

MEDIA EDUCATION FOUNDATION

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The Myth of the Liberal Media *The Propaganda Model of News*

Transcript

[Sound bites of different people talking about the “liberal media”]

JUSTIN LEWIS: The role of the news media is essential to the modern democratic process. For most people, the news media are the dominant source of information about the world. They tell us what matters. They tell who matters. The way we vote, the way we answer opinion polls, this is based largely on media information. So quality of a democracy now depends on the information they provide.

EDWARD HERMAN: The mainstream media really represent an elite interest and they serve those elite interests in a way that can be described as carrying out a propaganda function.

NOAM CHOMSKY: If you want to understand the way some system works, you look at its institutional structure. How is organized? How is it controlled? How is it funded, and so on.

JUSTIN LEWIS: The big question, of course, is: what kind of information do we get? Does it come from a diverse range of perspectives, or are some views dominant and others excluded? The most commonly repeated theory is that the media tilt towards the left or to the liberal end of the political spectrum.

[TEXT] The idea of “*the liberal media*” is a commonly held belief.

JUSTIN LEWIS: What’s curious about this view is that there’s almost no evidence to support it. In fact, the bulk of evidence suggests that the media tend to be biased the other way. The spectrum of opinion most often represented goes from center to right while voices on the left are generally absent. This is the essence of Edward Herman’s and Chomsky’s thesis.

NOAM CHOMSKY: In the last ten or 20 years, there’s been massive research documenting the fact that the media are extraordinarily subordinated to external power.

[TEXT] Most independent research has found that the media are influenced by wealthy business and conservative interests.

NOAM CHOMSKY: Now when you have that power, the best technique is ignore all of that discussion—ignore it totally—and to eliminate it by the simple device of asserting the opposite. If you assert the opposite that eliminates mountains of evidence demonstrating that what you’re saying is false. That’s what power means. And the way you assert the opposite is by just saying, “the media are liberal.” Ok, now the question that we discuss is, are the media too liberal or not too liberal?

[TEXT] The only question allowed to be asked is: *Are the media too liberal?*

[VIDEO CLIP] News anchors talking about liberal tilt in media.

Diane Sawyer: We’re talking about your letters saying that the media were biased in the last election.

News Correspondent in mailroom: The bulk of our mail supports the notion that there’s a definite liberal tilt to the news media.

NOAM CHOMSKY: All right. Now that we’ve narrowed the agenda to the one acceptable question, are the media too liberal, let’s have a look at the way it’s argued. If you want to show that, you would look at the media product, and you would try to demonstrate that it reflects a slant or distortion supporting a liberal agenda.

[TEXT] Do the actual messages of the media demonstrate a “liberal” bias?

NOAM CHOMSKY: No body does this. That would take a little work. Besides if you did it, you’d immediately fall on your face, because it works the other way. So what’s done is to produce a proposal, which is so idiotic that you have to wonder at the cynicism of the people who are putting it forth and their contempt for the population. The proposal is the following: let’s ask how journalists vote.

[TEXT]: The alleged “liberal bias” of the news media is investigated by asking: How do journalists VOTE?

NOAM CHOMSKY: Okay, so we find, let’s say 80% of them vote Democratic. Okay, we’ve now proven the media are too liberal. That proves nothing. No first of all, no matter what—even if the facts are right, it proves zero. You could find that 99% of the journalists are members of the Socialist Workers’ Party or some Maoist group, and that in itself would prove nothing about the media output. The issue is whether the media are free.

[TEXT] Are the media free to allow expression of opinion from whatever source?

NOAM CHOMSKY: Are the media, by their institutional structure, free to allow expression of opinion from whatever source and looking at any topic, and so on and so forth. That's the question. All right, but let's put that aside, and look at the facts. Suppose it's discovered that 80% of journalists vote Democratic. What does that tell you? The difference between the Democrats and Republicans is virtually nil.

[GRAPHIC: Corporate Support, Republicans vs. Democrats.]

NOAM CHOMSKY: These are just two factions of the business party. Two very virtually indistinguishable factions of the business party. So in the last election, for example, if you had interchanged Dole and Clinton, no body would have notice the difference. There are marginal differences between them. True, they have somewhat different constituencies. And that sometimes shows up in small policy decisions. But they basically reflect the same system of power. So if it turned out that 80% of journalists were part of one faction of the business party rather than another faction of the business party, would that tell you anything?

JUSTIN LEWIS: Even if you take these studies at face value, there are a number of flaws with them. Perhaps the most important one is that they assume that it's the journalists rather than the owners, the advertisers, the news shapers, or the newsmakers who control the manufacture of news. That's a bit like saying that the workers on the factory floor decide what the car industry produces.

EDWARD HERMAN: What the propaganda model tries to do is stipulate a set of institutional ideological variables that reflect this elite power and that powerfully influence the media.

[TEXT] The propaganda model shows how the media is influenced by conservative elites.

JUSTIN LEWIS: Herman and Chomsky used the metaphor of filters. There's all this information out there, but only some of it gets through. Now, of course, the use of filters is inevitable. The news has to select and edit information. But that filtering isn't just a question of free journalistic judgment. It's heavily influenced by a series of institutional pressures, such as who owns the media, the role of advertisers, the kinds of sources that are used, and a more direct form of pressure that Herman and Chomsky called "flack". The key question in any democracy is what makes it through the filters and what gets filtered out?

