A Marxist analysis of an editorial column as a site of struggle for meaning

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A MARXIST ANALYSIS OF AN EDITORIAL COLUMN AS A SITE OF STRUGGLE FOR MEANING

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

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ABSTRACT

A Marxist Analysis of an Editorial Column As A Site of Struggle for Meaning

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This study calls into question the repressive authoritarianism of state-corporate capitalism and the “march of the megamedia” by investigating the media’s role in perpetuating and sustaining hegemony. According to Marxist critics, the collective operations of the culture industry have worked to destroy the revolutionary potential of the working class. In a resistant textual reading and content analysis utilizing Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, this study looks at how a newspaper editorial fatalizes readers into passive acquiescence of the prevailing political and socioeconomic system. To gain the willing consent of the masses, the technocratic elites of media systems create a world that appears natural and inevitable rather a social construction. By reading the editorial column through the deconstructive lens of critical Marxist thought, this study finds a text infused with an ideology that serves the interests of those who possess social, political, and economic power.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

All is not well in American journalism. Our system of mass media is not functioning at the levels needed to serve the needs of a democratic society. Mass media refers to “devices for moving meanings across distance or time to achieve mass communication. The major mass media in modern society are books, magazines, newspapers, motion pictures, radio, and television” (DeFleur & Dennis, 1991, p. 621). Recognizing the importance of the media in democracy, Alger (1998) points out, “A keynote of democratic theory has been that a democracy can work only if there is a genuine “marketplace of ideas” for public consideration of basic orientations and particular proposals. Those ideas must come from truly independent sources” (p. 128). Much of the problem in the news media today lies with the dramatic restructuring of the American media landscape. Leviathan-sized corporations have been systematically consuming the smaller fish of the media sea. A barrage of megamedia mergers in 1995 were set off by the introduction and subsequent unimpeded legislative progress of major revisions of the Telecommunications Act which relaxed standards of media ownership and control (Alger, 1998). The passage of the act in February of 1997 gave impetus to an onslaught of media buyouts, “especially with its relaxation of aggregate ownership ceilings—including total elimination of ownership limits on radio stations over the nation as a whole—and other broadcast media regulations” (Alger, 1998, p. 127).
Communication rights in our society have inextricably been linked to the concept of freedom since the days of our founding fathers: freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of the press and freedom of access to information (McQuail, 1992). The First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States (1791) states that “Congress shall make no law . . . abridging freedom of speech, or press . . .” (McQuail, 1992, p. 36). However, even with the blanket of First Amendment immunity, the media have a social responsibility to provide the citizens of the U.S. with the kind of information they need to function and actively participate in a free society. If the mass media are, as has been suggested here, essential in providing a steady stream of information necessary for a successful representative democracy, we need to hold the press and its underlying forces up to intense scrutiny.

The Marketplace of Ideas

If, as is generally thought, we are ensconced in age of information, the power of the media to exercise total control over information is especially ominous. An information society can be defined as “a form of society in which there is a high and increasing dependence of individuals and institutions on information and communication in order to be able to function effectively in almost every sphere of activity” (McQuail, 1992, p. 1). As Ben H. Badgikian (1997), perhaps the best known critic of media monopoly, warns, “At issue is the possession of power to surround almost every man, woman, and child in the country with controlled images and words, to socialize each new generation of Americans, to alter the political agenda of the country” (p.29). To make matters even more complicated, government interference to protect the public from the self-serving interest of the media is contrary to the ideology of our concepts of a free market and a free press (Badgikian, 1997).
The expansion of corporate ownership and control of the media has profound implications for the citizenry of the United States. A necessary condition for democracy is a free and independent press actively involved in producing a “marketplace of ideas” for public consumption which, in turn, fosters a genuine dialogue on key issues (Alger, 1998). This public dependence on the media as a social institution carries with it a public trust that needs to function beyond the media’s immediate self-interests. As Alger (1998) points out, this service towards the goal of democracy “is why the news media are the only private, economic sort of organization given explicit protection in the U.S. constitution” (p. 128).

