Election coverage '72: 1

How well did the media cover the campaign? Was reporting influenced by Administration attacks? A survey's discomfiting findings.

The fruits of Agnewism

BEN H. BAGDIKIAN

■ If you were depending on daily reports in some metropolitan dailies—the Chicago *Tribune,* the Cleveland *Plain Dealer,* the New York *Times,* the New York *News* (the country's largest; circulation 2,125,000), or the *Wall Street Journal* (second-largest; circulation 1,250,000)—you would not have known promptly that a former FBI agent had confirmed that, under command of officials associated with the White House, he had spied electronically on Democratic headquarters and reported to the President's campaign officials.

Similarly, you would not have read that evidence had been unearthed by a reputable newspaper that this was part of a massive clandestine effort financed by hundreds of thousands of Nixon campaign dollars for the infiltration, sabotage, and subversion of the Democratic Party, or a report of importation of thugs into Washington to provoke riots and beat up a controversial public figure.

If you were depending on the usual special election-year political documentaries broadcast in prime time to explore and explain these events and other issues of the presidential campaign, you would have discovered that suddenly, in 1972, this form of political reporting had practically disappeared.

A sample study of leading papers and network specials during the presidential campaign makes it clear that the Nixon Administration's three-year war against the news media has succeeded. There has been a retrogression in printing newsworthy information that is critical of the Administration and a notable decline in investigation of apparent wrongdoing when it is likely to anger or embarrass the White House. This, coupled with the shrewd manipulation of the media by Nixon officials, has moved the American news system closer to becoming a propaganda arm of the administration in power.

It is a tragic time for a reversal of the lessons of the 1950s and 1960s. The news media have never been more technologically massive and penetrating. The check-and-balance between the Executive and the Judiciary is disappearing with

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a Supreme Court that reflects the Executive's political values and is increasingly hostile to the press. More than ever, the news media need to function as "the fourth branch of government."

The role of the news media is not merely to repeat like a tape recorder whatever someone in authority chooses to say in public. This is pretty much what the wire services do and do well, which is why they are always pointed to by White House media-watchers as the perfect model of journalism. Newspapers, radio-TV, and magazines should scan the social horizon and make their own decisions about what is important, independent of officialdom. If the President chooses not to talk about issues, this does not mean that objective journalists are forbidden to describe and illuminate the issues. If what is said officially is contradicted by what was said earlier, good journalists are supposed to have memories.

Reporting in the 1972 campaign was not notable for relevant memory. George McGovern had voting records and stands at odds with his campaign positions but these were not often raised, beyond the smaller time frame of the campaign. And Richard Nixon's denunciation of "giveaways" and his announcement of peace plans passed through the main body of journalism with hardly a recollection that in 1968 he was the leading promoter of a minimum income plan, or that he had earlier sworn not to make the kind of deal in Hanoi that he announced in 1972, or that he previously had quietly switched from nuclear "superiority" to "sufficiency."

Day-to-day routine reporting came close to being Administration propaganda, but for different reasons than the handling of basic issues; it tended to be propagandistic because President Nixon held himself aloof from the press, removing himself from public association with or personal accountability for the Watergate affair, the more unpleasant parts of the Soviet wheat deal, and the Election Eve peace-is-at-hand scenario. This pitted his opponent not against the President but against swarms of substitutes for the President. Correspondents could not ask the President what he meant by his grandiose public statements, but they could and did ask Sen. McGovern, producing aggressive, critical, and damaging reporting at every turn of the McGovern campaign. It is regrettable that the President didn't make himself more available, but this strategy is not new. Franklin D. Roosevelt used to do it except for one last-minute coup de grace.

Two major changes in day-to-day campaign reporting reflected wounds inflicted by the Administration's war on the press. One was the tendency of both print and broadcast media, when under fire for real or imagined unfairness, to retreat to mathematical editing: to give each major side the same play and space each day, regardless of the inherent news values of each story. "Twinning"—equal side-by-side Democratic and Republican daily campaign stories—was the rule in 1972. An uncoerced editor might decide that when George McGovern made a major statement on defense policy which was denounced rhetorically by a Republican campaign official that they were not of equal interest. But twinning made them so in the public eye, demeaning the President's opponent by seeming to accord him the same status as Administration underlings.

The other difference in day-to-day reporting was that in past years when a major candidate refused to make himself available for questioning, the media pounded away at him editorially and reportorially. This did not always flush the man out but it made his nonappearance an issue and made it clear that the candidate was giving no exposition of his real plans beyond rhetorical generalities in press releases.

For example, when White House press agents handed out a presidential statement on drugs that attacked courts for worsening the problem, it made headlines all over the country (NIXON SAYS JUDGES HINDER DRUG WAR, Baltimore *Sun*, page 1, Sept. 23). It is possible that this made such a big display because it was filed from the campaign plane by the eighty-eight correspondents "accompanying" the President on a trip to Texas. The eighty-eight correspondents never spoke to the President. They were in another plane and were handed the press release by White House press agents while their plane was in the air; on landing they rushed to phones to dictate stories based solely on the handout. As Richard Reeves commented in *New York* magazine, it would have

been nice to ask the President which judges he meant and what he thought judges could do about the drug problem.

