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What's Wrong With U.S. Opinion-Makers?

Biases of the Media Elite

On July 14, 1964, at the Republican National Convention in the Cow Palace in San Francisco, I watched many thousands of Republicans give wildly sustained applause to an unexpected paragraph in the formal address made by former President Dwight Eisenhower. Here is the way the official Convention proceedings report what happened.

"Let us particularly scorn the divisive efforts of those outside our family [of Republicans], including sensation-seeking columnists and commentators. (Cheers and Applause) Thank you. (Extended Cheers and Applause) Because, my friends, I assure you that these are people who couldn't care less about the good of our Party. (Cheers and Applause)"

David Brinkley and the other television personnel who were present were glad they were high above the crowd in the safety of the glassed-in network observation boxes. For a tense moment, it almost looked as though the crowd was ready to tar and feather them after the usually soft-spoken Ike pointed the finger of shame at the liberal news media.

Nobody had taken a poll of the media in 1964, but the Delegates believed that the media were their political enemies. Now, 18 years later, a study of the presidential voting record of the media elite proves that the intuition of Eisenhower and the Goldwater Delegates was correct.

The media elite voted 94% for Lyndon Johnson to 6% for Barry Goldwater in 1964; 87% for Hubert Humphrey to 13% for Richard Nixon in 1968; 81% for George McGovern to 19% for Richard Nixon in 1972; and 81% for Jimmy Carter to 19% for Gerald Ford in 1976. (The 1980 election was not included in the survey.)

These figures are from an extraordinary in-depth study of the national media elite made by S. Robert Lichter and Stanley Rothman and recently published in the magazine *Public Opinion*. Their findings were based on an hour-long interview with 240 journalists and broadcasters at the most influential media outlets, such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, CBS, NBC,

ABC, and PBS. Their findings make sensational reading even for those who have long recognized the liberal media bias.

The Lichter-Rothman survey took a searching look at the social and personal backgrounds of the media elite. What comes through loud and clear is that they are a socially privileged class from upper-middle-income homes. Not only are they well educated, well paid and well-to-do, their parents were also well educated and well-to-do.

Here are some of the Lichter-Rothman statistics: 95% are white, 79% are male, 93% are college graduates, 55% have postgraduate study, and almost half have a family income in excess of \$50,000. Since 68% come from the northeast or north central states, and only 3% come from the entire Pacific coast, it's no wonder they don't warm up to Ronald Reagan.

The most striking and predominant characteristic of the media elite is what Lichter and Rothman called their "secular outlook." Another way of expressing that observation would be to call it an anti-religious outlook. It's no wonder they oppose prayer in the schools; most of the media don't even believe in prayer in church or synagogue.

Exactly 50% say that they have no religious affiliation whatsoever, and 86% admit that they seldom or never attend religious services. Only 8% go to church or synagogue weekly. Almost one in four was raised in a Jewish household; only one in eight identifies himself as Catholic.

The survey shows that the media elite are strong supporters of sexual permissiveness: 90% agree that abortion should be legal; 54% believe that adultery is not wrong; 76% believe that homosexuality is not wrong; 85% believe that homosexuals should be permitted to teach in public schools.

The media take their power seriously. When asked to rate the major groups according to their current influence over American life, the media elite ranked them as follows: business, media, unions, consumer groups, intellectuals, blacks, and feminists. But when asked which groups should rule America, the media elite

chooses itself as number one. After that, in descending order, the media list consumer groups, intellectuals, blacks, business, feminists, and unions.

The media elite are not always successful in telling Americans what to think, but they are stunningly successful in telling them what to think about. The ability to set the agenda for discussions about social policy is what makes the media so powerful.

The Morality Gap

The favorite question now asked by reporters is, "Aren't you concerned about the 'Moral Majority' and the entry of preachers and religious groups into the political process?" Reporters often follow up with questions about the alleged threat of "making political decisions on moral criteria."

Left-wing fund-raisers have gone heavily "into the mails" with fund-raising "packages" filled with emotional hysteria, much underscoring, asterisks, and the frequent use of buzz words calculated to make one's blood run hot. Here is some of the flamboyant rhetoric — all underscored in the original — in a letter signed by the erstwhile Senator from South Dakota, George McGovern: "The danger is clear. The danger is present. The time to act is now."