NOAM CHOMSKY: Now, if you look at the agenda setting media, what are they? Well, in the first place, they're huge corporations, parts of even bigger corporations like, you

know, Westinghouse, and so on. So they are subparts of huge concentrations of private power.

JUSTIN LEWIS: We're used thinking of these huge corporations that run the media as large faceless entities. But they're actually run by people with opinions and a specific set of interests. And a few of them might be liberal on some issues that don't affect the bottom line, like abortion. But when it comes to the bulk of issues, they're significantly more conservative than most Americans.

[TEXT] Media owners are much more conservative than mainstream Americans on most issues.

EDWARD HERMAN: When we talk about media ownership and control, we're talking about the ownership and control by very wealthy people who have interlocking directorships with many other corporations. Now very often they don't intervene in a grow way, but, for example, Larry Grossman, who was president of NBC, in his autobiography, mentions that the GE chairman of the board, Jack Welch, pointed to him and said, "Remember you work for General Electric Corporation." Now in the case of hands on owners, like Rupert Murdoch, they obviously come in and impose an overall policy their subsidiaries.

[VIDEO CLIP] Rupert Murdoch: It's in the nature of the media business. Regardless of technology, the proprietors can run the show in this way.

[TEXT] "*When you are the monopoly supplier, you are inclined to dictate*" Rupert Murdoch, President and CEO, News Corporation

EDWARD HERMAN: When Rupert Murdoch takes over the London Times and The Sun in London, and The New York Post, the policies change markedly. Editors are put in who meet Rupert Murdoch's conservative biases.

[TEXT] Policies and personnel change to reflect the owner's conservative politics.

EDWARD HERMAN: In fact, in England, there's another very powerful media entrepreneur named Conrad Black who controls 50% of the newspapers in Canada, and owns over 100 papers in the United States, including the Chicago Sun Times. Like Murdoch, he's a very conservative man. Their power is so great, that when Tony Blair became head of the Labour Party, he actually went to Australia to visit Murdoch and to try to convince Murdoch that he had proper credentials. And he convinced Murdoch, and in the last election, Murdoch actually supported the Labour party and Tony Blair over the Conservative Party.

[TEXT] In the 1997 British election Murdoch-owned papers endorsed Labour Party leader Tony Blair

EDWARD HERMAN: Part of the reason for that was that, surprisingly enough, the Conservative Party had proposed some limit on a concentration in the British media and Murdoch was reportedly furious at this. Now the Labour Party had had an even more stringent proposal but at Blair's insistence, it was dropped.

[VIDEO CLIP] Andrew Neil, Former Murdoch Editor: Why did Murdoch change his mind? He likes to back a winner. And there's this sort of implicit understanding between Mr. Blair and Mr. Murdoch that, since the Murdoch press treated Mr. Blair kindly during the election, Mr. Blair would treat Mr. Murdoch kindly now that he's in power.

EDWARD HERMAN: So here you have an amazing case of policy imposed, and with such force, that great leaders have to come and genuflect to Murdoch.

JUSTIN LEWIS: TCI is the nation's largest cable provider, kind of gatekeeper that decides which channels get carried and which don't get carried. You can imagine that makes them a very powerful part of the media system.

[TEXT] TCI controls a significant share of the cable market.

JUSTIN LEWIS: TCI is owned by a man called John Malone. He gets right-wing channels like The National Empowerment Channel onto its cable system, but he can and does keep out any left-wing equivalent.

[TEXT] John Malone. His conservative views influence what channels viewers get to see.

EDWARD HERMAN: One thing that has always interested me is how the conservative critics of the media who allege that the media are liberal have a tendency to ignore ownership. They sort of pretend that the media are controlled by Dan Rather and Peter Jennings and these people down at the bottom of the power hierarchy in the media.

[TEXT] In media organizations, power rests with owners, not journalists.

JUSTIN LEWIS: We're entering the new millennium with just a few huge companies: Time Warner, ABC/Disney, Murdoch's News International, Viacom, that are not just in the news media, but the entire culture, from record labels to magazines to film studios to cable TV stations. We've seen a massive concentration in other industries too, but with media, the dangers of that narrowing are much more troubling.

JUSTIN LEWIS: Another important filter is advertising. As they say, “he who pays the piper calls the tune.” In the commercial media system, the person who pays is the advertiser.

[GRAPHIC] Advertising funding of the media.

JUSTIN LEWIS: Magazines get about 50% of their revenue from advertising. Press gets about 80%. And with Radio and TV, it’s pretty much close to 100%. If you run a news organization, these are the people you can’t afford to offend.

NOAM CHOMSKY: Like other corporations, they sell a product to a market. In their case, the market is advertisers, other business. Now the product is audiences. Well, if you just look at the basic institutional structure of that system, a rational person will ask what kind of news and interpretation is come out of this.

[TEXT] Corporations pay \$170 BILLION a year to the media to advertise to audiences.

NOAM CHOMSKY: Well, the picture of the world that’s gonna come out is gonna be one that’s supportive to the needs and interests of the sellers, the buyers.

EDWARD HERMAN: In its impact on the media, advertisers affect them mainly by wanting a proper environment.

[TEXT] Advertisers demand a supportive editorial and programming environment.

EDWARD HERMAN: They don’t intervene directly too often, but mainly they tell the media what they want. The media are in fact, soliciting them. They know what they want, so there’s constant interplay. But sometimes programs are produced that they don’t like exposed and they come along and they complain. In the case, for example, a newspaper had an article on automobile buying, and said that, this is a seller’s marker, and the new car dealers are asking for a seven and a half per cent profit margin, but if you’re smart and bargain with them you can get it down to half that.

