The Media and Its Impact on Institutions of National Government

Stephanie R. Felder
Roxborough High School

Abstract:

“Political Culture” is at the foundation of American society. Historically, American political culture is rooted extensively, though not exclusively, in the ideas of English political culture. The founding fathers of the United States leaned heavily to the writings of the English and French. In early political readings, the ideas of Jefferson, Hamilton, Franklin, and others permeated the dominant ideas of the times. These ideas were distributed through writings and orations. In today’s society, the mass media dominate our culture. The New Oxford American Dictionary defines the media as the main means of mass communication (esp. television, radio, newspapers, and the Internet) regarded collectively. This unit will focus on the ways in which the mass media have influenced political culture through the study of elections, the presidency, the congress and the judiciary.

The textbooks students’ use takes the historical view of four periods in journalistic history. Theses periods include “The Party Press”, “The Popular Press”, “Magazines of Opinion” and “Electronic Journalism”. As noted by Wilson and Dilulio in American Government Ninth Edition, the “Party Press” can be describe as the era in which politicians created, sponsored, and controlled newspapers to further their interests. The “Popular Press” can be categorized as the self-supporting mass readership daily newspapers. “Magazines of Opinion” developed to satisfy a middle class market that was repelled by what they considered to be the “yellow journalism” of the time. These magazines discussed issues of public policy. “Electronic Journalism” was developed with the advent of radio in the 1920’s and television in the 1940’s. This form of journalism has steadily increased and dominated the way in which we gather information, all the more so with the rise of the Internet. We will use these periods to study themes in political development.

This unit will also explore and analyze the ways the media shape public opinion and media bias. We will look especially to the way the media cover the president and the way that they cover the congress. Additionally, we will explore how the government controls the media. One of the methods we will use to explore this is the analysis of political cartoons. Another method will be to analyze the use of advertisements in campaigns and how these advertisements shape public opinion.