

The Role of the Mass Media in Society

Major issues around the role of the media in society

- How best can the media serve the public interest?
- How are the media structured and owned?

The Role of the Mass Media in Society

The Great Society

What was the “Great” Society?

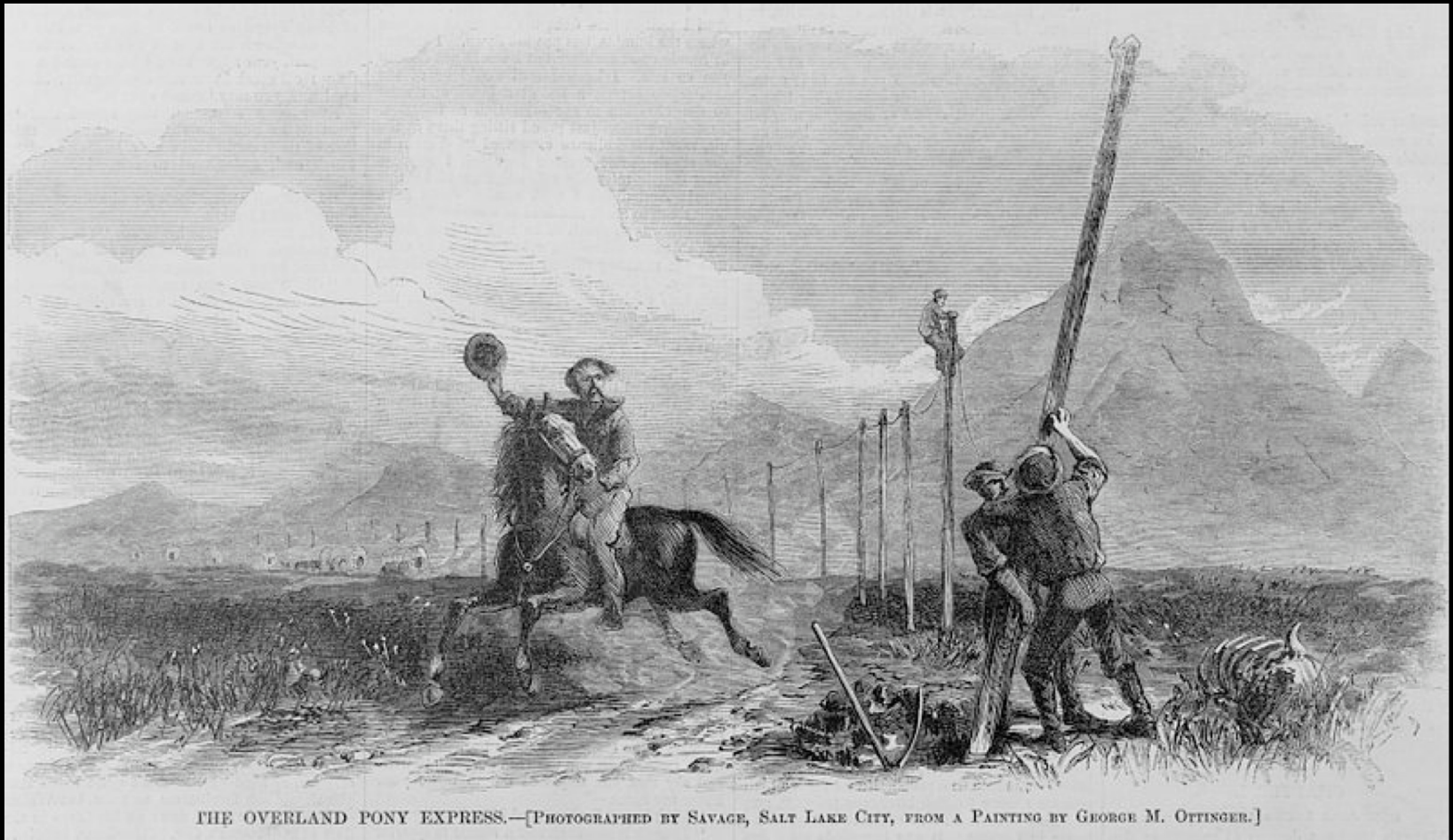
- A society where most people no longer lived in small communities

What was the “Great” Society?

