The Academy of Political Science

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POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY

Volume 123 · Number 1 · Spring 2008

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Political Science Quarterly
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the economy. But one could hardly tell from this account why, say, James Madison's *Notes on Confederacies Ancient and Modern* played much of a role in his thinking, or that he and other delegates drew on a republican understanding of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England to help frame their ideas. Gordon Wood, where are you?

And then there is the telltale amateur sign of the sources Stewart uses. Clear scholarly preference would be to employ the contemporary documentary editions of *The Papers of George Washington*, *The Papers of James Madison*, and *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, but Stewart relies on what he calls the "Correspondence of George Washington, James Madison, and Thomas Jefferson." Nor is there any excuse for using *Elliot's Debates* (a product of the antebellum period) to trace debates in state ratifying conventions when most of them are already available in *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution (1976-)*. One suspects that Mr. Stewart might have learned a thing or two from the documentary editors' handling of constitutional materials; exposure to the best in modern documentary editing surely would not have hurt.

All in all, the account in *The Summer of 1787* is not so much wrong as it is irrelevant. Scholars do not need it, and the reading public can find the same or better elsewhere. One is left wondering why books like this are published in the first place. Still, I suppose there is reason to be glad that the public takes an interest in these matters; after all, it is their story as much as the historians'.

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When the Press Fails: Political Power and the News Media from Iraq to Katrina *by W. Lance Bennett, Regina G. Lawrence, and Steven Livingston. Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press, 2007. 278 pp. $22.50.*

The analysis presented in this challenging book is based on the premise that a free press in a democratic society must "raise timely questions about debatable government policies" and must "report challenges to those policies when they fail" (p. x). Judged by these standards, as the authors apply them, the American press has failed repeatedly in major and tragic ways during the George W. Bush presidency.

The authors contend that expert news management by government officials, especially the president and his supporters, has all too often seduced the media to serve as handmaidens for incumbent governments, rather than as spokespersons for the American people. Reporters rely heavily on sources within official networks and are reluctant to feature opposing views expressed by unfamiliar critics.

The authors, all senior scholars with impressive research and publication records, argue their case expertly. Their findings are based on scrutiny of news

coverage of major events like the 2003 Iraq war, the Abu Ghraib torture cases, and the detailed accounts of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina that hit the U.S. Gulf coast. The authors benefit from hindsight when they characterize government policies in these situations retrospectively as "dubious" initially and "failures" ultimately because they fell short of ideal solutions. Prospectively, such judgments are far more difficult, especially when foreign policies are involved.

Herein lies the study's main problem: merit assessments of press performance are applied too uniformly to a variety of situations without considering the ease or difficulty of watchdog journalism and without grappling adequately with the risks engendered by violating the principles of press neutrality. Press coverage of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, which the authors praise highly, is an example of easy watchdogging. Journalists could make their own observations because they had access to the disaster area. Their definition and framing of the situation became dominant because they faced uncharacteristically limited government news management during the crucial initial period of the crisis.

The Iraq situation was far more complex. When an incumbent administration claims that a foreign policy is warranted, basing its analysis on unverifiable facts of the situation, and when few prominent political actors challenge these claims, watchdogging becomes precarious. Lacking insider knowledge and the legitimacy that springs from election to office, journalists are reluctant to undermine government actions that carry the explicit and implicit stamp of approval of most of the country's elected leadership. In such situations, reluctance to feature opposing news stories—aside from critical editorials and opinion pieces—does not constitute press failure. Rather, it is an inevitable consequence of a journalism culture committed to objective news reporting.

If the Bush administration's explanations for its Iraq policies were as blatantly out of line with observable reality as the authors contend, prominent Democrats should have spoken out, giving the press the needed sources for strongly opposing government actions. If the political opposition remained silent, the blame falls on it. The remedy should be reform of malfunctioning political institutions rather than abandoning press neutrality.

Whether or not one agrees with the authors' position, this is an important book worth pondering. When news management has become a science, how can ordinary citizens judge the true merits of the positions that political leaders construct so cunningly to ensure the public's approval? Should and can the press abandon its passion for neutrality and instead dedicate itself to monitoring government performance continuously, systematically, and from an adversarial perspective? If so, who monitors the performance of a self-selected, powerful press that bears no responsibility for governing the country? The book performs a major service by inspiring such questions, even though the answers remain elusive.

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