News in the Future

Schudson

- Growth in news' importance, given weakening of political parties.
- News has become "event-centered, negative, detached, technical, and official"
- Yet "For all [its] faults, Americans have more information, and more credible information, than ever before."

- John Dewey, 1927, *The Public and Its Problems*: "The newspaper of the future will have to rethink its relationship to all the institutions that nourish public life, from libraries to universities to cafes. It will have to do more than "cover" these institutions when they happen to make news. It will have to do more than print their advertisements. The newspaper must see that its own health is dependent on the health of dozens of other agencies which pull people out of their private worlds. For the greater the pull of public life, the greater the need for the newspaper. Empty streets are bad for editors, despite the wealth of crime news they may generate. The emptier the streets, the emptier the newspaper will seem to readers barricaded in their private homes.... Every town board session people attend, every public discussion they join, every PTA event, every local political club, every rally, every gathering of citizens for whatever cause is important to the newspaper—not only as something to cover, but as the kind of event that makes news matter to citizens.

Bennett

- "Whither the public sphere?" and the importance of citizenship.
- "The government regulates the quality of air, food, and water much more actively than it regulates the quality of political information."
- "the cultural ideal of neutral or objective journalism may be the greatest limit on the communication of political ideas."

Summary: News and Social Structure

How this course has approached the news

- Ideas matter; the news is not a bunch of things; it is bound up with principles
- So: understanding the news involves understanding the roles of institutions, routines, values, and ideas
- The news has always been changing, but it is particularly in flux now, so *what* the news is inseparable from what it *ought to be: values matter.*

Institutions

- News is NOT "what the audience wants"; institutions shape news before the audience has any input
- Capitalism: advertising, capital intensivity, and the structural influence of the profit motive
  - Controversy: Bennett for non-profit, government funding, Schudson sees it as more complicated
- The "news hole"
- Professionalism
- Channels: e.g., print vs. TV vs. internet

Journalistic Routines

- Shared professional "norms" -- pressures for reporters to agree with each other -- create patterns of coverage:
  - dominant formulas (e.g., narrative/stories)
  - official sources and source reliance
  - Practices of "objectivity" and "neutrality"
  - Strategy coverage!

So, what is "Newsworthy"?

- Compelling stories: conflict, drama, novelty, violation of the social order, good visuals
- News is about people and responsibility, not structure and issues
- Schudson: news is "event-centered, negative, detached, technical, and official"

News and Society I

- News from the Politicians' Point of View:
  - Cultivating Sources
  - Creating photo ops
  - Timing releases for the news cycle
  - Feeding the news machine vs. communicating with the public

News and Society 2: Bennett's Four Biases that Matter

- Personalization bias
- Dramatization bias
- Fragmentation bias
- Authority-disorder bias

News and Society 3

- Bennett: problem is that news distracts or lies
- Schudson: this is too simple. News is a "subtle cultural influence on human affairs, not an overt force controlling society."
- Culture vs. direct effects: framing, moral amplification and reinforcement
- News as part of the social construction of reality; "frame analysis" as a way to look at that -- where frames are “principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters." (Frames are not "bias" or distortion.)

Two Poles of the Public

- Bennett's focus: The Public as the Public Sphere, a place for reasoned criticism and debate
- Schudson's focus: The Public as Community, a place for consensus and solidarity
- Tensions, e.g., Patriotism vs Dissent
- Can they work together?

New media = new publics?

- Will the internet and other new media structures lead to new ways for people to get information and form communities?