of public enlightenment “through a scientific presentation of ‘the facts’ of natural and social life” (Schiller 80). However, to Schudson, the nineteenth century belief in the magic power of facts was simply naïve empiricism. The belief held that facts, as an entity separated from values, would construct a map of reality, and reporting the facts would lead to an enlightened public and a transparent and efficient social infrastructure. This ideal was shattered in the early twentieth century.

By the 1920s, journalists no longer believed that facts could be understood in themselves; they no longer held to the sufficiency of information; they no longer shared in the vanity of neutrality that had characterized the educated middle class of the Progressive era. (Schudson 1978 120)

Public relations, which sprouted at the very beginning of the twentieth century, evidently revealed the fragile and deceiving nature of manipulated facts, and made journalists ready to doubt the naïve empiricism of the nineteenth century. Walter Lippmann captured this change in his Public Opinion: “The development of publicity man is a clear sign that the facts of modern life do not spontaneously take a shape in which they can be known” (218).

Ironically, practitioners of public relations grasped this subtle change in epistemological belief almost at the same time as journalists and intellectuals became aware of it, and they used this very change to justify their cause. Ivy Lee, one of the founders of public relations, readily admitted that what he was doing through public relations was only to give his own interpretation of the facts through glasses colored by his own interests and prejudices. But, since absolute facts were not attainable and disinterestedness impossible, every interpretation and opinion, no matter if it was originated from a self-interested stance, or a claimed unbiased perspective, was equally justifiable and valuable in the democratic forum (Schudson 1978 135-136).

Journalists surely smelled danger in this message. The rhetoric constructed by Ivy Lee, not only discredited the concept of “facts”—the primary product of news, but also pulled journalism from the pedestal of neutrality and impartiality down into the despicable mud of bias and special interests where public relations—a monster journalists resented and rejected—arose.

Even more fearsome to journalists was that they found themselves relying on public relations specialists and propagandists as much as they resented and despised them. Journalists who had not shaken off the influence of naïve empiricism, were extremely vulnerable to the deliberate and organized erosion by public agents. At the very beginning of the century, news reporting was garnering facts, and journalists were not fully aware of the possibility that business interests took on the disguise of facts. The facts were willingly provided by the public relations agents with “typed copies of speeches, ready-prepared interviews, and similar material” (Crawford quoted in Schudson 1978 138). News became less the reporting of events in the world

than the reprinting of those facts which appealed to special groups who could afford to hire public relations counsel (Schudson 1978 138). Frank Cobb of the *New York World* depicts this changed landscape vividly: “[M]any of the direct channels to news have been closed and the information for the public is first filtered through publicity agents” (Schudson 1978 139). Reliance on information fed by public relations agents was insulting and detrimental to the egoistic image journalists had about their profession. Not only was news merely one among many interpretations of facts which could not claim more authority and credibility over public relations and propaganda, but also journalists were losing the ability even to generate their own interpretation—news was reduced to the conduit of information favored by corporate or governmental interests.

## **The Rise of Objectivity**

The picture painted above was a gloomy one for U.S. journalism after World War I. It was an institution besieged by both internal and external troubles. Internally, it had to seek a new information processing method in order to reestablish the credibility of its craft. Externally, it had to redefine its identity to distinguish itself from the institutions it loathed and feared, namely public relations and propaganda. Objectivity as a moral guideline was embraced by U.S. journalism in a self-salvation effort, when journalism was experiencing a “crisis of legitimacy” (Iggers 62).

They (journalists) needed a framework within which they could take their own work seriously and persuade their readers and their critics to take it seriously, too. This is what the notion of “objectivity,” as it was elaborated in the twenties and thirties, tried to provide. (Schudson 1978 151)

### ***From Facts to Truth***

After breaking away from partisanship, journalism in the penny press era in the nineteenth century claimed allegiance to “truth” rather than to political parties. Concerns for truthfulness in the nineteenth century were focused on facts. “Facts, facts piled up to dry certitude, was what the American people then needed and wanted,” muckraking journalist Ray Stannard Baker later recalled (quoted in Iggers 93). Facts themselves were taken to be unproblematic. Their meanings were assumed to be given, available to any competent observer. It was also assumed that knowledge of facts would unquestionably lead to knowledge of truth. Therefore, news was information, by which the newspapers mean facts, and the social significance of journalism completely rested on its ability to gather facts.

However, the attempts of the practitioners of public relations and propaganda proved that truth or reality did not automatically take shape and manifest itself from

the mere presentation of facts, and facts were vulnerable to manipulation and misinterpretation. Facts were not innocent and crude pieces of information that would map the same reality to everyone who could possess these facts. If facts could not claim superiority over other epistemological objects in the process of truth-seeking, journalism could not claim the necessity of its existence among all the information providers, including public relations and propaganda. If facts were not believed to be associated with truth, news could not claim its indexical relationship with truth either.

The hypothesis, which seems to me the most fertile, is that news and truth are not the same thing, and must be clearly distinguished. The function of news is to signalize an event, the function of truth is to bring to light the hidden facts, to set them into relation with each other, and make a picture of reality on which men can act (Lippmann 226).

The problem was if news was not closer to truth than any other discourse, news could hardly be legitimately offered as a paid service, and journalism could hardly be practiced as a profession. Objectivity as a doctrine, at this moment, was articulated and formulated in response to this epistemological epidemic.

