

Mass Media in the Digital Age

Lesson 2 *Regulating Print and Broadcast Media*

Review Questions

I. Media Protections

- A. The First Amendment means that print media are free from prior restraint. The government is, therefore, not allowed to censor information by preventing the press from publishing it.
- B. FOIA, the Freedom of Information Act, requires federal agencies to release most files to the public, providing the press access to much information. Although there is no federal shield law, state shield laws protect reporters from having to name their sources. Without these laws, many sources of information would be unavailable to the press.

II. Regulating Media

- A. The FCC is the Federal Communications Commission, a government agency with authority to regulate interstate and international communications by radio, television, telephone, telegraph, cable, and satellite.
- B. The two major regulatory activities of the FCC deal with the content of broadcasts and with ownership of the media.
- C. The purpose of the fairness doctrine was to discourage one-sided coverage of issues and encourage stations to present a range of issues.
- D. Since media outlet owners can influence the message their outlets present, the FCC set rules preventing the concentration of media ownership in any given area. This was to provide a wider range of ownership, leading to differences among the messages presented by the news media in any given area.
- E. A key objective of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 was to increase competition. This objective was not met, since an even greater concentration of media ownership followed.

III. Media and National Security

- A. The government, for reasons of national security, wants to keep some information secret, while the media wants to keep the public informed and the government transparent. The government opinion of what should be classified may differ from the media's opinion.
- B. During the Vietnam War, there were few limits on reporters, so they were able to roam freely across combat zones and report on the doubts expressed by soldiers over the way the war was being fought. The Defense Department wanted to prevent this negative reporting during the Persian Gulf War.
- C. The Pentagon allowed 500 reporters to accompany troops into battle as "embedded" journalists, who reported live on encounters but who were restricted in the information they were allowed to report.
- D. WikiLeaks provided thousands of U.S. State Department documents to news media around the world. The government believed these leaks jeopardized American lives, but the press was shielded by the First Amendment's protection.

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Summary and Reflection

The media keep the government both transparent and accountable in a number of ways. The freedom from prior restraint protects the print media from government censorship of information before it is published, including information that may be embarrassing to the government but not harmful to national security. FOIA and shield laws provide access to government papers and protect journalists' sources. Ending of the fairness doctrine did lead to extreme and one-sided views, but it has been argued that even these strident political opinions offer listeners an alternative viewpoint. Periodic leaks of government documents such as the Pentagon Papers, WikiLeaks, and the information leaked by Edward Snowden expose secret government policies and so lead toward government transparency and accountability.