[TEXT] The article gave advice on to save money when buying a new car by negotiating with auto dealers.

EDWARD HERMAN: And the auto dealers in the area were furious, and they raised Cain. They complained. They started an advertising (INAUDIBLE). And the publisher of this little newspaper issued a public apology and said they were all wrong. One station manager of a TV station in Boston was quoted a year or so ago saying that since auto advertisements are about 25% of local advertising, it is an unwritten rule that you will never discuss buying autos and make any critique of the process of buying autos. It would--It’s an unwritten rule.

JUSTIN LEWIS: The Chrysler company, for example, they sent out a letter to the magazines they advertise in. Chrysler's a big company, so that's a lot of magazines. And that letter insisted that they send out their letters to Chrysler in advance so that they could screen them in order to see if they were "suitable". If they didn't like the articles, they'd pull the ads. It's what we might call Corporate Censorship.

EDWARD HERMAN: Some of the prime advertisers actually have a powerful influence on Public Broadcasting, too, because in the desire to curb Public Broadcasting to keep it within proper bounds, uh, conservatives have kept its funding in short supply. During the Reagan years, there was a very sharp cutback of funding for PBS. There was a real attempt to push them into the Commercial Nexus. So who comes into the picture to fund PBS? Well, the advertising community.

(Cutaway: Welcome to Mobile Masterpiece Theater. For nearly thirty years, we've been proud to provide the energy that helps Public Television run.)

EDWARD HERMAN: What has happened over the years on PBS is that their regular public affairs programs have become very Conservative-dominated and it's partly because there's money there that will fund those programs. General Electric, which has its own network, funds the McLaughlin show. Which is on every week. And Tony Brown, a Black Republican who is on every week. So that even on PBS, which is supposed to be the focal point of Liberalism, Conservatives dominate. One could argue that the evolution of the American television system is really a case study in the evolution of what happens when you have advertising dominating a media system.

Graphic.

EDWARD HERMAN: Another important filter is Sourcing. The media depend on a steady stream of news and they've come to rely on powerful sources who can give them this regular news. The media locate reporters with regular beats to these primary news sources.

(Cutaway: David Martin, CBS news, The Pentagon. Bob Scheiffer, CBS News, at the Capital. John Donman, ABC news at the Whitehouse.)

EDWARD HERMAN: If there's some source that gives out news every day, or regularly, and this source is credible, so that you can offer the news without worrying about whether it is even going to be either true or false, it's very economical. We recently had this experience with Mr. Clinton's calling of this Voluntarism Summit.

Cutway: Clinton: We need an era of big citizenship. That is why we are here.

EDWARD HERMAN: He announced the voluntarism is taking a new importance in the United States and he got some very important dignitaries like General Colin Powell to be

one of the sponsors. Headlines day after day on this "marvelous," "wonderful" event. It was made newsworthy by the fact that the President of the United States was pushing it and got dignitaries. Its substance was not given close attention. Of course, there were protestors at the Summit Convention. But they were marginalized, although they were making a very good point. Namely, that the people who are sponsoring the conference had just past a ghastly so-called Welfare Reform bill that was gonna push millions into the need for Volontaires. So in a sense it was a huge, hypocritical operation. But the media took it at face value because it was peddled by dominant sources, primary definers, who define what was news.

Graphic.

NOAM CHOMSKY: Journalists are not supposed to expressed their opinions. Opinions are supposed to be on the editorial pages. On the front page, you have News. But of course everyone who thinks knows that's mostly meaningless. Journalists DO express opinions, but they don't put them in their own words. So the way to express an opinion is to got to an "expert." And ask the expert, what do you think about such-and-such? And then you quote the expert. That's not your opinion, quoting the expert, it's "objective." But of course, you choose the experts properly, so that they will express the acceptable opinions.

EDWARD HERMAN: There's a question, there's always a problem, who's going to be the experts? It could be that dissidents would be experts. Since that presents a problem, Conservatives have frequently organized Think Tanks, which experts will be cultivated, who meet the Conservative standard. Institutions like, uh, The Georgetown Center for Strategic and International Studies, is a Think Tank that's specialized in International Affairs. And it was in a revolving door relationship with the CIA and the State Department. Same thing has been true of the American Enterprise Institute, which are a very important Corporate-funded Think Tank that sponsors economists and political scientists and others who are very Conservative and speak the Corporate line.

JUSTIN LEWIS: There've been a number of studies of the experts who are used by the news media. Time and time again, the people who come out on top in these studies are all Right-wingers. One of the recent studies looked at all the Think Tanks credited by major media in 1995. Top of the list, cited over two thousand times, came the Heritage Foundation. The Heritage Foundation makes no pretense of being anything other than a voice of Conservative, Right wing thought. In fact, what these studies show was that 3 of the top 4 on the list were solidly Conservative, Corporately funded Think Tanks. In total, 51% of the total citations were from Conservatives 41% were from Moderates, Think Tanks like the Brookings Institute or The Council on Foreign Relations. And only 7.5 were from experts coming from a progressive or left-of-center perspective. What's interesting is that the voices which are often excluded are actually more in-tune with American public opinion, whether it's on Social Policy, or Government Spending Priorities, than groups like the Heritage Foundation or the CATO Institute.