Nixon's strategy was standard for an incumbent sure of victory. The failure was that of a news system which did not systematically remind the public of the fact that it was electing a President for four years without knowing how he responded to issues in the campaign—of a news system that was biased in favor of the President or lazy or fearful of the operatives at 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., or of the Federal Communications Commission, the Attorney General's Anti-Trust Division, the FBI, the Internal Revenue Service, the Securities and Exchange Commission, or the effect of governmental denunciation on a newspaper's standing in the stock market.

"Reflected wounds inflicted by the war on the press . . ."

The failure was the fault of publishers and editors so personally favorable to the President that they do not permit their news columns to press him critically as they would other public figures under comparable circumstances. According to corrected compilations by *Editor & Publisher,* of all daily papers reporting any presidential endorsement, 93 per cent endorsed Nixon. Endorsements ordinarily are dismissed as ineffective in persuading voters. But DeVan L. Shumway, public affairs director of the Committee for the Reelection of the President and a former UPI correspondent, disagreed; he said endorsements were particularly effective in smaller papers, and he is probably right.

This year saw a visible return to the sweeping orders for entire newspaper chains to back the President. When chains are gobbling up independent newspapers they have a standard speech about respecting local autonomy. This year the Cox chain ordered all its papers to endorse Nixon. The Scripps-Howard chain sent a teletyped editorial to be inserted in all their papers entitled WE CHOOSE NIXON AGAIN. The teletyped editorial from headquarters began:

> Four years ago when the editors of (Name Your Paper) . . . met in editorial conference, they decided. . . .

The Dirks Brothers' economic *Newspaper Newsletter* for Oct. 31 reported:

> Directors of the American Newspaper Publishers Assn. decided at their meeting in early October to maintain for now their neutral stance on whether newspapers should seek exemptions from price controls on First Amendment grounds. They may take up the question at the next meeting, in December. We understand some of the publishers, a vast majority of whom support President Nixon's reelection, were chary of taking any action that implied criticism of the President's policies.

If this report is true it is too full of exquisite ironies to explore in detail. But it is worth noting that publishers are overwhelmingly in favor of an Administration whose views and whose Supreme Court appointees' views of the First Amendment are among the most constricted in history; that these First Amendment views have sent their reporters to jail, threaten to send more in the future, and have permitted prior restraint upon publication.

Does the Republicanism of these publishers affect the news they print in their papers? It is official dogma in American journalism that editorials do not affect the news. It is official dogma of the Nixon Administration that the opposite is true, that the news is written by liberal Democratic reporters and is heavily biased against the Republicans. But for most papers this is not true. Conservative publishers do not often hire liberal editors who stay liberal. Conservative editors do not let their reporters regularly write reports that offend the editors' sensibilities. Systematic studies show the opposite: editorial endorsements and publishers' personal politics do affect the use and display of news in favor of the candidate the publisher likes. Sometimes it is blatant, but usually it is done by omission or deemphasis of news hurting the publishers' candidate. This is true of the study made for this article: pro-Nixon papers had a much higher tendency to suppress damaging Watergate stories than papers making no endorsement.

The enterprise generally labeled "The Water-

gate Affair" (or "caper" by those wishing to put it in the category of panty raids) began in mid-June with the arrest of five men as they broke into the Democratic National Committee headquarters in the Watergate hotel-apartment complex in Washington. The men, mostly former CIA or FBI agents, were loaded with electronic and other equipment, thousands of dollars of cash in new bills, and notebooks with initials and telephone numbers leading to the White House and the Committee for the Reelection of the President. As the story unfolded it led to at least $10 million in unaccounted Nixon campaign funds gathered before a new contributions reporting law went into effect last April. It was from these funds that this project seemed to have been financed. The project apparently encompassed a large-scale effort dating from 1971 to sabotage and immobilize the Democratic Party by infiltration, eavesdropping, forgery, and acts of violence.

Various Republican campaign and White House officials either avoided comment or denounced the news stories about the case, even after seven men were indicted. This was shrugged off by some as usual campaign hanky-panky. But if it had ever occurred before with this virulence and intensity, no one knew it. John D. M. Hamilton, former chairman of the Republican National Committee, said he had never heard of anything like it before. He added, "I think they're doing their best to ruin the political system in this country." Denison Kitchel, Barry Goldwater's campaign manager in 1964, said, "The sabotage, if it happened, is very bad and very damaging to our political system." Bruce Felknor, another Republican and former executive director of the Fair Campaign Practices Committee, said, "Nothing like this has ever happened before in a national campaign."

There was abundant evidence that the "Watergate Affair" was an extraordinary and ominous story of major proportions. Serious men, including conservatives such as William F. Buckley, Jr., and U.S. Sen. Strom Thurmond, saw it as a dangerous corrosion of the American political system. There was little excuse for its not attracting massive press investigative and display attention.