Objectivity was celebrated when journalism professionals and critics realized that truth was far more complex than the simple revelation of facts, and that facts could be presented in a most innocent-looking way while they were manipulated to serve special interests or political purposes. Thus, objectivity, once written into journalism's professional code, was designated to provide a set of methods that could penetrate the misleading appearance of facts. As the most forceful advocate of objectivity, Lippmann seeks the solution from the scientific spirit:

In fact, just because news is complex and slippery, good reporting requires the exercise of the highest of scientific virtues. They are the habits of ascribing no more credibility to a statement than it warrants, a nice sense of the probabilities, and a keen understanding of the quantitative importance of particular facts. (Lippmann 82)

Rather than the common belief that objectivity prescribes absolute separation of facts from values and that it urges journalists to place loyalty in facts, Lippmann is calling for journalists to adopt the scientific method that will lead to the discovery of truth. He realizes that the process of pursuing truth cannot be a smooth ride. It requires patience, courage, and persistence. When Lippmann brought objectivity into the profession, he was perfectly aware that journalists were subjective human beings and that they could never be absolutely free from personal bias. Therefore, objectivity is not "a claim about the epistemological status of truth claims" (Iggers 66), but a method that could help journalists minimize the influence of their personal bias and proceed towards truth. "As method, it meant that truth claims were to be subjected to the same continuing and rigorous scrutiny as scientific hypothesis. The truths of the scientist are working hypotheses, continuously subject to retesting, revision, and rejection" (Iggers 66).

Schudson says that the rising of a social norm as a disciplinary moral code usually happens when certain social conditions develop, one of which is a Durkheimian condition. This Durkheimian condition arises when a group is under pressure to redefine its identity, which the group feels is endangered by its cultural contact and conflict with other groups. “Here the prescription that ‘the way we do things’ is ‘the way one should do things’ is a function of a kind of group egoism, a way of defining the group in relation to other groups” (Schudson 2001 167). At a time when public relations and propaganda were claiming the same legitimacy in the democratic forum as news, journalism was in the danger of losing its credibility. Since public relations, propaganda and news all offer facts, none of them could declare superiority. Objectivity was introduced at this moment, as a norm that can prescribe procedural rules, to lead journalism to go beyond facts. The mission of journalism was no longer gathering facts, many of which were prepared by publicists and propagandists, but to seek truth that hid beneath the disguising maze of facts and overt events.

### ***Reestablishing Independence***

Another implication of the Durkheimian condition is that the group is provoked to “claim independence or separation from other groups, but equally it may prod them to claim affiliation with other groups” (Schudson 2001 167).

Newspapers after the Partisan era took pride in their independence from institutions and interests of any kind. However, with the emergence of a new “profession” of public relations, journalists found themselves “besieged by a squadron of information mercenaries available for hire by government, business, politicians, and others” (Schudson 2001). On one hand, journalists despised public agents, because they brazenly declared loyalty and sold their service to special interests under the disguise of offering information. On the other hand, journalists were horrified to find that they had to rely on public agents for information. Many public agents were former journalists. They compiled the facts they wanted to publicize in press-friendly formats that were easy to read and to process by journalists. They paid attention to the newspapers’ deadlines and provided journalists information ahead of time so that journalists could meet their deadlines. They staged press conferences and other public events that were organized solely for the purpose of press coverage. At the same time, they carefully guarded information that was unfavorable to the special interests they served. Reporters either accepted the information provided by public agents and published the facts, or they got no information and failed to meet the deadlines. In the news industry saturated with brutal competition, the latter was fatal. “Many reporters today are little more than intellectual mendicants,” complained the political scientist Peter Odegard in 1930, “who go from one publicity agent or press bureau to another seeking ‘handouts’” (quoted in Schudson 2001 178). The constant erosion of public

agents blurred the line between journalism and public relations. A collateral relationship was unstoppably growing between these two professions. To journalists, it was truly horrifying.

Journalism embraced the moral norm of objectivity in an effort to reclaim its independence. “Journalists grew self-conscious about the manipulability of information in the propaganda age. They felt a need to close ranks and assert their collective integrity” (Schudson 2001 177). In the face of public relations specialists and propagandists who unabashedly use information (or misinformation) to promote special interests, journalists declared that their service was to inform and only to inform. They rejected affiliation with any special interests, and offered their allegiance only to scientific spirit and truth.

When objectivity was ushered into journalism’s professional code, it was under the circumstance of disbelief and crisis. It was a general vision that facts could no longer be trusted as the crude and innocent revelation of truth. Publicists and propagandists realized this change in epistemological view, and took advantage of it. Journalists realized it, and found themselves lost and vulnerable to the manipulation by agents of special interests. Journalism critics advocated objectivity in the hope that it could save journalism from falling. Lippmann, the most forceful advocate of objectivity, has the vision that a journalist that pledges faith to objectivity would be one that would not stop at the deceiving surface, and would not take public relations and propaganda as answers. To Lippmann, an ideal journalist has to know that “‘news’ of society almost always starts from a special group” (87), and that the truth lies deeper than the facts generated by these special groups, otherwise, “he will report the ripples of a passing steamer, and forget the tides and the currents and the groundswell...He will deal with the flicker of events and not with their motive” (Lippmann 87). Lippmann avidly expects a new generation of journalism professionals who would hold the ideal of objectivity as cardinal: “The true patterns of the journalistic apprentice are not the slick persons who scoop the news, but the patient and fearless men of science who have labored to see what the world really is” (1920 82).