EDWARD HERMAN: So you have really a closed system, in which the sourcing is the Government, the powerful sources at the government level, and then there are complimentary, quote "Independent Experts." It's a beautiful system...

Graphic.

EDWARD HERMAN: Flack is a filter that means negative feedback. Flack really is important when it comes from people who can really threaten the media effectively.

NOAM CHOMSKY: If you want to write a story about, say, the military system. You go to the Air Force, they have a huge publicity system. They're very nice; they'll give you all the data, and do the work and give you the right ideas. You change a few words maybe. If you follow that script, you'll never get into any difficulty. On the other hand, if you begin to challenge any of these things, you will get into problems.

EDWARD HERMAN: Some years ago, the Chicago Tribune hired a man from the military who was an ex-marine named David Evans. He was their military reporter. David Evans knew a lot about the Pentagon and he was an honest man, he wasn't a flunky at the Pentagon, he was an old Veteran, obviously incredibly loyal to this country, but he didn't believe that the Pentagon always told the truth. And therefore the Pentagon didn't like him at all. So the Chicago Tribune's publisher was being constantly assailed by the Public Relations Department of the Pentagon, and the Contractor, and eventually, David Evans was fired.

(Cutaway)

Another form of flack that is very important now and very obvious is Libel Suits. A company like Philip Morris, for example, going after ABC for having made allegations about nicotine manipulation in cigarettes, caused ABC to eventually to settle on a very apologetic terms.

(Cutaway: Tonight, for the second time in a week, a major broadcast network will apologize to the Tobacco Industry...We apologize to our audience, Philip Morris, and Reynolds.)

EDWARD HERMAN: The other major kind of flack that should be mentioned explicitly is the organizations that have been organized mainly by the right-wing foundations, can monitor and discipline the media on a continuing basis. The most notable is Accuracy in Media, and is funded by corporate money. And it monitors the media and writes letters and threatens...

Cutaway: I told the Chairman of the New York Times and the Editorial Page editor the other day that now is the time to have a proper investigation.

JUSTIN LEWIS: There are basically three kinds of flack. One, pressure from Government, which is particularly important for say, defense of foreign policy issues. Two, pressures from corporations. And thirdly, pressure from Corporate-funded, Right-wing pressure groups like Accuracy in Media. What's notable is that on issues where it counts, all the pressure comes from the Right and not from the Left, and that might be way we hear so much about this mystical creature, The Liberal Media. Because we hear people complaining from the Right but not from the Left. So what emerges from this systematic analysis is that the idea of the Liberal Media is a myth. In fact, once you do a systematic analysis of media institutions, the whole idea of a Liberal Media really begins to look rather silly. The media owners, the advertisers, the news shapers, the news makers are the powerful groups who put pressure on the media. They all represent interests that go from the middle of the road to very Conservative. A left wing or Liberal media clearly goes against their interests, and they control the media.

Graphic.

JUSTIN LEWIS: If the media really were Liberal, how might we expect them to cover and social and economic policy issues? Well, the one major area of government spending that the left argues is excessive is the military. So, I would expect a Liberal Media to turn a critical eye on the quarter of a trillion dollar defense budget, to ask questions like, Why is this such a priority when the risk of a foreign power invading the US is virtually zero, or Why are we spending billions of dollars on B2 stealth bombers when they don't work in the sun, or in the rain or when it's too cold? With other areas of the budget that the left supports, like welfare, which is incidentally much smaller than the military budget, we'd expect to see a Liberal Media pointing out that the level of support here for poor people is much lower here in the US than it is in other developed countries.

EDWARD HERMAN: There seems to be a consensus now among American leaders in the business community that the welfare state has to be cut back.

Cutaway: President Clinton is promising to end welfare as we know it, and just about everyone agrees that the system is in need of an overhaul.

EDWARD HERMAN: We're now in a period where the establishment, having decided that they are the targets, the media really don't discuss whether there could be, for example, other targets--we could be going after the military budget again. But it's been decided that those things are off the agenda, and it's the social budgets that must be cut.

JUSTIN LEWIS: If we look at the interests of media corporations, we can see what lies behind the media's logic. So, for example, two of the companies that benefit most from high levels of defense spending are General Electric and Westinghouse. Westinghouse owns CBS and GE owns NBC. So cutting defense is clearly not in their interests.

EDWARD HERMAN: We see a sequencing of targets and cutting back on the social budgets. We start with ones that are most vulnerable, the AFDC clients, the teenage mothers. They don't talk much about the tax burden of welfare because it's actually not very huge, but they talk about welfare as being damaging to the welfare clients.

Cutaway: It's gonna be hard to say. We're not going to give you more money for having more and more children once you're on welfare. But we're doing that because we love the people that are beneficiaries of welfare.

EDWARD HERMAN: A pretense is given that tough love is being applied for the benefit of these dependents who are being freed, empowered by removal of these benefits.

NOAM CHOMSKY: If you take, say, AFDC, Families with Dependent Children, it was always low, but it declined from 1970 to 1990. Along with it, there started a huge propaganda assault.

Cutaway: To many people, these girls are public enemy number one. Like most American teenagers, they started having sex by the age of 15 or 16. Now the taxpayers sitting at home will say, why should I pay for your mistake?