- The specific U.S. case of “mass” society where the nation spanned an entire continent – a geographically great society

What was the “Great” Society?

- The U.S. during the 19th and early 20th centuries, when advances in communications technology made it possible to connect people across the continent



THE OVERLAND PONY EXPRESS.—[PHOTOGRAPHED BY SAVAGE, SALT LAKE CITY, FROM A PAINTING BY GEORGE M. OTTINGER.]

<http://tripsintohistory.com/2012/03/28/building-the-transcontinental-telegraph-lines-westward-expansion-america/>

The Transcontinental Telegraph Line

What was the “Great” Society?

- An ideal of what the U.S. could be under these conditions of:
 - population and geographical expansion and
 - improved communications technology

The Great Society

- Posed challenges for democratic participation
- What were those challenges?

Media and Democracy: The Dominant View

- The media provide the information people need to make informed decisions - especially decisions about who should represent them in the government

Media and Democracy

Lippmann's view

Lippman's View

- In order to understand Lippmann's view it is necessary to understand his concept,

The "Pseudo-environment"

Walter Lippman

Pseudo-environment:

- “A representation of the environment which is in lesser or greater degree made by man himself.”

Walter Lippmann

- People do not act in the real environment based on what that environment is like
- Rather, they act based on their “pseudo-environments”

Walter Lippmann

- Lippmann saw this as a fundamental problem with public opinion since that opinion was supposed to be the basis of democracy

Walter Lippmann

- The media also report news based on their pseudo-environments rather than the actual environment:
 - “...analysis of the nature of news and of the economic basis of journalism seems to show that the newspapers...reflect and therefore...intensify the defective organization of public opinion” (1922/1997: 19).

Walter Lippmann

- The media therefore did not resolve the problem that flawed public opinion posed for democracy

Walter Lippmann

- Why was Lippmann so pessimistic about the ability to make sound decisions based on the media
- He had seen the effectiveness of propaganda in the U.S. during WWI and was alarmed by this



U.S. Propaganda Posters from WWI

Walter Lippmann

- What did he see as the solution?
- Information provided by:
 - “an independent, expert organization for making the unseen facts intelligible to those who have to make the decisions”
(1922/1997: 19). OR

Political Observatories

Walter Lippmann

- Some have challenged Lippmann's faith in the reliability of scientific knowledge
- Others have noted that the political observatories he called for were coming into existence at the time he wrote

Lippmann's Dilemma & Schudson's Response

- Schudson seeks to counter Lippman's pessimism. E.g. he notes that Lippman was writing at an early stage of journalistic professionalism
- He also challenges determinist views of the relation between the Internet and newspapers

Lippmann's Dilemma & Schudson's Response

- The political observatories that Lippmann called for to ensure accuracy in reporting began to emerge around the time that Lippmann was writing (e.g. the Brookings Institution & Govt. Accountability Office)
- The Pentagon Papers, that were leaked to the press in 1971, were the result of a Department of Defense study on the U.S. role in Vietnam



Meryl Streep
Tom Hanks

A Steven Spielberg Film

The Post

Music by John Williams Produced by Amy Pascal, p.g.a. Steven Spielberg, p.g.a. Kristie Macosko Krieger, p.g.a.
DREAMWORKS PARTICIPANT MEDIA
#ThePost ThePostMovie.com Liz Hannah and Josh Singer
Writers: Liz Hannah and Josh Singer Directed by Steven Spielberg

In Select Theaters December 22nd Opens Everywhere January 12th

Lippmann's Dilemma & Schudson's Response

- Political observatories have expanded in number and scope – especially since the 1970s.
- There are political observatories within and outside the government. They include Inspector General's offices (internal) and Human Rights Watch (external)

Lippmann's Dilemma & Schudson's Response

- Political observatories now include Internet databases
- There are challenges to journalism partly from social, economic and technological factors
- Journalists and political observatories work in partnership with each other

Lippmann's Dilemma & Schudson's Response

- The ethos of democracy, participation and rights has become a feature not only of news but also of the Internet

Lippmann's Dilemma & Schudson's Response

- While the Internet by itself is NOT the main determining factor in the future of the news, it is a factor in the expansion of news providers and of political observatories

Question for Wednesday

- Are the news media biased?