### ***Naïve Empiricism and Objectivity***

Before proceeding to define objectivity, we have to understand the relationship between naïve empiricism and objectivity—their association and their difference.

Schudson believes that objectivity arose “not so much as an extension of naïve empiricism and the belief in facts but as a reaction against skepticism” (1978 122). Indeed, rather than evolving from naïve empiricism which defined U.S. journalism after the partisan era and before objectivity, objectivity was brought up because allegiance to naïve empiricism was endangering journalism. The fundamental doctrine of naïve empiricism is that facts are the physical manifestation of truth and are beyond human distortion. It was exactly this belief, as was analyzed above, that sent

journalism into the hands of manipulation. Therefore, the shift from naïve empiricism to objectivity was not a smooth transition. It was rather an epistemological overhaul.

However, Schudson neglects the connection and association between naïve empiricism and objectivity. Naïve empiricism has to precede objectivity in order for the latter to arise.

It was naïve empiricism that defined journalism as an institution that was independent from parties, political groups and interests of all types, an institution that pledged its loyalty only to truth. Newspapers in the penny era were selling opinions and advocacy, while newspapers in the naïve empiricism era were selling information and truth. Naïve empiricism successfully helped journalism to establish itself as an independent and neutral institution that could be relied on for truth. That was why journalism had to struggle for change and adjustment when these images were threatened. If naïve empiricism had not liberated journalism from partisan affiliation, journalists would not have to feel under crisis when their jobs were so closely attached to that of propagandists and public agents, because journalists would have been conduits of political spins or advocates of special interests anyway. And journalists would not have to panic when they felt they were not able to present truth simply by offering facts, because no one was expecting pure truth from partisan newspapers anyway.

### ***Definition of Objectivity***

Objectivity was advocated and embraced by journalism critics and practitioners to salvage journalism from its internal and external crisis. The definition of objective journalism is needed to situate journalism in relation to its craft and its relations with other institutions.

Objectivity in journalism is based on the belief that facts can be decorated and manipulated, hence truth can be evasive. It also recognizes that newsmaking process is a subjective one and that journalists bring into this process their cognitive deficiencies, such as bias, stereotypes, shortsightedness and the inability to be free from the influence of human emotions. Objectivity as a journalism principle is a spirit of professionalism that requires constant awareness of potential distraction by external manipulation and journalists' intrinsic deficiencies and an unyielding struggle to overcome these barriers in order to pursue the hidden truth. The following will list in further detail what objectivity requires journalists to do in their daily practices.

While facts were at the center of the craft of journalism in the era of naïve empiricism, objectivity asks journalists to look beyond and beneath facts. Journalists should ask questions such as “why these facts are so readily available;” “what messages do these facts present;” “what are the motives of the parties that provide these facts;” “what facts are likely hidden behind the visible facts.” They should be

aware that there are occasions where facts are offered not to reveal the truth, but on the opposite, to conceal the truth.

Journalism should cautiously set its relations with other institutions that provide information for the purpose of dissemination, such as public agencies and governmental propaganda. While it's unavoidable that journalists are going to receive information from public agents and propagandists and cooperate with them to some extent, journalists should realize that the goal of public agents and propagandists is not to provide pure information. They are revealing the information in order to fulfill their own or their clients' agendas. Therefore, in working with public agents and propagandists, journalists should always ask questions such as "why they make the efforts to expose certain information?" "Is the information they provide accurate and reliable?" "In so doing, what kind of messages are they trying to present?" "Are these messages distorted?" "What purposes and agendas are they serving?" Journalists should realize that by solely relying on public agents and propagandists, they are serving indirectly as advocates instead of impartial information providers. Journalists should be willing to take the trouble to double-check the information fed to them, and make the efforts to dig out information that is kept from them.

The ideal of objectivity was passionately advocated eighty years ago. However, the illness objectivity set off to cure is still rampant in journalism. Even today, journalists still report the surface of events. They give most importance and credibility to information provided by special groups, and rely on official sources for verification and evidence. Therefore, they reported Powell's speech in the UN Security Council in detail, and granted it maximum credibility. They resorted to officials or government supported analysts for confirmation. The result was that they greatly facilitated the circulation of the government's constructed lies. Why did objectivity fail to fulfill its mission? Where did it go wrong? The next chapter will examine what was lost in the translation.



## **Chapter 4: Lost in Transition**

### **Introduction: Seeking a Genuine Interpretation**

As was stated in the previous chapter, objectivity was called forth by liberal scholars and journalists in after World War I in an attempt to redefine the social significance and the legitimacy of journalism in the United States. Objectivity was meant to steer journalism away from naïve empiricism, which was a dominant epistemological belief in the nineteenth century. Objectivity was granted the mission to define journalism as an institution ideologically distinct and independent from public relations and propaganda. According to Lippmann, a journalist practicing objective reporting should be one equipped with scientific spirit, aware that facts and overt events are not sufficient to reveal truth, ready to battle personal bias and stereotypes, and must assume that his/her sole mission is to inform the citizenry. The concept of objectivity was introduced to U.S. journalism more than eighty years ago, however, the “objective reporting” today is nowhere near the objective ideal that Lippmann aspired to.

This chapter will revisit the case studied in chapter two—the press coverage of Secretary of State Colin Powell’s speech at the UN Security Council, and reexamine the interaction between the press and the government propaganda machinery. It will then compare the practices of the press with the theory of objectivity, and analyze if the problems in these practices that derailed journalists in their pursuit of truth were caused by the principle of objectivity. The conclusion will analyze what was lost in the transition from objectivity in theory to objectivity in practice.