There are more conventional reasons why one could expect the news media to seize every new detail with excitement. Quite aside from its implications for political ethics and the use of government power in a free society, the story was in the classic tradition of cloak-and-dagger and cops-and-robbers. It exuded the odor of official corruption that sets conventional investigative and page 1 juices flowing. During the Truman Administration, day after day the country's front pages were full of horrors, with minor detail piled on minor detail, of men close to the President accepting deep freezes, and their wives mink coats, from supplicants before government. Sherman Adams, the most trusted aide of probably the most trusted President in this century, Dwight D. Eisenhower, fell from grace as a result of newspapers' putting reporters on his trail and stories on page 1 because Adams had accepted hotel rooms and other favors from a friendly garment manufacturer.

But curiously, the allocation of fulltime journalistic investigation to this far more important story was hardly lavish. *Hudson's Washington News Media Contacts Directory* lists working journalists based in Washington. Using it, I found that sixteen bureaus with ten or more correspondents employ a total of 433 reporters. Of these,

"Sweeping orders for entire chains to back the President . . ."

fewer than fifteen were assigned fulltime to Watergate—some for only two weeks. All organizations of any size apparently had a total of only twenty reporters on the case fulltime and most of these not from the start.

The average Washington bureau had no one working fulltime on the Watergate story: Newhouse, with twenty-one correspondents, had none; Gannett, with twelve reporters, had none; Copley, with seven, had none; the Baltimore *Sun*, with thirteen, had none. Networks also were notably missing: ABC, with sixteen reporters, had none;

CBS, with twenty-five, had none; and NBC, with twenty-five, reported one assigned after the Republican Convention.

The Washington *Post*, chief source for the original stories, assigned two reporters fulltime, backed up at various times by six others. The Washington *Star-News* assigned four fulltime. The New York *Times* buried the original burglary on page 50, got into the story late, and finally brought in Walter Rugaber from New York, with an assistant, fulltime; about a dozen scattered correspondents also worked on the story. The Los Angeles *Times*, with seventeen reporters in Washington; had three on the story fulltime from the first day; the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch*, with eight, had two fulltime and two parttime; the Chicago *Daily News*, with six reporters, had two on it off and on; the Chicago *Sun-Times*, with five, no one; and the Chicago *Tribune*, with eleven reporters, two fulltime (only in mid-October).

Time, with nineteen Washington reporters, had one on the story fulltime after the GOP Convention; *Newsweek*, with twenty-six reporters, had one fulltime with occasional assistance from two others; and *U.S. News & World Report*, with fifty-six reporters, had no one fulltime on the story. AP, with sixty-five reporters in Washington, had none on the story fulltime; UPI, with fifty-one, also had none fulltime. Scripps-Howard declined to respond.

It is possible that more man-hours of investigative journalism were put into the 1962 rumor (never confirmed) that John F. Kennedy had been secretly married in 1947 than were assigned to investigate the Watergate Affair.

In 1952 there were two spectacular campaign stories ("spectacular" for that time: neither came close to the importance of Watergate). Both were about special funds, though very different ones. Richard Nixon, running as Eisenhower's vice presidential candidate on a ticket promising to "clean up the mess in Washington," was found in September to have been the recipient of a secret fund maintained by a group of California millionaires to assist Mr. Nixon in any way he thought best for his political future. It was considered serious enough to cast doubt on Nixon's ability to stay on the ticket, and only after the melodramatic "Checkers" speech on television did Eisenhower unequivocally reendorse him.

Several days later, it was discovered that the Democratic presidential candidate, Adlai E. Stevenson, while governor of Illinois, also had a special fund. His was put together by Illinois businessmen to augment the civil service salaries of other top state officials in order to attract qualified men from private life.

A careful study of the news treatment of these two fund stories was made by Arthur Rowse and reported in his book, *Slanted News* (Beacon Press, 1957). Rowse looked at thirty-one leading dailies and found that papers endorsing the Republican ticket (twenty-seven of the thirty-one) tended not to print the Nixon fund story as soon as it was available, not to put it on page 1 when they did, and when they finally did print it to do so with a denial lead, followed in subsequent days with stories about public figures defending Nixon. But they tended to put the Stevenson fund story on page 1 as soon as they could and to follow it with Republican denunciations of Stevenson because of his fund.

The same tendencies appeared in handling of crucial Watergate developments during the midst of the campaign last October. Four specific stories were looked at for placement in thirty papers representing 23 per cent of American daily circulation. Most of the papers are those regularly received in the Columbia University journalism library and include some of the best large dailies in the country.

The papers were: the Buffalo *Evening News*, Chicago *Daily News*, Chicago *Sun-Times*, Chicago *Tribune*, Detroit *News*, Kansas City *Star*, Milwaukee *Journal*, Minneapolis *Tribune*, New York *Post*, New York *Times*, New York *Daily News*, Philadelphia *Evening Bulletin*, Philadelphia *Inquirer*, St. Louis *Post-Dispatch*, St. Louis *Globe-Democrat*, Baltimore *Evening Sun*, Cleveland *Plain Dealer*, Los Angeles *Times*, San Francisco *Chronicle*, Atlanta *Constitution*, Boston *Globe*, Houston *Chronicle*, Ithaca (N.Y.) *Journal*, *Newsday*, Providence *Evening Bulletin*, Richmond *Times-Dispatch*, St. Petersburg *Times*, San Diego *Union*, Washington *Post*, and the *Wall Street Journal*.