NOAM CHOMSKY: The leading image was the black welfare mother, riding in a Cadillac, you know, breeding like rabbits so we can pay 'em. A complete fabrication, in fact, it was quite the opposite. So that propaganda system was developed with, you know, with considerable skill at the same time that actual support systems--always low--were in fact declining, with the obvious effects on the breakup of families and child abuse and child neglect and so on. In fact the main effect of welfare reform is almost certainly going to be to drive down wages for poorer workers. Because what's happening is that even poorer people are being forced into the labor market. The intent is to make poorer people even poorer, and to make them hate and fear each other even more and to make them pay less and less attention to the exuberance and the business press about the extraordinary wealth that's accruing through a very tiny sector of the population.

Cutaway: Dan, nobody I've talked to today can remember a stock market as hot as this one; it's a real rampaging bull market. In fact, in just the past two and a half years, the Dow Jones industrial average has doubled.

JUSTIN LEWIS: The media coverage of welfare has been extraordinarily one-sided, we see stories of so-called "welfare queens" but never stories of people who have been saved from desperation or hunger or domestic abuse by the welfare system. We hear from wealthy politicians and well-paid representatives from corporate Think Tanks, who all say that welfare should be cut. But we very rarely hear from advocates for the poor. It is actually so distorted that when welfare reform was being debated, you hardly ever

anybody make the simple point that cutting programs to the poor will significantly increase poverty.

Graphic.

EDWARD HERMAN: The media have not done an honest job on Social Security. It's a totally concocted crisis that is meant to create panic.

Cutaway: Old age. Words that evoke age-old fears. Of being left behind. Left without.

EDWARD HERMAN: It's caused a lot of young people to think that Social Security isn't going to be there when they get older. But that's a complete fraud. It will only not be there if they allow these propagandists to scale back the system and to privatize it. It's partly on the hit list because it's so successful. It demonstrates that a government program can be extremely effective. The administrative expense of the Social Welfare system is under 1% of total revenue and it's brought vast numbers of elderly people out of poverty. It's been a tremendous success. If we privatized it, there could be a lot of money made by people in the market, so a very important force pushing for privatizing Social Security is market participants: the mutual funds, security dealers all over the place. They could make a huge mint if Social Security funds were channeled through them. Hence they've been forecasting that things are going to collapse maybe in 2030 or maybe 2070. One thing that has always impressed me is how, for the first time, the establishment looks into the future. I mean, on things like environmental controls, they don't think more than one year out. But on something like Social Security, all of a sudden they're really focused on 70 years into the future, which is a little droll.

Graphic.

NOAM CHOMSKY: There have been public opinion polls in the United States on healthcare since the 1940s, and there's a very steady figure. A considerable plurality or sometimes majority, depending on how the question is asked, is in favor of a single-payer plan. Meaning comes out of the tax system and is accessible to people generally. But a plan like the kind that exists in every other Industrial country of the world, and many non-Industrial countries. All right, when the big healthcare debate came with Clinton, there were basically three options: there was the Clinton system, which essentially handed the healthcare system over to the insurance company, there was the so-called Conservative critique of that, which handed the system over to big insurance companies in a slightly different fashion, and there was a third position, which they don't hand it over to insurance companies at all, let's leave it in public hands. Single-payer option.

Cutaway: It is about time that we tell these insurance industry mechanics that are pocketing 34 cents out of every dollar for every ounce of healthcare they deliver, for every dollar we spend, they take thirty-four cents. It's about time we dump this junk, and

get on the road to affordable healthcare for all Americans, with freedom of choice, cost control; we can do this in America, on the single-payer provisions.

NOAM CHOMSKY: If you look at polls, the third option, let's keep a public system, that had very substantial support, usually majority support, and that was occasionally wrecked, and if you look at that debate, it was only between the first two-systems. And that's the way the healthcare debate continues. The only question allowed to appear in the arena of debate was which device do we use to hand healthcare over to bureaucrats and insurance company offices. Meaning, very high costs, extreme inefficiency, very high administrative costs, much more so than the public systems. Their goal is to make a profit, which means minimal care and maximal supervision. The only question is which variant of these systems will be allowed to exist--the Clinton variant or some other variant. But another possibility--maybe we shouldn't have huge insurance companies running our lives and bureaucrats in offices deciding whether I can see a doctor tomorrow, and doctors filling out tons of forms and patients waiting in line and not getting care. The idea that you might not want that--well, that's not under discussion.

JUSTIN LEWIS: There's a consensus amongst the political elites, many of whom receive campaign contributions from the health insurance industry, that the U.S. shouldn't have a single-payer system. Because of those pressures, single payer is hardly ever mentioned by these political elites, and they happen to be the people that dominate the discussion. During the first 6 months of the healthcare debate in 1992, the New York Times only mentioned the single payer option five times, and even then it was only a single sentence. Healthcare in the United States is really an anachronism. Every other developed country has pretty much abandoned a free market approach because it's inefficient and because it leaves too many people without adequate coverage. And it's the corporate media, really, that's been instrumental in keeping it that way.

Graphic.

JUSTIN LEWIS: If the media really were liberal, what would we expect to see in the coverage of labor and business? In a Liberal media, we'd expect to see far more coverage from a labor angle than from the business angle. If on the other hand, the media represent the interests of corporate elites, well then we'd expect a pro-corporate slant. So we need to ask the question, what does the coverage actually tell us?

NOAM CHOMSKY: Just open this morning's paper and compare the size of the business section with the size of the labor section. There isn't a labor section. If there's any labor news at all, it's covered by a footnote in the business section. The reason is that the overwhelming majority of the people in the country are wage earners, laborers, but their interests count as nothing. The only interest that counts is the small sector of investors. So there's a business section. So for example, the stock market's a big issue, a lot of coverage in the press about what 's happening in the stock market.