### **Mission Impossible**

Iggers claims that objectivity, which demands journalists to observe and record “raw data” (Philip Meyer’s term, quoted in Iggers 104) is unrealistic, because “news events are not given, but are rather the product of newswork” (104). Tuchman argues, “[T]he act of making news is the act of constructing reality itself, rather than a picture of reality...Newswork transforms occurrences into news events.” These views imply that activities of news making constitute a conscious and subjective process. Rather than a fly on the wall that records events without interfering with the natural course of reality, a journalist weaves threads of his/her consciousness into the fabric of reality. Many critics and journalists, therefore, dismiss objectivity as an idealistic state of being that is unattainable by mortal human beings and that is at odds with the nature of news making. They claim that to require journalists to be objective pitches them

against the inherent cognitive deficiencies of human beings that are regrettable but unconquerable.

As a matter of fact, the term “objectivity” began to appear among journalism lingo early in the last century, particularly in the 1920s, when there was growing awareness that subjectivism was inevitable. When raising the concept of objectivity, Lippmann has realized that the process of news making is a subjective one.

Every newspaper when it reaches the reader is the result of a whole series of selections as to what items shall be printed, in what position they shall be printed, how much space each shall occupy, what emphasis each shall have. There are no objective standards here. There are conventions. (223)

Because of the subjective nature of this process, news is vulnerable to distortions caused by journalists’ endemic cognitive deficiencies, such as biases and stereotypes, on one hand; and deliberate external interference, such as censorship and manipulation, from institutions bearing interests of their own, on the other hand. Lippmann examines these obstacles that cause the “pictures in our head” to differ from “the world outside” (3). Having realized that subjectivity is an essential factor in the news making process, Lippmann finds the necessity for an objective method, “as our minds become more deeply aware of their own subjectivism, we find a zest in objective method that is not otherwise there” (256).

Therefore, by “objectivity” Lippmann prescribes a method instead of raising a standard beyond reach. Kovach interprets objectivity as “a consistent method of testing information—a transparent approach to evidence—precisely so that personal and cultural biases would not undermine the accuracy of their work” (72).

The following will study whether the journalistic practices in the coverage of Powell’s UN presentation adhere to or deviate from objective reporting.

### ***Which Events to Report***

As is pointed out by Lippmann, news is never a perfectly flat mirror that reflects reality as it is. Making news is rather making reality itself. Aside from natural disasters that journalists observe and record, most news events are “cooked data” (Iggers 104) or “pseudo-events” (Fishman’s term). This type of event includes “press conferences, information released by official sources, records of commercial transactions, or events that have been created for the sake of their symbolic significance” (Iggers 104).

Powell’s UN speech and many related occurrences were typical examples of pseudo-events. The speech itself was a carefully staged event, calculated for political purposes. At the international level, it was to demonstrate that the U.S. had decided to take the issue into its own hands instead of waiting for a UN resolution, and that its decision to quickly go to war was a response to imminent threat. The undertone of the message was to put out a warning that the U.S. was impatient with the UN inspectors’

progress and put pressure on nations who had requested for more time for the inspection process. On the domestic level, it was aimed at convincing American citizens that they were under severe and palpable threat from Saddam Hussein, that immediate military action was inevitable, and that the U.S. government had exhausted its means to win international support.

Previews of Powell's speech constituted headlines and occupied front pages days before his appearance at the UN Security Council. On the day when Powell made his presentation, it was the story of the day and pushed all other events to the side. Days after the presentation, the media was still following up with politicians' responses and experts' analysis.

Among numerous events taking place everyday, journalists have to make editorial decisions on allocating their limited attention and broadcast airtime or print space to chosen issues. The criteria for news selection are inherently biased towards certain events—events that involve people of notoriety, events that have or may have profound impact, and events that are dramatic. Therefore, most journalists would argue that they were bound by these criteria to give Powell's speech maximum attention. It was an occurrence that could have international ramification. The protagonist was a prominent figure in the administration and a figure of international notoriety. It involved conflicts between two blocks of nations: the US and its allies on one side and Iraq and countries who were opposed to military invasion on the other. However, it is debatable as to how much significance and dramatic aura Powell's speech carried was built up by the media coverage.

In order to emphasize the significance of the address, the media described the speech as a watershed between war and peace: "Secretary of State Powell could help tip the balance between war and peace today" (Cho); the final stroke by the U.S.: "This could be final straw" (Gregory); or a high-stake showdown: "high stake diplomacy on the eve of a critical presentation to the United Nations Security Council" (King).

Accompanying reports on the speech, the media cranked out incremental reports on the U.S. military deployment in the Middle East, and correspondents in Baghdad reported on the situation in Iraq, which was depicted as a nation preparing for the dawning of war. These reports created images of mounting tension in the Middle East and two confrontational nations on the brink of war. Instead of encouraging debate and deliberation by the public, these headlines created a sense of emergency and a perception that war was unpreventable.