In dozens of other papers, small to large, spot-

checked during the period, there was an even greater silence on Watergate developments, or else brief, incomprehensible fragments from the wire services. These papers ranged from the Rawlins, Wyo., *Times* (circulation 3,400; lead national headline on the day of the Haldeman story, 'SOME PROGRESS' IS REPORTED FOR PEACE, with no Watergate story) to the Omaha *World-Herald* (circulation 243,000) and the Denver *Post* (circulation 251,000), which carried no story about the Haldeman allegations but front-paged the next day's denial.

The first story studied was the exclusive tape-recorded interview obtained by Los Angeles *Times* Washington reporters Ronald Ostrow and Jack Nelson. This appeared on Oct. 5 and had a documented quality from a participant in the alleged conspiracy that was stronger than almost any other of the stories in that period. With it was a long sidebar—a verbatim taped account by the participant, a former FBI agent named Alfred C. Baldwin.

The second story studied was the Oct. 10 Washington *Post* account by Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, who with occasional help by other *Post* reporters, produced most of the investigative information in the case. This story detailed for the first time the scope and technique of the sabotage effort beyond burglarizing and bugging the Watergate. It included the bizarre information from another *Post* reporter, Marilyn Berger, that the famous letter accusing Sen. Edmund Muskie of calling Americans of French-Canadian descent "Canucks" that helped knock him out of the race was a forgery—written, Miss Berger said, by her former reporter colleague on the *Post,* Ken Clawson. Clawson, who had left the *Post* to become Deputy Director of Communications for the White House and a major operative in the media campaign, had, she said, admitted writing the letter; Clawson later denied this.

The third story studied was another *Post* account by Woodward and Bernstein, connecting the President's appointments secretary and confidant, H. R. Haldeman, with the sabotage project. It was an unattributed story, but previous *Post* stories had held up and had been confirmed by other news organizations or official records, so this one—whether or not it is ultimately proved correct—entered the field with credentials.

The fourth story studied was the White House denial of the Haldeman connection and its bitter denunciation of the Washington *Post.*

The first information readers of the Chicago *Tribune* received of the *Post*'s Haldeman story was not the morning it broke (this story, like all the others, was carried by AP and UPI as well as by the Washington *Post*-Los Angeles *Times* Service). That day the *Trib* had a page 1 headline, FEW AT SHRIVER PARADE. But the next day on page 7, under the headline ZIEGLER DENOUNCES POST SPY STORIES, DENIES LINK, there was from Chicago Tribune Press Service an 18-inch story; two inches explained the *Post* account, the rest denounced the story.

The San Diego *Union,* formerly edited by Herbert Klein, Clawson's boss as Director of Communications for the White House, had no story on the Los Angeles *Times* break, nor on the conspiracy-"Canuck" story, nor on the Haldeman story. But the day after the Haldeman story was not run the *Union* carried a large page 1 editorial by publisher James S. Copley endorsing Nixon and a one-column story on page 4 consisting almost entirely of denunciation of the *Post* headlined: WHITE HOUSE DENIES FUND FOR SPYING.

The Minneapolis *Tribune* did not print the original Haldeman story at all but put the denial of it on page 1. The Philadelphia *Inquirer* (which receives the *Post* news service) did not print the original Haldeman story but the next day printed the denial on page 4.

Of the seven papers that had no original story on the alleged Haldeman connection, five were listed by *Editor & Publisher* as endorsers of Nixon.

There were ninety possibilities for publication of the three news breaks studied—thirty papers times three stories. Of these opportunities, there were thirty-one failures to carry stories at all. Fourteen papers in the sample were listed by *E&P* as having endorsed the President; fifteen were listed as making no endorsement; one endorsed McGovern.

Nixon-endorsing papers had forty-two opportunities to print the stories but 52 per cent of the time did not. The non-Nixon-endorsing papers

Providence and Chafee: study in fairness

□ Whether the Providence *Journal* and *Evening Bulletin* coverage was balanced in the U.S. Senate campaign in Rhode Island last fall would not likely merit special attention were it not for the fact that the family of Republican Senatorial candidate John H. Chafee is part owner of both dailies. How much of the private corporations' stock is held by relatives of Chafee is one of the best-kept secrets in recent Rhode Island history, and even traditional sources of such information, as well as Chafee's recent opponent, Democratic Sen. Claiborne Pell, said they had no idea of its extent. But both the candidate and the newspapers have confirmed the link, and the checks of all reporters and editors continue to be signed by William G. Chafee, the company treasurer, who is the candidate's cousin. William Chafee, in fact, said recently that John Chafee, who was President Nixon's Secretary of the Navy for three years, even owns some *Journal* and *Bulletin* stock himself.