Cutaway: If we look at the Dow Jones Industrial Average, it sent up 28.5 points...they sent up a royal delight when trading closed this afternoon today

NOAM CHOMSKY: So yes, the interests of one percent of the population merit a special section of the paper.

EDWARD HERMAN: The press has not paid much attention to the very unfortunate, bad things that have happened to labor and the labor movement over the years. Media and real wages have actually gone down. We're talking here about the majority of Americans. Their trials and tribulations and suffering in this period have gotten very modest media coverage.

JUSTIN LEWIS: The interests of business and big money are inscribed within the routines of news reporting. The stock market, the NASDAQ, they're reported on a daily basis. But labor only appears really when they're doing something that inconveniences people. So, when they're on strike for example.

Cutaway: Eleven people were arrested for blocking the entrance to a UPS facility in Massachusetts. In this fourth day of the strike, tensions are mounting, erupting in a clash once again near Boston.

EDWARD HERMAN: The thing that most impresses me about the media treatment of markets is how they treat wage increases as actually a negative factor. Wage increases mean cost increases for business and so wages are looked upon as a cost of production, they're not looked at as the mass of the income of the society, for which increases are there for a beneficial good. If the media were in fact concerned for the general welfare, wage increases would in basically be considered to be very good. But if you're looking at it from the standpoint of elite interests, the profit margins of firms and stock prices, then wage increases are detrimental, they encroach on margins, they may threaten inflation, etc.

Cutaway: The chairman of the Federal Reserve board Alan Greenspan told Congress today that the economy is virtually doing too well and with record low unemployment this could lead to the dreaded word "inflation."

JUSTIN LEWIS: So, when we look at the actual media coverage of Domestic issues, whether it's welfare, the military, healthcare, labor and business, what we find is a systematic bias, not in favor of Liberal or progressive perspectives, but actually against them. In fact, we find pretty much exactly what Herman and Chomsky institutional analysis will predict that we find.

Graphic.

JUSTIN LEWIS: The media's coverage of foreign policy news is very important. For most people, the media are the only source of information about the rest of the world. So the media have the power to frame the way we think about our world. For decades, the media has covered the world through a lens of anti-Communism. But it wasn't just a thoughtful anti-Communism, everything that could be described as Socialist was portrayed as bad.

Cutaway: If a person consistently reads and advocates the views expressed in a Communist publication, he may be a Communist. If a person defends the activities of Communist nations while consistently attacking the domestic and foreign policy of the United States, she may be a Communist. If a person does all these things over a period of time, he **MUST** be a Communist.

EDWARD HERMAN: America's religion for decades has been anti-Communism, a very negative religion, but one that's had very powerful effects. It has been seized upon, too, by people who want policy to move in a Conservative direction. In fact, in practically every case where we have knocked over Democratic governments, we have done it on the grounds that there was an alleged threat of Communism, and that a Soviet was in the background. A very impressive case was in the case of Guatemala, back in 1954. Guatemala at that time had a Democratic government, so we organized a Contra Army, and had this Democracy overthrown, and installed in its place was a government that was a terroristic government.

Cutaway: Carlos Castilla-Arnas now speaks of the future. The aim of his government will be to restore the Civil Rights of the people, to establish a true Democracy based on the principles of his movement of National liberation. Truth, justice, and honest labor.

EDWARD HERMAN: What we have always done is used the alleged threat of Communism, even when it's totally remote and totally implausible, to cover over the fact that we want somebody there who will serve our needs more perfectly.

JUSTIN LEWIS: What we've seen in recent years is that the ideology of anti-Communism has evolved into something that is more positive, but just as simplistic. And that's the idea that free-market Capitalism is the only viable Democratic system. Now a study of world politics tells us that that's nonsense. Many successful countries have mixed systems, what we might call Social Democracies. While many of the world's most brutal dictatorships are Capitalist Dictatorships. But if you listen to American media reports, you'll constantly hear the words Democracy and free-market Capitalism used as if they're interchangeable, as if they mean the same thing.

Cutaway: Free-market. Free Capitalist economy. It is the only way to get out of crisis.... But the first priority is to turn Communist farmers into Capitalists. Only they can give the polls the food needed for the challenge ahead.

Graphic.

EDWARD HERMAN: Boris Yeltzin in Russia is a beautiful example of reform in the sense of doing what the Western establishment wants done in Russia. And he has been engaged in returning Russia to capitalism as fast as he can do it. So there's been massive privatization. In fact, privatization has been carried out before there were even markets in which this could take place in a reasonable way. So that the privatization process has been hugely corrupt, insiders have been taking over properties, criminal elements have thrived in Russia, the damage to ordinary people has been absolutely spectacular. There's been a huge fall in output. There's been a redistribution in income, upward, masses of people falling into serious poverty, and yet the West has kept pressing and supporting Yeltzin to go ahead with this process of privatization, because, for one thing, Westerners are benefiting directly. There are a lot of Westerners who are participating with the privatization process, but also he's making the move away from Socialism to Capitalism irreversible. So the West has apologized for virtually everything he's done: The Chechnya war, the enormous thievery. There's very little criticism of Yeltzin for his violations of Parliamentary rule.