To add dramatic spice to the incident, the administration sold the whole event as a forensic drama in which Powell was the prosecutor and Saddam Hussein the villain. Accordingly, news reports on this event followed the storyline that unfolded around the melodramatic confrontation between Powell and Hussein, like a reality show with the mundane context edited out, and the most dramatic and confrontational elements blown out of proportion. As a result of political compromises and power struggles, in reality, politicians always demonstrate multi-dimensional personalities and their

actions are often the results of a mixture of political calculation, external pressure, and ideological convictions. In the news reports, however, both Powell and Hussein possessed one-dimensional traits. The personalities of these two characters were constructed as extreme opposites.. Powell was one who gained international respect with honesty and prudence, and Hussein was a pure demon, a habitual liar, and a dangerous rogue.

This whole event to a large extent fell into the convention of a collateral cooperation between propagandists and the media. The government propaganda office was very knowledgeable of the elements that make big news: prominence of the players, potential of profound impact, urgency, conflicts, and melodrama. And they packed these elements into the orchestrated event. On the other hand, the media was constantly and consciously looking for these elements, and especially thirsty for dramatic showdown. Therefore, reporters used instigative headlines to grab viewers' attention, and depicted Collin Powell and Saddam Hussein as symbols of stark good and evil.

As was defined in the previous chapter, the principle of objectivity requires journalists to have a more critical understanding of the relationship between themselves and propagandists. Journalists should realize that a significant part of the propagandists' job is to orchestrate events to attract media attention in order to gain publicity to push forward their agenda. While undeniably some of these events do have considerable news values, journalists should approach them critically instead of acting voluntarily as facilitators of government propaganda. While covering Powell's speech, they should ask why the Bush administration staged this event at this moment. What was their motive? What objective did they want to achieve?

It was to the administration's favor to create the feel of a state of emergency so as to subdue the public with panic and fear, and to silence debate and dissent. It seemed, however, that the media was the first to be overwhelmed by the gravity of the situation and was robbed of the ability to think with composure. Instead of screaming that the enemy is at the gate, journalists should have provided a counterbalancing voice that called for calm deliberation.

Undeniably, drama is always a selling point for news, but journalists should have realized that the event they were covering was more somber than a soft human-interest story that can be jazzed up to attract eyeballs. Therefore, instead of oversimplifying this political showdown as a soap opera confrontation, journalists should have understood and let the public understand the complexity of the event. It was not a melodrama in which truth and lie were lying in plain sight. It was a carefully orchestrated diplomatic move propelled by sophisticated political calculations. Forces and interests behind the master design were much more involved than pure justice and evil face-off. In an event of such complexity and significance, the least the media could do was to avoid jumping into hasty conclusion. However, headlines such as "U.S. Made its case" gave viewers the impression that the U.S. had redeemed truth and justice. Journalists should have let the public understand that

given the complexity of the event, evidence provided by Powell was still subject to corroboration and examination.

### ***Which Facts to Report***

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the authoritative power of facts was brought to doubt. People outside and inside the profession of journalism realized that the decision as to which facts to reveal had a great impact on how news stories present events. Doubt in the absolute authority of facts led to competition between press agents, propagandists, marketers and reporters—all vying for authority as well as legitimacy.

The enormous discretion as to what facts and what impressions shall be reported is steadily convincing every organized group of people that whether it wishes to secure publicity or to avoid it, the exercise of discretion cannot be left to the reporter. It is safer to hire a press agent who stands between the group and the newspapers. Having hired him, the temptation to exploit his strategic position is very great. (Lippmann)

The great tradition of hiring press agents to direct the media has been kept ever since. In the event of Powell's speech in the UN, of course, the White House press office would not leave the discretion of "what facts and what impressions shall be reported" to reporters. When the event was orchestrated, it was shrewdly plotted so that only the information that facilitated the administration's agenda was presented.

First, the press agents pumped out one press release after another and stoked abundant on-and-off-the record leaks that would keep reporters preoccupied with useless dead ends. Second, they set up layers of bureaucratic barriers that made potentially disrupting information hard to obtain. Reporters pressed by deadlines and competition had to produce stories as quickly as possible, and officially provided information came in handy. While reporters were occupied with officially pre-approved information, they were less likely and more reluctant to dig out facts that might undermine the official stance, because they were much harder and more costly to obtain. Reading through news reports on Powell's UN presentation, we can find that almost every element that received considerable publicity was well packaged and carefully decorated. The following will pinpoint two of the elements that stood out as they were emphasized by the media but could have been subject to more scrutiny.

The first prominent element was Colin Powell himself. Powell had maintained a warm relationship with the media and had a respectable public image. The administration further packaged him as a war hero with honor and credibility. In addition, the fact that Powell was seen as the leader of the moderate wing of the administration—the one who had pressed for diplomatic solutions over military actions—made his case stronger. The undertone was that if Powell, who was opposed to a hasty plunge into war, said immediate action was unavoidable, it was truly

unavoidable. The media pipelined the Powell image sold to it and constructed a conscientious, trustworthy, and discreet public figure.

What the administration tried to hide and the media did not mention, was that Powell also served as the chief mouthpiece for the First Bush Administration in the Gulf War. He briefed the media in D.C. on situations in the Gulf and “reported” progress of the war on behalf of the Pentagon. Instead of giving an accurate account of the warfare, Powell’s briefings were often ambiguous and misleading. By downplaying this background, the media helped to fortify Powell’s credibility.