And what is this terrible "danger" he is so exercised about? The danger that prayer might be restored to public schools, that parents might be allowed to review textbooks before they are given to their own children, and that public schools might teach "creationism" as well as evolution.

TV script-writer Norman Lear is trying to raise \$5 million for the first year of operation of his new organization designed to counteract what he labels "the pernicious danger" of religious groups in politics. Like an oldstyle orator emoting and handwaving, Lear opens his appeal for funds with this tear-jerker: "If I live to be a thousand, I may never write a letter that is more important to me than this one."

Those who feel threatened by the entry of religious groups into politics are trying hard to convey the notion that there is something un-American about applying moral principles to politics, and something offensive about religious groups and leaders entering the political arena. But who is really out of step — the secular political and media leaders who have been running the country for the last couple of decades, or the religiously-oriented leaders who have become political powers and spokesmen today?

The answer to that question was the surprise result of a major study recently completed by Research and Forecasts, Inc., which had been commissioned by the Connecticut Mutual Life Insurance Company to explore American values of the 1980s and the extent to which those values are shared by our leaders. The study concluded that U.S. leaders are out of step with the American public. The American people are far more concerned about moral values than are the top people in most fields such as politics, the news media, science and education.

"It is clear there is a dramatic gap," John C. Pollock, the project's research director, said. "Overall, leaders are different from the public. They don't represent the public."

Mr. Pollock was apparently stunned by the results of the study he directed. He hadn't structured the survey to inquire about religion at all, but the report concluded that religion emerged as "the one factor that consistently and dramatically affects the values and behavior of Americans."

"We had no idea we'd find this," Pollock said, "but there it was, showing up in every sort of systematic analysis, a common thread. It's more than a movement. It's something running through the whole culture."

The 337-page report is the result of 2,018 hour-long interviews with a random, nationally-distributed sample of the public, plus responses to eight-page questionnaires from 1,762 leaders in business, law, education, government, military, the news media, religion, science, and voluntary associations. That's about twice as large a sample as is used in the typical Gallup, Harris or Roper polls.

Which group was found to be closest to the public in beliefs and attitudes? Not politicians, not the media, but the clergy. Are you ready for the second surprise? Businessmen came in second.

The message coming out of this report is that American leaders as a group prove the old adage that birds of a feather flock together, but the flocks of leaders clustering in their New York and Washington, D.C. cloisters are simply out of touch and out of step with the morals, the values, the goals, and the needs of the American people.

It looks as though the morality gap, rather than the misery index, was the decisive factor in the November 1980 election.

Opinion Leaders Are Out of Step

Several independent public opinion survey firms unearthed data this year which tell a great deal about what the American public believes. They reveal a tremendous gap between the beliefs of the people and of the leaders and opinion-makers who run our country.

The Connecticut Mutual Life Report on American Values in the 1980s, a survey taken in late 1980 and released in 1981, asked three groups the question whether they consider the following things "morally wrong." The answers form a consistently striking pattern.

In the following breakdown, the first figure is the percentage of the *public* who think it is morally wrong, the second figure is the percent of *leaders* who think it is morally wrong, and the third figure is the percentage of *law/justice leaders* who think it is morally wrong. Abortion: 65, 36, 25; homosexuality: 71, 42, 30; lesbianism: 70, 42, 30; smoking marijuana: 57, 33, 19; sex before age sixteen: 71, 55, 46; living with someone of the opposite sex before marriage: 47, 32, 19; adultery: 85, 71, 60; pornographic movies: 68, 56, 41; hard drugs: 84, 73, 58; sex between two single people: 40, 31, 17.

The Connecticut Survey thus makes it clear that it is not the American people who are demanding the acceptance of extra-marital sex, alternate lifestyles, and drugs; it is our leaders and opinion-makers in government, education and television who are leading us in that direction; and the law/justice leaders (the courts) are the most permissive of all.

Now let's look at the same kind of breakdown on the religious commitment of these three groups. The figures below are the percentages of the same three groups who answered the Connecticut Survey question saying "frequently."