Cutaway

JUSTIN LEWIS: If you look at the data, there's no question that the shift to Capitalism in Russia has been an unmitigated disaster. Under Communism, the Russian economy experienced a modest growth. Since 1989, when the Soviet system collapsed, the economy has shrunk by an average of 10% every year. In real terms, per capita income in Russia is now less than one third of its 1989 level. Even the average age of life expectancy has decreased. For men it used to be around 63, now it's around 56. And apart from a generally corrupt minority who have profited from this transition, it has been eight years of misery for most Russian people.

EDWARD HERMAN: There was an article in the New York Times about two days ago on the sickness and misery of the Russian people. They're death rate...is absolutely staggeringly high. It's higher than it was a hundred years ago! And the title of the New York Times article refers to the dark soul of Russians. The dark soul. But they find it very difficult to locate the cause. Because it couldn't be privatization and the return of Capitalism to Russia. It must be something else...

Graphic.

JUSTIN LEWIS: Cuba is an interesting case of media bias. Essentially there are two stories you could tell about Cuba: One would focus on the lack of political freedom in Cuba, although you should that State repression and Human Rights abuses in Cuba are really pretty mild when compared to other U.S.-backed Latin American countries like say, Guatemala or El Salvador. The other one you could tell is one of extraordinary success in raising the standards of living of most ordinary Cubans, in particular in areas

like education and healthcare. But the media will only ever tell you the first story, they'll never tell you the second one. Essentially, they reiterate the line put out by the U.S. government, by the more vociferous members of the exile community in Miami. Which is to behave as if Cuba is the most egregious violator of Human Rights in the world. Talk to any Human Rights group and they'll tell you that's an absurd proposition.

NOAM CHOMSKY: Now what is Cuban trouble, Castro's trouble-making in the hemisphere and the Soviet connection? Castro's trouble-making in the hemisphere is the spread of the Castro idea of taking matters into your own hands, which has great appeal to poor and oppressed people in Latin America, suffering problems similar to those of Cuba, who have the model of the Cuban Revolution in front of them. If you pursue the reasoning, you'll figure out what the Cold War was about. It was overwhelmingly inherent fears about preventing the spread of the idea of taking matters into your own hands and doing something to overcome poverty and misery and oppression, with the model of someone else who did it in front of you. The model of the Castro Revolution. So that has to be smashed.

JUSTIN LEWIS: One problem that the media has is that Cuba doesn't really look like the stereotype of a Communist country. It has beautiful beaches, it has a thriving music scene, it has a fabulous climate. So when American reporters go there, they have to work very hard to keep reminding you that Cuba is the enemy.

Cutaway: And the benign images can't obscure the reality that this is a hard line of an oppressive, Communist dictatorship.

JUSTIN LEWIS: One way they do it of course is to avoid interviewing too many ordinary Cubans. When they do, you have the extraordinary sight of an American reporter who thinks he knows more about life in Cuba than they do.

Cutaway: (journalist:) When was the last time someone ran against Fidel Castro? (Cuban) Nobody has run against Fidel Castro. Ever. (Journalist) And you think you live in a Democracy? (Cuban) I live in a Democracy! (Journalist) And you are free? (Cuban) I am free! (Journalist) You say you're free. And Fidel Castro is a hero? (Cuban) He's a hero!

Graphic.

JUSTIN LEWIS: The great media myth about U.S. foreign policy is that it's driven by a concern for Democracy and Human Rights. It's amazing how powerful that myth is, given the evidence to the contrary. In the post-war period, the U.S. has supported and often installed really a horrific succession of dictators. Whether it's Pinochet in Chile, Mobutu in Zaire, Sukarno in Indonesia, Somoza in Nicaragua, the Duvaliers in Haiti, a series of brutal and autocratic regimes in El Salvador, in Guatemala, in Saudi Arabia, in fact I think it was Nixon who said in a candid moment that Anastasio Somoza of

Nicaragua who operated the country like his personal estate, and terrorized his people with death squads, Nixon said that Somoza was a son-of-a-bitch, but that he's OUR son-of-a-bitch.

EDWARD HERMAN: The United States is very selective in its targets for Democracy, it wants Cuba to be Democratic. The most interesting thing is that the American media don't laugh, they don't say, my goodness this is really very funny because, Look! We're in Saudi Arabia! And we have troops in Saudi Arabia to protect the Saudi theocracy! This is a government that will not allow dissident movements to exist; this is obviously an authoritarian government of the grossest sort.

NOAM CHOMSKY: If some brutal, murderous tyrant is doing his job, meaning, keeping his country quiet, ensuring that the profits flow to the West, voting with the UN... whatever is required, as long as that's going on it's just fine. We don't care what he does.

Graphic.

NOAM CHOMSKY: Let's just take Saddam Hussein. Brutal killer, I mean, he was gassing Kurds, you know, torturing dissidents, extremely brutal. The United States loved him. He was one of our favorite trading partners, in fact, right up to the Gulf War. The United States was still showering aid on him, lavishing agricultural exports, technological assistance, and so on. There's just nothing wrong with him, fine guy... Well, August 2nd, 1990, he made a mistake. He misinterpreted U.S. orders. The U.S. had told him, Look, if you wanna rectify the border with Kuwait, then take over an oil well, an oil field that they're drilling into, that kind of thing, that's fine, we don't care. He misinterpreted that. He took over all of Kuwait. No, that's not allowed.

Cutaway: The Chairman of the joint Chiefs, on the Iraqi army: First we're gonna cut it off, and then we're going to kill it.