The second element placed on the foreground in media reports was that the evidence presented by Powell was founded upon reliable intelligence gathered with the most sophisticated technology. The administration gave voluminous emphasis on the sophistication of the intelligence system, and the press followed suit. However, it is widely known among the intelligence community that intelligence collected is often incomplete and ambiguous, and is vulnerable to manipulation by the source of information. The following is quoted from the website of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Evidence comes from an unusually diverse set of sources: newspapers and wire services, observations by American Embassy officers, reports from controlled agents and casual informants, information exchanges with foreign governments, photo reconnaissance, and communications intelligence. Each source has its own unique strengths, weaknesses, potential or actual biases, and vulnerability to manipulation and deception. (Heuer Jr.)

Part of the evidence provided by Powell came from sources that were susceptible to political bias, such as Iraqi expatriates and political dissidents who may have been motivated by their own agenda to cooperate with the U.S. intelligence agencies. None of the news reports spotted the potentially problematic nature of the evidence.

Even information collected by U.S. intelligence agencies, such as that illustrated by satellite photos, was not clear-cut, and the process of intelligence analysis is not error-proof.

Information presented in vivid and concrete detail often has unwarranted impact, and people tend to disregard abstract or statistical information that may have greater evidential value. We seldom take the absence of evidence into account. The human mind is also oversensitive to the consistency of the evidence, and insufficiently sensitive to the reliability of the evidence. Finally, impressions often remain even after the evidence on which they are based has been totally discredited. (Heuer Jr.)

One example of such ambiguous information was satellite photos of missile heads in Iraq. Powell claimed that these pictures were the smoking gun proving that Iraq was hoarding weapons of mass destruction. The U.N. weapons inspectors,

however, called for caution, because these missile heads were empty and they could merely be relics from the previous round of weapon destruction.

Journalists accurately recorded what they saw, what they heard, and what they were told. To scrupulously follow the book, they carefully attributed most accounts and comments to their sources, such as “a White House official” and “a high level official.” They were content with being accurate with “Powell said what,” despite that “what” Powell said could be inaccurate and untrue. By doing so, the media essentially was serving as a mouthpiece for the government.

Journalists that took facts at their face value fell into the ancient trap called naïve empiricism, which ironically, was what objectivity was set to counter. Journalists before the 1920s believed that reality would reveal itself through obvious facts. Schudson calls this belief naïve empiricism. Objectivity was introduced at a time when journalists and critics realized that life was more complex than they had thought. Herbert Brucker claimed, “life is now more complex, more highly integrated with other lives out of sight and even out of ken, than ever before” (quoted in Schudson 1978 146)

As long ago as in 1947, the Hutchins Commission, a group of scholars who spent years producing a document that outlined the obligations of journalism, warned of the danger of publishing accounts that are “factually correct but substantially untrue.” “It is no longer enough to report the fact truthfully. It is now necessary to report the truth about the fact” (Kovach 43).

Objectivity as a method was called forth to guide journalists to “bring light to the hidden facts, to set them into relation with each other, and make a picture of reality upon which men can act” (Lippmann).

Kovach and Rosenstiel call truth the first principle in journalism and the essence of news, and they use a simple example to explain the problematic nature of accuracy.

Today stories reporting simply that the mayor praised the police at the Garden Club luncheon seem inadequate—even foolish—if the police are in fact entangled in corruption scandal; the mayor’s comments are clearly political rhetoric and come in response to some recent attack by his critics. (Kovach 43)

In the above example, even if the story reporting on the mayor’s speech accurately captures the content of the speech, it can be misleading and erroneous if it fails to uncover the real picture that contradicts the mayor’s statement. Kovach says that the process of pursuing “journalistic truth” is a sorting-out process that develops between the initial story and the interaction among the public, newsmakers, and journalists over time. He says the world is confusing, and the way to get to the truth is to strip information “first of any attached misinformation, disinformation, or self-promoting information and then letting the community react, and the sorting-out process ensue” (Kovach 45).

In reporting Powell’s UN speech, instead of following the official version of the story, and being content with facts fed by the White House Press Office, a journalist

practicing objective reporting would have employed this sorting-out process. Since many reports discredited Saddam Hussein based on his dubious record, journalists should have equally revealed Powell's record as a government spokesman. Instead of painting Powell as a flawless saint, journalists should have realized that Powell as an important figure in the administration had to represent the voice of the government. Even if Powell as a private person is a person with integrity and prudence, he may have had to adopt a work ethic that was not perfectly in line with his personal beliefs. The administration stressed the logic that Powell could never lie and Hussein could never speak the truth. The media, instead of being taken in by the government so easily, should have had a moment to examine the basis and reliability of the logic.

Instead of relying solely on one version of interpretation given by Powell, journalists could have checked with intelligence agents who worked behind the scene to find out if there were any misgivings regarding the evidence. Instead of pouring spotlight on the Bush administration, the media could have shown more details of the UN weapons inspectors' arguments, and information they had compiled.

### ***Whose Perspectives to Report***

Frequently, newsrooms take pride in being opinion-free, and it is a common motif that journalists refrain from telling the audience what to think, but only present opinions and arguments from a third party so that the audience can make up their own minds.

Covering Powell's UN speech, the news media did make an effort to present "a balanced" picture in which both the Republicans and the Democrats had a say. It seems that the media hopes that by presenting views from both parties, the true picture would take shape, but it may not be the case.

Most people reported or interviewed were political appointees, legislators or think-tankers who had numerous ties with the government. These people usually enjoy the most visibility, because their positions in the government or their affiliation with the government are frequently taken as credentials of authority and insiders' knowledge. In addition, many of them desire publicity in order to facilitate their partisan agenda or political ambitions. Lippmann believes that politicians' views should be taken with caution, because they constantly make decisions to "suppress information, either by concealing it or forgetting to mention it, without some notion of what he wishes the public to know" (158). He points out: "Every leader is in some degree a propagandist" (158).