Feel that God loves you: 73, 54, 44; engage in prayers: 57, 48, 33; attend religious services: 44, 43, 34; read the Bible: 28, 22, 8; have had a religious experience: 25, 21, 9; encourage others to turn to religion: 23, 19, 8.

The liberals who are presently engaging in massive fund-raising solicitations to fight the alleged danger of the "moral majority" and "morality in politics" don't seem to understand why such issues as national defense and the federal courts appear on the political agenda of religiously-motivated people. The Connecticut Survey shows that those issues follow the same pattern as the moral and religious issues.

The above-named three groups responded in the following percentages to the statement, "It is important for America to have the strongest military force in the world, no matter what it costs": 74, 50, 47. Those three groups responded to this statement, "There is too much concern in the courts for the rights of criminals": 70, 69, 41.

Independent confirmation of the Connecticut Survey came from a poll by Sindlinger and Company of Media, Pennsylvania, which found that 77% of the American people do *not* feel that the Federal judiciary reflects their views. This survey shows that massive public support exists for sweeping reforms in the Federal Court system.

Here are some of the Sindlinger results which show public disenchantment with the Federal courts: 73% want Federal judges to face periodic reconfirmation; 68% support replacing present lifetime tenure with direct election of judges; 61% want sensitive issues like "busing, abortion, or voluntary prayer decided in state courts" rather than Federal courts; 81% endorse Congressional efforts to withdraw jurisdiction from the Federal courts over "issues like busing."

A substantial majority of Americans want Congress to assert its power in order to diminish the judicial power: 86% want Congress to scrutinize Federal court decisions to be sure they do not go beyond the bounds of the Constitution; 55% would allow Congress by a two-thirds majority vote to overturn a Supreme Court decision.

The orchestrated responses of the sex-and-violence TV producers, of the *Playboy*-type magazines, and of the librarians who buy dirty books with tax funds is, "But we merely reflect society; we are just giving the people what they demand." The Connecticut and Sindlinger surveys show how phony is that response. The American

people clearly want a decent, moral, law-abiding, and militarily-strong nation.

The New York Times and Campus Trends

The New York Times recently printed a very long, bleeding-heart editorial complaining about what's happening on college campuses today. It wasn't printed on the editorial page; it started on page one, so no doubt many people inferred that it was "news" although it was really opinion.

Starting with the headline "College Students Squeezed Into Career Paths," the *Times* shared its anguish with its readers over what is going on today. The article provides an instructive lesson in liberal attitudes.

The *Times* article begins by asserting that college students now "face a financial squeeze that is increasingly channeling them in a narrow, career-oriented direction." According to the *Times*, "it's an awful thing that students more and more have to weigh the cost of every little thing rather than think, 'is this something I want to study or to do?'" The *Times* reports as "news" the comment of one Ohio student who said sadly that "adolescence has been an American luxury, but we can't afford it anymore."

The truth is that the fact that college students are becoming career-oriented, and are learning to make the hard choices that real life requires, is the best news that has come out of campuses in a long time. It's about time that college students learn that life requires making daily choices between what you "want" to do and how much it costs!

Whether America can afford the luxury of adolescence is irrelevant, because most college students are not adolescents and it is ridiculous to pretend they are. If they are old enough to vote, they are old enough to make choices between "wants" and costs.

The *Times*' next complaint is that a growing number of students must work in order to meet college costs. "The need to work and study at the same time has created stresses. It has forced many students to give up such pleasures as fraternity membership, movies and football games; fewer seem to have cars."

So what's wrong with that? The experience of paying your own way, of learning the value of a hard-earned dollar and how to budget your time, and of acquiring responsible job habits, is a much greater learning experience than college social life, entertainment, or spectator sports. I know, because I worked 48 hours a week on the night shift (without a car) while I was carrying a full college course.

The *Times*' next complaint is the sharp decline in the number of students going to graduate school in the arts and sciences. The truth is that this decline shows that today's college students are smarter than those of the 1970s who spent five to ten years of their productive young lives preparing for jobs that don't exist; today there are too many Ph.D.'s looking for too few available Ph.D.-type jobs.

The *Times* article is so uptight about changing trends on college campuses that the author didn't seem

to notice his inconsistencies. The same article complains about the drop in graduate students "who will be America's future college professors" and then admits that, "because of an oversupply of doctorates and slipping university enrollments, there are often 100 applicants for a teaching post."