JUSTIN LEWIS: The case of Saddam Hussein is a good illustration. When the U.S. was friendly towards Saddam Hussein, and supplying him with arms in his war against Iran, the media pretty much ignored his brutal record. When the U.S. decided that he was the enemy, suddenly, his brutality became big news.

Cutaway: This man who was been compared to Hitler, may be capable of Hitlerian actions.

JUSTIN LEWIS: The media coverage of the gulf war I think is a good example of that capacity to accept the official line. We were told, for example, about the success of high-tech weapons, like the Patriot Missile, that it's success was spectacular. In fact it wasn't. The Patriot, actually, missed nearly every single time. We were told it was a moral war against a brutal dictator that invaded another country.

Cutaway: (George Bush) And we are here because we believe in freedom. Our freedom, and the freedom of others.

JUSTIN LEWIS: But if that was so, why weren't we at war with Indonesia? Also ruled by a brutal dictator, who had invaded another country, in this case, East Timor.

Cutaway

Graphic

JUSTIN LEWIS: It's interesting to compare the media coverage of Indonesia's invasion of East Timor with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. After the invasion of Kuwait, there was massive media coverage. After the invasion of East Timor, which involved slaughtering of vast scale, the media coverage of the area actually decreased. This was an invasion that the U.S. in fact tacitly supported. Not only was there no coverage, there was no outrage, no comment.

EDWARD HERMAN: The fact is, the attitude towards Democracy externally seems to be totally opportunistic. Where there are gains from trade, or gains from oil, like in Saudi Arabia, the United States is totally oblivious to the interests of Democracy. And will not even support Democratic movements. And in the case of Indonesia, the United States government for years have been very supportive of the Suharto government, even though it's now illegally occupying East Timor, and to killed vast numbers in that country. These things are irrelevant; it has opened its door to American business. And from the standpoint of American oil companies, and others, it's a very fine country. And therefore, for the United States the question of Democracy is literally, is off the agenda. There was a recent election in Indonesia, and the United States media did give it coverage, and they noted that the opposition was not really allowed to campaign or really enter on the ballot, and the Suharto success was assured. And if you read between the lines you can see that this was strictly a phony election. But the thing that was so interesting about the treatment of it is how it was treated antiseptically. Just a part of the world, an object of fact. And nothing to get excited about or indignant over.

Cutaway: It was Election Day today in the fourth most populace nation on Earth. That's Indonesia. More than 200 million people. The voting follows the most violent campaign in thirty years. Nearly three hundred people died. They have begun counting the votes and as expected, the ruling party of President Suharto, which tightly controlled the election, is winning a huge majority of the seats in Parliament.

EDWARD HERMAN: Now if you compare that with elections in countries that we're trying to destabilize, like back in 1984, and in 89-90, there were elections in Nicaragua, which was ruled by the Sandinistas who we didn't like.

JUSTIN LEWIS: In 1984, there was an election in Nicaragua. Impartial, international observers described this election as a model of fairness in a region that was famous for rigged elections.

Cutaway: There is general agreement that the balloting process itself was fair and open. I saw no conflict, and as I saw it, no possibility of any kind of monkey business in the voting. I think it was a very good and honest election.

JUSTIN LEWIS: The problem was that the winners were the Left-wing Sandinistas, who the Reagan administration had been trying to overthrow.

Cutaway: The Sandinistas continue to try to manipulate every aspect of the electoral process, including the police, the army, the media and mass organizations in an attempt to project the illusion of popular support.

JUSTIN LEWIS: So the media were encouraged to ignore the election in 1984 and go along with the Reagan administration's attempts to discredit it.

Cutaway: The Reagan administration considers Sunday's elections...the election was denounced as a Soviet-style sham by President Reagan, nothing happened to change his mind... the election is between the ruling Sandinistas and very little opposition.

JUSTIN LEWIS: This actually works so well, that by the time the Sandinistas called a second election in 1990, the media talked as if the first one hadn't existed. I remember watching Peter Jennings forget the 1984 election, wondering if someone would point out that he was effectively re-writing history. But nobody did, and he and everybody else kept on reporting this propagandist view, as if it were fact.

Cutaway: This Sunday, when the people of Nicaragua vote in their first free election in a decade... like this Sunday's election, the first free election in a decade...They don't know much about Democracy, but then again, neither do most Nicaraguans, because no one can remember the last time there was a free election.

EDWARD HERMAN: You have this amazing...double standard. For Indonesia, we're happy with the government. They can run an election infinitely more phony than in Nicaragua, and the media will treat it very likely. But with Nicaragua, where our government wants to overthrow the government even though they had an election far more Democratic than most in the third world, we found flaws. And the media allowed this to be used to justify a military attack on that little country. Now that's propaganda service.

JUSTIN LEWIS: If we look at the coverage of International News, which theory makes more sense: if the media were Liberal, we would expect to hear them constantly criticizing U.S. government's when they support brutal, Right-wing regimes. What we

actually hear is pretty much deafening silence. In fact, the regime's the media often choose to point the finger at are nearly always on the left, whether it's Angola, Cuba, or Nicaragua.

NOAM CHOMSKY: It's long been understood, you know, hundreds of years, that unless people are controlled, they are going to challenge power. They will not willingly accept subordination, domination, hunger, and so on. No one is going to accept that if they have choices. So it is therefore necessary for those who are in the positions of a controlled decision-making, monopolized-wealth, etc. necessary for them to somehow keep the population from their throats, as they put it. And that can either be done by force, or as that capacity declines, by control of opinion. There's no other method.

[END]