Herman and Chomsky hypothesized a propaganda model in which the media "keep closely to the perspective of official Washington and the closely related corporate elite" (171). They applied the hypothesis of the propaganda model to the media's coverage of the run-up to the Vietnam War.



It is a highly significant fact that neither then, nor before, was there any detectable questioning of the righteousness of the American cause in Vietnam, or of the necessity to proceed to full-scale “intervention.” By that time, of course, only questions of tactics and costs remained open, and further discussion in the mainstream media was largely limited to these narrow issues.

We saw Herman and Chomsky’s hypothesis materialize in the coverage of debates on the Iraq War. In the case of deliberating a war against Iraq, politicians across the aisle tended to agree with the President. The debate on the war was shadowed by the aftermath of the 911 terror attacks. The administration pronounced in numerous circumstances explicitly and implicitly that the Hussein regime was connected with the September 11th attacks and harbored members of the Al Qaeda. With the majority of the nation still grieving over the tragedy, and eager to take revenge on terrorists, Republicans rushed to prove that they stood firm and that they were capable of defending the national security. The Democrats were too timid to utter any dissent to the war for fear of being accused unpatriotic. Therefore, in a two-party system, the opposition had its hands tied behind its back, and debates were constrained and insufficient. As a result of the narrow scope of debates, none in the mainstream media questioned whether the fact that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction was actually a legitimate reason to go to war. Nobody questioned whether it was justifiable to invade another country when no offensive action or menacing gesture was made by the target. Almost no one asked whether it was a violation of international law to invade a country without a UN resolution authorizing such an action.

As Powell’s presentation at the UN was portrayed as a highly abstract confrontation between Saddam Hussein the evil and Colin Powell the saint, no one in the mainstream media contemplated the broad and far-reaching impact of war. No report asked what the war would entail for the peoples of both nations, especially for Iraqis, even though bombs would fall on their roofs, and armies would march into their neighborhoods. No report asked whether the Bush administration had a plan to rebuild Iraq after the invasion. No report studied what impact such a preemptive action would have on U.S. relations with other countries and on international relations in general.

Despite the media’s efforts to provide a fair picture by including voices from both parties, the picture presented was skewed by over-zealous republicans and skittish democrats. Anyone outside of the two-party power structure, had a harder time getting a fair representation in the media, because their views are usually regarded as marginal and insignificant. In the debate on a war on Iraq, these traditionally marginalized groups may have had views that were closer to rationality, because they were not hampered by the desire to maintain the status quo or stay in power.

The verdict is made to depend on who has the loudest or the most entrancing voice, the most skillful of the most brazen publicity man, and the best access to the most space in the newspapers. For even when the editor is scrupulously fair to “the other side,” fairness is not enough. There may be several other sides, unmentioned by any of the organized, financed and active partisans. (Lippmann 252)

Lippmann insists that information should go through a process before it can reach “the busy citizen of a modern state” in a form that is intelligible. He explains that partisan voices need to be “confronted with men, not personally involved, who control enough facts and have the dialectical skill to sort out what is real perception from what is stereotype, pattern and elaboration” (252). Those who should assume the above responsibility are journalists, because they have access that ordinary citizens do not have, they possess facts that the general public do not have, and they are in theory institutionally independent from partisans.

Following the method prescribed by Lippmann, journalists should have consciously sought out parties that did not have the resources to have their voices heard and that did not have convenient access to the press. In the debate about whether to launch the Iraq War, instead of dismissing people who advocated for peace as naïve “lefties,” the media should have at least made their arguments heard and respect their points of view as they did for Washington politicians. Instead of eagerly discrediting UN weapons inspectors, the media should have given their comments the weight they deserved. Instead of fixing the spotlight only on politicians and high-profile think-tankers, the media should have given exposure to domestic dissidents who protested the war for various reasons, and instead of depicting them, as the media occasionally did, as anarchical crowds, it should have duly presented their arguments and perspectives.

### ***Boundary Crossed***

Under most circumstances, journalists tend to refrain from openly making judgments or showing their convictions and emotions. However, in the coverage of Powell’s speech, journalists stepped out from behind the curtain of impartiality and neutrality and declared their stances. This rather unusual aberration from the appearance of impartiality was prominently illustrated in the following two portrayals.

The connection many reports made between Powell’s speech and Adlai Stevenson’s UN presentation was arbitrary and had nothing more than an expression of nostalgic nationalist sentiment. To revive the historic moment did not have substantial informative value. Instead, the purpose was to relive the glorious moment, and to borrow the power of the Stevenson speech to prop Powell’s case. Additionally, in a more implicit fashion, the connection could spur nationalism and a sense of

emergency among viewers, because Stevenson's historical speech was made at a moment when the nation was under severe and immediate security threat.

In most reports, Saddam Hussein was entirely dehumanized and demonized. He was depicted as so mentally distorted as to be incapable of normal thinking and behavior. Anyone who gave serious consideration to his words was dismissed as gullible and naïve. As in the CBS 60 Minutes II story analyzing British reporter Tony Benn's interview with Saddam Hussein, all the pacifists were labeled Saddam Hussein's sympathizers, despite their diversified background and varied reasons to oppose the war. Therefore, both Saddam Hussein and opponents to the war were conveniently discredited based on journalists' pronouncement of their flawed character instead of sound evidence.