When I was a *Journal-Bulletin* reporter during the 1966 gubernatorial campaign and asked a question of Horace Hobbs, who was soon to be defeated by Chafee, I remember that he replied, "What's the difference what I say? It will be buried inside while Chafee is grinning on the front page." Days earlier the personable and handsome Chafee had indeed appeared grinning on the front page of the Sunday *Journal* (circ. 198,444), posed atop an elephant; Hobbs, on the same elephant a day later, made page 19 of the weekday *Journal* (circ. 65,000). Hobbs added, however, "I know it's not your fault." The criticism in that campaign was not so much of the quality of reportage (none of my handful of stories was ever altered to favor Chafee) as of other practices.

Last fall's campaign was Chafee's most important, both because the vote was destined to be close and because Pell was one of five vulnerable Democratic incumbents whom Republicans hoped to unseat to obtain a Senate majority. President Nixon campaigned for Chafee four days before the election, and he had been preceded by Senate Minority Leader Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania, Gov. Nelson A. Rockefeller of New York, and Nixon's son-in-law, Edward F. Cox.

Pell was bolstered by several appearances by Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, former Sen. Eugene McCarthy, and Mrs. Sargent Shriver. Mrs. Jacqueline Onassis said she would have campaigned for Pell—her childhood friend from Newport's exclusive Ocean Drive—would it not have jeopardized her court suit for protection from photographers.

The financial link between Chafee and the two dailies and any recent manifestations of pro-Chafee bias, however, were notably difficult to discern this year. A study I made of both statewide papers discloses that there was not only a dearth of campaign bias, but both papers must have made a conscious effort to avoid even a hint of favoritism.

In the nine weeks from Labor Day to Election Day, both papers printed 4,014 inches of news copy that tended to help either candidate, by expounding his views or mentioning endorsement or support of him—and only 294 inches separated their total space received. Pell received 1,860 inches (1,061 in the *Journal*), and Chafee 2,154 inches (1,208 in the *Journal*), which gave Chafee 54 per cent of this total coverage. However, Pell campaigned far less than did Chafee because of Senate business that occupied him into October. Moreover, in the two weeks prior to the election, Pell received 54 per cent of the coverage, this coinciding with Chafee's slipping behind in polls for the first time.

In news stories, there was a consistent effort to explore the views of each candidate on such issues as ending the Vietnam War, aiding the elderly, and a U.S. Senator's obligation to Rhode Island; to balance reporting in such instances as face-to-face debates. In fact, after the *Journal* endorsed Chafee two days prior to the election, the newspaper broke with its precedent of withholding last-day political commentary by printing, in most of three columns of page 3, the Democratic outcry over that endorsement.

In the letters to the editor columns, Chafee was endorsed twenty times (twelve in the *Journal*) which gave him 145 inches (85 in the *Journal*), while Pell was endorsed nineteen times (twelve in the *Journal*) for 139 inches—giving Chafee 51 per cent of the space. But Pell, his wife, or prominent out-of-state supporters received 51 per cent of the photographs. The Pells or their prominent friends appeared twenty-seven times (seventeen in the *Journal*), while the Chafees or their VIP endorsers appeared twenty-six times (twenty in the *Journal*).

"Their coverage was fair," Pell said after winning with 54 per cent of the vote. "There's nothing else you could make of it."

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(only one of which was listed as having endorsed McGovern), had forty-eight opportunities and only 23 per cent failed to print the stories.

The Nixon-endorsing papers had forty-two opportunities to put the stories on page 1 but did so only nine times. The non-Nixon endorsers had forty-eight opportunities and among them put the stories on page 1 twenty-two times.

On the denial of the Haldeman story, of the fourteen Nixon-endorsing papers, eleven ran the denial, two on page 1. The non-Nixon endorsers had sixteen opportunities to run the denial and thirteen did, six of them on page 1.

Not all the Nixon-endorsing papers followed

the pattern. The most consistent and emphatic display of all the stories studied was by the Houston *Chronicle,* an endorser of Nixon and a paper not always praised for professionalism. But it prominently ran on page 1 every one of the news breaks studied and, therefore properly, ran the denial of the Haldeman story on page 1.

The papers as a group, whether or not they endorsed Nixon, had a poor record of use and display of these stories—major events in the most ominous episode of high-level dirty politics in our history, occurring at a crucial time of national decision-making.

Where the papers in this study are the ones in the Rowse study, some comparisons are possible. In 1972 the Chicago *Daily News* ran none of the three October stories on page 1; in 1952 it ran the Nixon-Stevenson fund stories on page 1. The Detroit *News,* which endorsed Republicans both times, put the 1952 Nixon fund story on page 9 the first day, but made the Stevenson fund story the lead the first day; in 1972 its three October Watergate newsbreaks were, respectively, on pages 22, 11 (with a denial lead), and 8.

The Kansas City *Star* in 1952 waited a day to run the Nixon fund story and then ran it under the head, 'SMEAR' TO NIXON, but it used the Stevenson fund story the first possible day, as the lead. Its 1972 stories in this study were all inside.

The Milwaukee *Journal* was consistent in 1952 and 1972, giving page 1 plays at first opportunity.