Material Conditions of the Media

As of 1996, little more than ten media corporations dominated the landscape, down from fifty companies in 1984 (Badgikian, 1997). Badgikian (1997) reports, “In terms of media possessions and resources the newest dominant ten are Time Warner, Disney, Viacom, News Corporation Limited (Murdoch), Sony, Tele-Communications, Inc., Seagram (TV movies, cable, books, music), Westinghouse, Gannett, and General Electric” (p. 31). In the 1940s, 80 percent of the country’s newspapers were independently-owned. Conversely, by the early nineties, more than 80 percent of the newspapers were owned by media conglomerates. As of 1992, 12 newspaper conglomerates controlled about half of all the newspapers sold in the U.S. daily (Alger, 1998, p. 26). In 1989, in one fell swoop there came about a merger of epic proportions. Time, Inc. merged with Warner Communications to form Time Warner in a $14.1 billion deal, “thus joining Time’s huge stock of magazines, control of the second biggest cable TV operator, cable channels like HBO, book publishers, and so on, with Warner’s major film studio and library, recordings, and so forth” (Alger, 1998, p. 127). Subsequently, in
the early days of this century, an even larger media colossus was formed when America
Similarly, many media corporations today are intertwined in a complex web of financial
entanglements and profit-maximizing strategies, which McManus (1994) has called
"market driven journalism." It seems "deep pockets" and a CPA mentality rather than
journalistic integrity and stewardship are a necessary condition of contemporary
journalism. These include conglomeration, joint ventures, vertical and horizontal
integration, cross-promotion and cross-subsidization (Badgikian, 1997). Busterna (1988)
explains the reasoning behind the formation of conglomerates suggesting, "Size is seen as
one means of possessing superior financial reserves, referred to as the theory of 'deep
pockets.' Profits from different subsidiaries give the conglomerate's pocket its depth" (p.
63). In cross-subsidization, profits from a more lucrative market can be used to subsidize
and augment losses in a less profitable market (Busterna). Badgikian (1997) explains,
"Known and admired on Wall Street as 'synergy,' the policy calls for one company
subsidiary to be used to complement and promote another" (p. 35). Integration pertains
to either 'vertical' or 'horizontal' ownership of control. Vertical integration occurs when
successive steps of the process are under the same ownership; "for example, paper
production, advertising agencies and newspaper production" (McQuail, 1992, p. 89).
Horizontal integration applies when "competing media or media-related business are
jointly owned (the case of multi-media businesses)" (p. 89).

Needless to say the threat of conflict of interest is inherent "when a news
operation covers issues in industrial or commercial areas with which the parent
conglomerate is involved" (Alger, 1998, p. 131). Additionally, journalists run more risk
of "rocking the boat" when attempting to report on stories that may be potentially "bad
for business” for one of the organizations which fund the parent company. This type of “bottom-line” journalism also encourages the practice of editors “suggesting” their journalists look the other way in a conflict of interest situation; or even worse, to report or “slant” the news with an eye to promoting the company’s interests.

Another difficulty with what Badgikian (1997) calls “the imperial fervor” of the media cartel is its conservative nature. Contrary to the widely accepted notion of a “liberal press” Badgikian (1997) suggests, “Almost all of the media leaders, possibly excepting Ted Turner of Turner Broadcasting, are political conservatives” (p. 34). St. Dizier (1986) found chains were more likely to have Republican purchasers and were more likely to endorse a Republican candidate for president. For understanding the particular leanings of the press, Lewis (1990) suggests:

If journalists are sometimes more liberal on “social issues” than the public as a whole—which, given their class profile, we might expect them to be—these left leaning attitudes do not extend to economic questions. Indeed, on economic issues, people who work in the media are generally to the right of the general public—something that given their class profile is fairly predictable. (p. 257)

This would be consistent with the historical precept of the “haves” having more conservative leanings that the more liberally-inclined “have-nots.” McQuail (1992) supports this idea stating, “In the US, where large media groups own numerous different titles... ownership generally goes with Republican leanings” (p. 118). As Badgikian (1997) points out:

With minor exceptions, (the media) share highly conservative political and economic values. Most also own interests in other industries—defense,
consumer products and services; firms like General Electric, Westinghouse, and the country's cash-rich telephone companies—and have shown little hesitation in using their control of the news to support the fortunes of their other subsidiaries. (p. 30)

In their zest for promulgation of their conservative ideology, the media elite have transformed the presses and the airwaves into a propaganda machine for the ultra-conservative political right; especially radio which features an endless run of conservative, right-wing talk shows in the model of Rush Limbaugh (Badgikian, 1997).