The *Times*' next complaint is the dramatic shift away from traditional liberal arts courses to engineering and business schools. So what's wrong with that? Our country desperately needs engineers, far more than we have been producing.

The *Times*' next complaint is that a survey conducted at 368 colleges and universities shows that the number of this year's freshmen who say that "to make more money" is an important reason for going to college has risen from 57 percent to 67 percent. The *New York Times* certainly hasn't abandoned its own motive of making money out of the news.

The *Times*' next complaint probably comes the closest of all to revealing why the *Times* is so upset at changing trends on college campuses. A survey made for the American Council on Education discovered that freshmen calling themselves "conservative" have risen from 15 percent in 1971 to 24 percent today, while freshmen calling themselves "liberal" has dropped from 37 percent in 1971 to 18 percent today.

Now, *that* is something for the nation's most prestigious liberal newspaper to be really alarmed about! But even worse from a liberal point of view is that the financial pinch has produced a revival of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps program.

During the Vietnam War, the liberals were pleased that student protests required R.O.T.C. to be shut down on many campuses. The Army R.O.T.C. program, which had dropped to 33,220 in 1973, is up to 72,463 students enrolled today. No wonder the anti-defense liberal establishment is worried!

Sabotaging Reagan's Economic Program

Cutting up President Reagan and his economic program has become the current indoor sport of the national news media. Orchestrated throughout the electronic and the print media, these attacks are blatant anti-Reagan political propaganda masquerading as news.

Night after night on the national television news programs, the American public is shown heartrending stories about people allegedly hurt by the Reagan program. We are shown pictures of senior citizens who will not be able to make ends meet, school children who will be hungry because the school lunch program is reduced, and blacks who will be out in the cold because urban programs are cut.

Network television features tear-jerking pictures of lovable little children who will be left without supervision because Reagan cut federal funds for child day-care. In order to maximize the emotional impact of the segment, television solemnly tells us that many homes burn to the ground because unattended children play with matches. The implication is that this is all Ronald

Reagan's fault; nobody ever asks the question of where the fathers are and why they are not looking after or supporting their children.

As one example of print media attacks, look at a recent *Newsweek* article presented as news under the headline "And the Poor Get Poorer." No proof was offered in the text that any "poor" have gotten any "poorer", but, no matter, the headline conveyed the propaganda message plus its subliminal corollary that "the rich get richer," a favorite refrain of Speaker Tip O'Neill.

Even more misleading than the headline was the colored graph that accompanied it. The graph was designed to convey the pictorial impression that the poor are getting poorer because the purchasing power of the minimum wage has declined dramatically.

The graph plotted the minimum wage as a function of time, from 1975 extrapolated to 1983. It actually shows two curves: one measures the minimum wage in 1975 dollars and the other in nominal dollars (face-value). The curves both start at \$2.10 in 1975 and rapidly diverge due to the effect of inflation. The difference by 1983 is \$1.78, which *Newsweek* ostentatiously points out with bright red arrows.

The implication is that the Reagan Administration has cheated poor people out of \$1.78 per hour. Actually, the \$1.78 is completely meaningless. It makes no sense to subtract inflation-adjusted dollars from face-value dollars.

The subtraction in *Newsweek*'s graph is analogous to the following example: Suppose that you want to drive ten miles. If you drive a foreign car that measures distance in kilometers, you will have to drive 16 kilometers. It makes no sense to complain that you have to drive six extra kilometers in the foreign car.

Newsweek's use of a truncated graph makes it appear that the purchasing power of the minimum wage is only a few cents. The misleading effect of a truncated graph was pointed out years ago in the classic work "How To Lie With Statistics" by Darrell Huff. The figures may be true, but they give a false impression because there is no zero line at the bottom, and the proportion between the ordinate and the abscissa is distorted to produce maximum dramatic effect.

The headline "And the Poor Get Poorer" is misleading in other respects. The article says that half of the minimum wage earners are between ages 16 and 24. The minimum wage earners in 1975 are obviously not the same as those in 1983; so who got poorer? The article says that experts predict that 200,000 new jobs will be created by freezing the minimum wage. The people who get those new jobs are certainly not getting any poorer.

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