The Philadelphia *Bulletin* in 1952 held the Nixon story a day and then used a head, EISENHOWER DEFENDS NIXON'S HONESTY, but used the Stevenson story on page 1 the first day. In 1952 the Philadelphia *Inquirer,* then an Annenberg paper, put the Nixon story on page 2 and the Stevenson story on page 1 under the biggest headline used in the campaign. In 1972, now a Knight paper, it used the Los Angeles *Times* story prominently under a page 1 banner, but did not use either the Oct. 10 or Oct. 25 stories.

The St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* in both 1972 and 1952 used stories at first opportunity on page 1. The more conservative St. Louis *Globe-Democrat* in 1952 held the Nixon story a day and then ran it under the head IKE PUTS TRUST IN NIXON, but ran the Stevenson story on page 1 at first opportunity. In 1972, it ran the Los Angeles *Times* story in its third section, and the Oct. 10 and 25 stories not at all.

The Cleveland *Plain Dealer* used the Nixon story the first day on page 13 in 1952 and the Stevenson story on page 1, but three days late. In 1972 it did not use the Los Angeles *Times* story, put the Oct. 10 story on page 1, the Haldeman story on page 8.

In 1952 the Los Angeles *Times* held the Nixon fund story for three days and then ran it as EXPENSE FUND FOR NIXON EXPLAINED BY FRIENDS. It ran the Stevenson fund story on page 1 the first day. In 1972 it gave its own story a big page 1 play, but put other stories on the inside, and skipped the Haldeman story on Oct. 25—perhaps a reflection of the endemic bitterness of the Washington bureau of the *Times* toward the *Post.*

The San Francisco *Chronicle* had a good record of prominent display at first possible opportunity of stories in both 1952 and 1972.

In comparing behavior of the papers in 1952 and 1972 the numbers only hint at relative journalistic performance; the stories are different in quality and impact and the times have changed. But insofar as they have any comparative meaning, in 1952 the papers in the study had thirty-one aggregate opportunities to use the Nixon-damaging story on page 1 at first opportunity (if they waited for a second-day story they could run the denial instead) and this happened 40 per cent of the time. In this 1972 study of the three major breaks in October, they had ninety aggregate opportunities to use Nixon-damaging stories on page 1 and did it 32 per cent of the time.

Though the precise numbers are minimally significant, the general quality of use is not. American journalism learned much from its doctrinaire errors of the 1950s. McCarthyism and the start of anti-press statements with Adlai Stevenson's "one party press" commentary had its impact. It was in the years 1952 to 1968 that professionalism in journalism rose rapidly and the old assumptions of the dogfight on Champa St., of the police reporting mentality, of Chamber of Commerce boosterism, of cynicism about news, and of the almost universal acceptance of each paper's sacred cows all began a metamorphosis into re-

portorial independence and discipline that have changed the face of the trade. But the performance of the printed press in October was not up to that elevated standard and is one of the more depressing signs of deterioration under pressure.

There were technical reasons why some papers might not have been able to run the stories at once, but only a few. AP and UPI were late in picking up the Los Angeles *Times* and Washington *Post* stories. The Oct. 5 Baldwin story was on AP at 3:08 a.m., Eastern time, and on UPI almost seven hours later. This would have made it unavailable for those morning papers not receiving the Los Angeles *Times*-Washington *Post* news service. These would be the *Wall Street Journal,* Richmond *Times-Dispatch,* New York *Times,* and New York *News* in the East, and the Minneapolis *Tribune* and Chicago *Tribune* in the Midwest (where the hour's difference would not help much). But the *Times,* the *Daily News,* and the *Wall Street Journal* did not run the story in their next editions on Oct. 6.

All other papers either were PMs (fifteen), or AMs with the Los Angeles *Times*-Washington *Post* news service (eight), or were in the West where, in subsequent AP and UPI pickups, the time zone difference made up for the lateness of wire copy. The Haldeman story for Oct. 25, for example, was on AP at 11:48 p.m. and UPI at 11:58 p.m. the night before, hitting the Western papers before 9 p.m. Los Angeles *Times* and Washington *Post* service clients received stories at about the same time as did the *Post* itself.

The failure to use these major stories was not for lack of space. The day the Chicago *Tribune* decided not to run the sabotage-Clawson story, it had space in its main news section for two stories, each 14 inches long, with headlines NEW PHOENICIAN TEMPLE IS FOUND and BAGELS BECOME A U.S. STAPLE.

The day the Cleveland *Plain Dealer* did not run the Los Angeles *Times* story, it had a campaign page headed by a picture of Sargent Shriver shaking his fist belligerently, with a prominent headline below MCGOVERN 'SMEARS' ASSAILED BY AGNEW.

The same kind of reverse accusation occurred in the Richmond *Times-Dispatch,* which on the day it did not run the story alleging a widespread Republican sabotage network had a page 2 story headlined PROBE ASKED OF ATTACKS ON NIXON.

The day the New York *Daily News* did not print the same story it ran an editorial, THE LOW, LOW ROAD, saying, ". . . Senator McGovern's presidential campaign spiraled downward into the gutter. . . . Can such a man be believed, or trusted with the nation's highest office?"