Alger (1998), who labeled the increasingly heavy concentration of media ownership as the "march of the Megamedia," sees the "tabloidization" of the news as one consequence of mega-consolidation. The time of the crusading news editor with a "nose for news" dedicated to serving the public interest with daring investigative exposes is rapidly disappearing to be replaced with lurid journalistic titillation, sensationalism, "infotainment" fluff pieces, and endless celebrity prattle. The overwhelmingly commercial character of contemporary media has encouraged "lower-quality, easily-digested simple feature stories featuring gruesome crimes and happy lifestyles" (Entman, 1985, p. 150).

What Cobb and Elder (1975) have called the "agenda-building process" is a process that gives the media the power to exercise undue levels of ideological control over the public domain. Media content is determined by a small group of corporate decision makers who decide whether it is in their best interest to disseminate such information (Badgikian, 1997). As Badgikian (1997) suggests, "What the public learns is heavily weighted down by what serves the economic and political interests of the corporations that own the media" (p. 30). Epstein (1981) argues, "(T)he daily agenda of
reports produced by the media and called ‘news’ is not the inevitable product of chance events” rather it is “simply the result of decisions made within news organizations” (p. 119). Brown et. al. (1987) suggest “the true power lies not only in the decision making arena, but, perhaps most importantly, with those who can determine which issues will be debated” (p. 54). The media hand-picks the issues that come to dominate the public forum and provides support and backup for these vested issues in what Hall (1972) calls a “process structured in dominance” (p. 13).

For instance, certain issues never reach the public at all. Others are glossed over or given minimal coverage. A case in point is the Telecommunications Act of 1996. This act, “which swept away even the minimal consumer and diversity protections of the 1934 act that preceded it,” received very little in-depth coverage in the media (Badgikian, 1997, p. 37). Alger (1988) reinforces this stating, “The nature and likely consequences of the Telecommunications Act got shockingly little attention in the mainstream media, especially the networks” (p. 128). A direct blow to the principle that the “public owns the airwaves,” the act allows, for the first time ever, for a single company to own more than one radio station in the same market (Badgikian, 1997).

To further legitimize the existing system, the media make use of elite sources while, at the same time, suppressing other social voices. Brown, Bybee, Wearden, and Straughn (1987) maintain “the press is simply not doing its job of including and identifying a variety of sources and viewpoints” (p. 53). The bedrock of diversity in a pluralistic society is the opportunity for all voices—the unorganized as well as the organized and the non-governmental as well the governmental—to be heard (Brown et. al., 1987). These voices allow for counterhegemonic penetration, or what Stuart Hall (1972) calls “countervailing forces,” against the narrow set of issues defined by the elite.
However, it has been well documented that the lower status, the unknown, the powerless, the "politically extremist" or the "socially deviant" are virtually omitted from the discussion to the point of invisibility (Palentz and Entman, 1981; Golding and Middleton, 1982; Shoemaker, 1984). Sigal (1973) found in a 20-year content analysis of the New York Post and The Washington Post that "almost 60 percent of the news in all stories came through routine channels, such as official proceedings, press conferences, and press releases, which are predominantly under source control. Furthermore, government officials, both American and foreign, accounted for more than three-fourths of all news sources" (Brown et al., 1987, p. 46). Culbertson (1975) found that 54 percent of all stories in the New York Times and The Washington Post used at least one unnamed source with "(t)he two words most frequently used to veil source identity being "officials" and "spokesman" (Brown et al., 1987, p. 46).

