

WHAT ABOUT THE MEDIA?



RANDY JONES

INTERVIEWS BY MICHAEL McCUSKER

The North Coast Times Eagle celebrates its 20th birthday by asking an impertinent question of a few coastal folk:

"What do you think of the media?"

The question is purposely vague and generalized to plumb the various definitions, opinions and effects the media has on contemporary American society, and to also microscopically gauge public attitudes toward the media:

(Is it the 'Watchdog of Freedom' or the 'Lapdog of the National Security State'? Is it the 'Stenographer of Power'? Is it fair and impartial or biased and coercive? Is it fatally corrupted by profit and merger? Is 'Trash Journalism' all we can expect in the future from the media?)

The answers are varied and critical but the collective verdict is ambiguous. If media does not in respondents' opinion rule entirely, it yet seems to be the most pervasive, controversial and disquieting influence on the American public.

While two previous surveys of local opinion conducted by this newspaper were literally random chance ('The Impeachable Question', Jan/Feb '99; 'What Do We Do About The Salmon?', May/June '99), a group has been intentionally singled out to answer this question, cast members of the 1999 production of 'Shanghaied in Astoria'. They are a varied bunch, in age as well as opinion, and their responses reflect the diversity of everyone asked.

CYNDY LEE

I think the whole trip with media is that it's going to be homogenous — stereotypical roles for men and women. It's all hype, people acting hysterical. It's worse than it's ever been.

People watch TV for role models but it's more sexist than ever. Somebody who's an object of controversy gets only a paragraph in a newspaper or a couple of seconds if any on TV, but the cops, district attorney or politicians get all the press or time they want.

We need a forum such as the alternative press offers. That's a safeguard so we can have a public forum when we really need it. Advertisers and corporations dictate to the regular media but not to the alternative media. Most alternative newspapers or radio stations usually don't have much money but we can always have a carwash or something to raise the money if we need it to get issues out there for people to read or see them.

(Cyndy Lee is a proud member of the 'Schlock Sisters' and proprietor of The Last Garage Sale in Astoria.)

TOM CARMICHAEL

The media should report the facts and be evenhanded, which it is not. With few exceptions the media is a bunch of liberals spewing the same old liberal line. Whether it is TV or newspapers, the media should not be conservative or liberal. It should be objective and the people reporting should know about the subject they're reporting on.

(Tom Carmichael owns an Astoria oil company and is a former Clatsop County Commissioner.)

CHARLES ('BUDDY') HOELL

You can take news from one source — but you have to take it from many sources even if you want to vomit afterward. You have to be open-minded and hear all sides, which is difficult for me because I am hard-headed. You should seek out divergent opinions.

We are all biased in some way, but we must read and listen to more sources than one however difficult it is as we grow older and more set in our opinions.

(Buddy Hoell hosts historical tours of Astoria and is the author of *Air Force Para-Rescue 50 Years: 1943-1993*.)

JIM WILKINS

The American media has evolved into an anti-democratic institution. The media is part of the popular culture which is largely driven by the media. The worm eating its own tail — self-fulfilling prophecy: Say something and make it happen.

The media has way too much power because modern society developed with newspapers and television. People are so distanced from each other they don't talk and instead use the media for information, which gives it a power it should not have, such as influencing elections. It is distressing to think of the American public being manipulated by the media, but apparently it is if you look at election results.

What the media should report are facts, but what they do is based on other factors beside the truth. What comes quickly to mind is the CIA/Contra involvement with crack cocaine in the black districts of Los Angeles. Only one reporter tried to print the truth but he was shut down and his newspaper forced to print a retraction. This is an example of corporate political pressure and manipulation.

The corporate power structure of the media itself has power it uses primarily for its own profit and political influence. What they do is not so much distort but present selective information rather than the whole truth.

Even public broadcasting is influenced by big corporations who give it lots of money — there is no other interpretation as to how that works.

(Jim Wilkins is a former Astoria City Councilman and owner of a construction company that bears his name and a restaurant, Uniontown Cafe. He is also a musician. "The local media has written articles about me because of my community and political involvement," he says, "and they never get it right — not once!")

DON MARSHALL

I gave up reading newspapers. I will occasionally watch a TV news flash if it is a world shaking event. I'm not interested in Kosovo, Clinton or killing a whale. I don't pay much attention any more because of saturation — that's the word: *Saturation!*

I've become rather apolitical, so that leaves me out of a broad spectrum of media. My interests are ancient history, Egyptian, Mayan and Olmec. I read articles or watch TV documentaries about them avidly.

(Don Marshall has written many books on Pacific Coast shipwrecks and his experiences as a U.S. Marine on Iwo Jima during WW2. He is most recently author of [written with his late wife Johna] *Eh, What's That You Said: Jargon of the Sea*.)

POLK RILEY

I think the media is so involved with selling products and making money they don't really give the American people the truth about anything. We have been lied to for so long. Our press isn't any different than Hitler's or Stalin's. It's purpose is to lie and manipulate and keep us numbed and comfortable: *The stock market's fine, don't rattle the cage!*

(Polk Riley owns his own print shop in Astoria. He suggests as a "primer" for understanding media and American politics that everybody read *Betrayal* by Bill Gertz.)

PAM JENKINS

I enjoy the news. I look for it in many places. I read newspapers. I watch 'talking heads' and TV news, whatever it is (and I truly mean it that way). I know of instances where the media is not welcome because of the personal nature of a situation, which does not have to be on public view or treated as news.

I truly do not like war viewed as no more or less important than anything else on TV news that is telecast between commercials.

My dad says if movies or TV had shown World War 2 as it actually was (he is a veteran of the war) we would not have had any wars afterward. No Korean War. No Vietnam, 'Desert Storm' or Kosovo. 'Surgical airstrikes' don't really show what war is.

I don't believe in war. I think television coverage of war — virtual reality of murder and horror without leaving the house — both encourages and discourages the public's appetite and

support for war. People who don't want to see war on TV don't. People who do watch it.

After World War 2 we should have said "Never again."

Yet what do you do about Kosovo refugees?

We have been far too selective in our 'missions of mercy'. You can't just look at white people who are in distress. We have to look at people of color also. The media does not do a good job at looking at what happens in Third World countries, concentrating mainly on white/European and USA affairs.

(Pam Jenkins is Residential Wing Supervisor at the Tongue Point Job Corps Center.)

FENTON STOKELD

I am not quite happy with the way media shows itself off of late. If someone is to experience a tragedy it is bad form to have microphones and cameras shoved in your bloody face. I don't pick up newspapers anymore. I watch CNN in the morning and get the whole day's news.

The media is bent toward the purpose of special interests rather than the public interest. The media gives us a half-truth but if indeed they knew half the truth they couldn't give you even that.

The media is being taken out of the picture and replaced by the Internet. You can plug into the Internet and get the real picture instead of distorted or selective presentations by the media. The Internet supersedes the self-appointed members of the media. It's the difference between representative and participatory journalism, like in politics.

(Fenton Stokeld and his wife Jill are co-owners of the Ship Inn in Astoria.)

PAUL THORSNESS

There are no rules governing context or amount of coverage by the media, intentionally so to protect the First Amendment. Therefore the media format is not cast in stone but rather ebbs and flows with public interest. As long as there is debate on the content and amount of media coverage I think we live in a healthy society.

I think NATO has slanted some things with the crisis in Kosovo. However I think the Serbs and perhaps Russia have



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