This was in the period when *Time* magazine, which did a creditable job of investigative reporting of the affair, reported:

> *Time* has also learned that Bernard Barker, the former CIA agent who led the raiding party into the Watergate, recruited nine Cubans from Miami in early May and assigned them to attack Daniel Ellsberg, the man who released the Pentagon Papers to the public. Barker flew the Cubans to Washington first class, showed them a picture of Ellsberg, and told them: "Our mission is to hit him—to call him a traitor and punch him in the nose. Hit him and run." . . . The idea was to . . . start a riot.

The attempt was made but miscarried.

It brings thoughts of the movie *Z.* And of daily papers undisturbed by strong signs of thuggery in national politics. It also helps explain why George Gallup found that 48 per cent of Americans had never heard of the Watergate Affair and most of the rest didn't seem worried by it.

This could be another dividend of the Nixon-Agnew attacks on the "Eastern" press (to which the Vice President attached the Los Angeles *Times* and a few other papers west of the Appalachians). Most of the significant findings in the Watergate Affair came from the Washington *Post,* the paper most hated and publicly attacked by the Administration. Other major investigative work was done by the New York *Times* and *Time,* with a major break by the Los Angeles *Times.* These are also the organizations that most damaged McGovern with their reporting and editorials. Despite the obsession of the Nixon media-watchers, these news organizations originate such stories not because they are liberal or anti-Nixon but because they have competent staffs covering Washington.

Apparently the sources of these stories—some of the most experienced staffs in the country—tended to be neutralized by the Nixon-Agnew campaign against them. The *Christian Science Monitor* asked its correspondents around the

country to poll people on the impact of the Watergate Affair. Godfrey Sperling, Jr., reporting on the results, wrote, "Many people, it seems, are slow to accept 'evidence' which has been brought forth by Eastern publications."

If the networks did almost no original reporting requiring intense investigation, this is not unusual. What was unusual in TV in the fall of 1972 was another phenomenon, also a radical retrogression from good journalism.

The networks were used in some ways they could not easily avoid, any more than could the correspondents who were handed press releases in midflight. The President would buy radio time

"Pro-Nixon papers had a higher rate of suppression . . ."

for a "white paper" that removed him from questioning but was the basis for lead stories in newspapers thereafter. But broadcasters were used in other ways that they could have prevented. *Variety* on Oct. 25 reported that some of the same TV stations that had told the McGovern campaign they could not clear time for him on Oct. 10 "for reasons of policy" had cleared similar time for the Nixon campaign, "their rigid policies having been reconsidered and abandoned." Two New York outlets had said they could not clear time for McGovern; yet they did so for Nixon's substitute, John Connally. Five of the seven outlets in Los Angeles found their time could not be made available for the McGovern campaign but could for Nixon's, as did five of six in Philadelphia and every TV outlet in cities like Cleveland and Detroit.

But the most significant change in network behavior in this campaign was the almost complete disappearance of prime-time political specials on issues between Labor Day and Election Day. The documentary in prime time has a special function in TV journalism. It is the only time a large national audience obtains any more than a detached fragment of unintegrated information. Walter Cronkite's CBS news show included several five-minute "mini-documentaries." They were often effective, but were no substitute for reporting in depth about basic issues.

The campaign did not lack for issues which were more important than those in most elections: wage-price controls affecting every working person; the proper size of the future defense budget; the Vietnam War and the peace-is-at-hand announcement; the relationship government should have to big business such as ITT and Lockheed; the Watergate and its questions about political ethics; and the history and character of the two men running for office, one only semi-visible in the White House, the other not well known to most voters.

In the past, networks had made election specials out of lesser stuff. In 1960, CBS devoted fifty-five minutes to the minor candidates; in 1964, a special to Mrs. Goldwater; in 1968, a program to the vice president of the third party. The CBS Labor Day-Election Day schedule for unpaid election specials has been:

1960—four hours for the Nixon-Kennedy debates; one hour on *Money and the Next President;* one hour called *The Right Man;* and 55 minutes on *Other Hats in the Ring.*

1964—30 minutes on Mrs. Goldwater; 30 minutes called *Politics Is a Funny Business;* 60 minutes called *The Presidency;* 30 minutes called *One Week to Go;* 30 minutes on *The Polls and the Candidates;* 30 minutes on *Conversation with Dean Burch;* 30 minutes called *The Press and the Candidates;* 30 minutes on *Conversation with John Daley;* and 30 minutes called *Two Days to Go.*

1968—30 minutes called *Conversation with Lawrence O'Brien;* 30 minutes on *Wallace's Selection of a Vice President;* 30 minutes on *The Next Vice President;* 30 minutes on *Candidates in Close-Up;* and an hour called *Two Days to Go.*

1972—60 minutes on *The Election Year;* and 60 minutes called *Two Days to Go.*

ABC, the Administration's favorite network, ran no specials this year. Asked why, a spokesman

said, "It's 315, the fairness rule. If we have a documentary that has one minute of a McGovern supporter we've got to have one minute of a Nixon supporter. And then we have to have the same time for every one of the minority parties. Just let me tell you what we'd have to do: Benjamin Spock of the Peoples' Party, John Schmitz of the American Party, Linda Jenness of the Socialist Worker Party, Gus Hall of the Communist Party, Earle Harold Munn of the Prohibition Party, Louis Fisher of the Socialist Labor Party, John Hospers of the Libertarian Party, and John Mahalchik of the America First Party, who would probably insist on showing his replica of the White House molded out of bull excrement."