## **Lost in Transition**

As we have seen, there are three levels of decision making in news making: what issues to report, what facts to reveal, and whose opinions to present. Objectivity does not negate this conscious decision making process, and it in fact accommodates the subjective nature of this process.

First and foremost, objectivity commands that journalists be independent from public agents and propagandists, not only institutionally, but also in their day-to-day execution. From the analysis of news media's coverage of Powell's UN speech, we can see that the government stole the power of making news decisions from journalists, and journalists were driven by the political agenda rolled out by the Bush administration and failed to counter its manipulation. Journalists overwhelmed by the onslaught of press releases and politicians' spins could hardly step aside to absorb and assess information that was jammed down their throats, let alone make independent investigations.

Second, objectivity commands that journalists actively pursue a picture that is more comprehensive and more representative of a diversified society. Journalists cannot be content with presenting a "fair" picture by representing voices of politicians from both parties. By doing so, journalists limit the spectrum of debate, and leave out voices that are outside of official Washington.

Third, objectivity asks journalists as professionals to be aware of their personal bias and stereotypes. In their practices, they should not make assumptions based on their own convictions. Instead, conclusions should be based on sound and reliable evidence obtained through impartial and scientific investigation. In covering Powell's speech, we saw journalists yield to their nationalist and jingoist sentiment and make unfounded accusations against anti-war pacifists.

Since its initiation, objectivity was a conception that was subject to misunderstanding and misinterpretation. The method of objective reporting advocated by liberal intellectuals such as Lippmann has never been fully incorporated in daily

reporting. “It is quite likely that their concept of ‘objectivity’ was simply the application of a new label to the naïve empiricism which reporters of the 1890s had called ‘realism’” (Schudson 1978 155). Objectivity was called forth with hope for changes in the profession of journalism and a breakaway from the prevailing belief of naïve empiricism that facts were pure and unformulated fragments of the truth. For journalists seeking recognition as professionals, the concept of objectivity extended to their activities the legitimacy of natural sciences and satisfied the desire for absolute norms in the face of the modern relativism.

The reason that objectivity was emphasized, resisted and defended was that it went against the entrenched social grain and it required journalists to break away from deep-rooted patterns of behavior and their own cognitive deficiencies.

[T]he Lippmann-espoused objectivity, which was seated in the broader cultural movement of scientific naturalism, was rigorous and difficult. By the time objectivity became enough a part of the working vocabulary of journalists to make its way into textbooks, its meaning was diluted. (Streckfuss, 982)

Journalists and media scholars talk about objectivity in at least two different senses. Sometimes, when a report is said to be objective, what is meant is that its statements of facts, or more broadly, the pictures of reality it presents, correspond to the way things really are. But the term objectivity is also used to refer to a set of procedures that the reporter uses in order to produce those accounts. There are many journalists who practice procedural objectivity without any epistemological commitments. For them, following the procedures of objectivity may be what sociologist Gaye Tuchman has termed as a “strategic ritual,” which is designed to fend off criticism—that is, “don’t blame me, I was just following procedures.” (Iggers, 92)

Many journalists and critics today believe that objectivity is an idealistic stage that can never be achieved by mortal beings. Therefore, they regard it as an unrealistic goal that should be substituted by more practical standards such as accuracy, fairness, and balance. This version of objectivity was, Donald McDonald has argued, “so narrowly defined that what was eliminated was not only opinionated editorializing in the news columns but also any opportunity for the reporter to put what he was reporting into a context which would make it meaningful.” (Iggers 95).

Thus, the cure to passive reporting and dependence on official resources is not to abandon objectivity, but to revive the genuine principle of objectivity that shapes journalism as a genuinely independent institution—independent institutionally and in thinking and practice, and that cultivates journalists who are willing to discover the hidden truth and who are willing to see from perspectives that are different from their own beliefs and convictions.

This thesis examines mostly wartime reporting. As was explained earlier, wartime reporting is especially challenging to journalists. Under this type circumstance, the government propaganda machine is more aggressive in engaging

journalists and keeping them occupied with facts that are favorable to the war cause. In the mean time, it is more determined to guard facts that can potentially undermine its stances, using excuses such as protecting military confidentiality and national security. The propagandists can also effectively attack critics of war for being unpatriotic, which can subject these critics to adverse public sentiment. On the other hand, journalists can be victims of their own patriotism and their desire for the nation's victory in the war. Caught in these sentiments, journalists may be more inclined to adopt a stance in line with the government, and are less likely to think independently. Wartime can also create a sense of extreme emergency. Journalists can be overwhelmed by deadlines and overflowing information. They can be too occupied with reporting the progress of the warfare to investigate statements and allegations made by the official spokesperson. These difficulties only make objectivity more necessary to guide journalists through the maze and the confusion, because it asks journalists to try their utter most to shed off their bias, and it offers procedures for journalists to fend off the aggression of propagandists.

In addition, the principle of objectivity should be a guideline for journalism at all times. Propaganda and public relations are established institutions in American democracy no matter in wartime or in peacetime. The only thing that sets journalism apart from propaganda and public relations is that journalism's mission is to inform the truth, and objectivity is the only principle so far that guides journalists towards truth. In peacetime, journalists may have easier access to information, and may be given more time to investigate and deliberate, but the more favorable environment only means that there is even less excuse if journalists fail to make genuine efforts to abide by objectivity and seek the truth.

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