The ABC spokesman obviously had his list at hand. But the fact is that in any network political documentary on issues Mr. Mahalchik wouldn't have a chance. The Federal Communications Commission says that what the ABC spokesman (and other network people hint at) simply isn't true. Discussion of issues, unlike time given to candidates, is under no compulsion for equal time. The operative language is "afford a reasonable opportunity" for the discussion of conflicting views. The FCC's view of what is a reasonable opportunity is notably broad. An FCC spokesman said, "We have dismissed complaints where there has been a 3-to-1 imbalance in presentation of views. And a network editorial at the end of such a program is not a violation of 315 nor is it interpreted by the FCC as unfair or unbalanced. Documentaries that take a position on issues are not a legal problem. If networks don't put them on it's for some other reason."

"Almost complete disappearance of TV political specials . . ."

The networks provide masses of other reasons why they cannot regularly air political issue specials after Labor Day: they cover the issues in their regular newscasts; they spend a fortune covering the conventions and campaigns and don't have money left for documentaries; the best people to do the documentaries are out on the road covering the campaign; documentaries take a long time to prepare, and two months after Labor Day isn't enough; the new fall entertainment programs are just starting their sudden-death rating fight and early preemption of any of them kills their ratings; because new programs are being tested during the election weeks "those are the weeks when the agencies are in full command" and they don't like their big clients' shows skipped; and it's pro football time.

Then why was there time after Labor Day for specials like *How to Handle a Woman* (NBC); *Country Music Awards* (CBS); *Private Pension Funds* (NBC)? The Television Information Office urged the public to include in its October viewing such specials as one on the Eskimo curlew bird, Oct. 4; *VD Blues,* the fight against venereal disease, Oct. 9; the story of Christian, a lion, Oct. 20; *Smithsonian Adventure,* Oct. 20; *You're Elected, Charlie Brown,* Oct. 29; and so forth.

And how is it that on CBS, for example, in each campaign in 1960, 1964, and 1968 there was an average of seven political election specials, usually at prime time, but in 1972 only two?

The answer appears to be the Nixon-Agnew attack on the networks. The attacks roused public disapproval, a phenomenon that even in microscopic quantities makes broadcast executives catatonic. But there are also some unsubtle practical pressures. The Republican chairman of the FCC began asking for scripts that were critical of the Administration. A conservative ideologue, Patrick Buchanan, organized a White House staff of five persons fulltime to monitor the networks, AP, UPI, and thirty major newspapers. Buchanan warned of possible antitrust action against the networks if they didn't stop critical comments on the Administration. A CBS executive said, "If you don't take the pabulum as they feed it to you at the White House, they feel there is something very, very wrong with you."

Taking official pabulum at face value and repeating it to the public, even though the journalist knew it to be false, created one of the major crises in American politics in this century. For

years, the newspapers and broadcasters repeated straight-faced and without investigation or comment what Sen. Joseph McCarthy said even when they had evidence that what he said was untrue or irrelevant. American journalism emerged from that era with a central lesson that until now has been accepted by all reputable news organizations: it is the duty of the responsible journalist not only to report accurately what an important official says on an important subject but also to inform the citizen when the journalist can show that the important official is wrong.

During the 1972 campaign Cassie Mackin of NBC said on the air, "The President accuses McGovern of wanting to give those on welfare more than those who work, which is not true. The President says McGovern is calling for a —quote—confiscation of wealth—unquote—which is not true." Before Mackin was off the air, top officials at NBC received three calls from the White House. Presidential assistant Ken Clawson said, "She, in effect, called the President a liar." A fourth call came later.

Occasionally Presidents do lie and when they do good journalists say so. More often it is what Lord Tyrrell, permanent undersecretary of state at the British Foreign Office, once told a correspondent: "You think we lie to you. But we don't lie, really we don't. However, when you discover that, you make an even greater error. You think we tell you the truth."

"My primary concern," Patrick Buchanan has said, "is that the President have the right of untrammeled communication with the American people." The communications system in the United States today is the most elaborate in the world. There are 1,750 dailies, with more than 62 million circulation; more than 8,000 weeklies; and more than 8,000 broadcasting stations. The President can preempt prime time on broadcasting networks almost any time he wants, and almost simultaneously does so with front pages of all the papers. It is the most awesome, untrammeled communications power exercised by any leader in history.

The President has his untrammeled communication. But in the fall of 1972 the performance of the news media, the only communications mechanism that can possibly act as a balance to such awesome presidential power, shows that the prolonged attack on the most independent and competent of the nation's news organizations has inhibited the untrammeled interpretation by professional journalists of what the President and his subordinates say and do.

Months before the presidential campaign began, in May of 1972, the *Freedom of Information Center Report,* No. 281, looking at the present state of the media and government, declared: "The analysis concludes that the seeds have been planted for an era of stricter governmental control of the mass media." Coverage of the 1972 presidential election suggests that the seeds have begun to take root.