Shoemaker (1984) in her article, "Media treatment of deviant political groups," suggests the media do not actively suppress "the publication of new and different ideas, but rather the media vary their coverage of political groups according to how different they are from the status quo" (p. 66). Milliband (1969) suggests that the views of marginal social groups which do not uphold the popular consensus are ridiculed as "irrelevant eccentricities which serious and reasonable people may dismiss as of no consequence" (p. 238). Lauderdale and Estep (1980) suggest that the media in their selective representation of the world "may be unwitting agents of social control, rather than purposive guardians of centrist ideology" (Shoemaker, p. 66). Even in the few instances when disparate groups are given any kind of access to the media, it is "on the terms set by the 'establishment' and often in a negative context" (Shoemaker, p. 67). If as labeling theorists postulate, "a group will be defined as being deviant if someone
labels it as deviant, not because of any inherent badness” (p. 67), the press is relatively omnipotent in deciding where a group stands on the political spectrum and, in turn, whether that group’s interests will ever appear on the public agenda.

Reporters favor bureaucratic sources “who can provide a regular, credible and ultimately usable flow of information, insight and imagery with which to construct the news” (Brown et. al., 1987, p. 46). Reporters and their elite sources exist in a complex system or reciprocity or “quid pro quo.” The reporter easily and efficiently receives the information he or she needs for a story within the rigid time constraints of the day-to-day production of news—and “the ruling class constructs and circulates the ideas which secure its power” (Strinati, 1995, p. 131). As Brown et. al. (1987) suggest, the easily available information subsidies provided by elite sources are “tailored to ensure that the information is consumed by target audiences—audiences capable to affecting the formal policy agendas of government and other institutions such as business or education” (p. 46).

Jon Ralston and the Greenspun Media Empire

The Greenspun Media Group owns the Las Vegas Sun, an afternoon daily newspaper, Las Vegas Weekly, an alternative newspaper, Las Vegas Life, a glossy city magazine, Showbiz Weekly, an entertainment-based show guide, Vegas Golfer, a glossy addressing local golf, and the Business Voice, the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce’s monthly tabloid-format newsletter. It was the power and growth of this local media empire that was the inducement that lured Ralston away from the rival Las Vegas Review Journal. The Group also owns the Internet site, Vegas.com., NextLink Nevada, a telecommunications business, a portion of Cox Cable, and the Hospitality Network, cable
in hotel rooms, and is in development stages of Las Vegas I, a television station and an unspecified “business weekly” publication for the city of Henderson, Nevada.

It is interesting to note that Chamber of Commerce officials recently announced they were transferring the publication of their magazine from the Las Vegas Business Press to the Greenspun Media Group due to what one official described as the former organization’s “anti-business stance” (Las Vegas Business Press, online, 1999, October 25, p. 1). In response, the Business Press in an article entitled “Readers deserve unbridled news” wrote, “We will not yield on the integrity of our news coverage. The role of this newspaper is to deliver to readers accurate, fair, useful news about business developments in Las Vegas” (online, 1999, October 25, p. 1). Ironically, the Business Press article concluded with, “After the divorce our insistence has caused, we hope the chamber finds its new partner, the Greenspun Media Group, serves it and its propaganda well” (online, 1999, October 25, p. 1).

In his first published editorial column in the Las Vegas Sun, Ralston addressed the question everyone was anxiously awaiting—why he left the RJ for the rival Sun, an act which he himself facetiously calls “signing on with the enemy” (Ralston, online, 2000, January 16, p. 1). One of the reasons Ralston gave for his “signing on with the enemy” was that he was promised a frequent contributorship to Las Vegas I, a Greenspun television channel “including the development of a new public affairs show” and “other projects in the works” (Ralston, online, 2000, January 16, p. 2). Addressing the subject of receiving more money for his new position, Ralston wrote in his column published on January 16, 2000 in the Sun, “I built a valuable product—the Ralston Report—and then sold it” (online, p. 2). Ralston’s telling phrase “I built a valuable product” confirms the commercialized viewpoint held by many of today’s journalists. The phrase was then
softened and qualified by classical journalistic “buzzwords” that characterize the public’s notion of what comprises good journalism. He stated, “I also developed a less tangible commodity—a reputation for credibility and integrity—that helped attract a suitor. Hello capitalism” (Ralston, online, 2000, January 16, p. 1). Hello the state of journalism today.

It is generally a given that “those who benefit from the existing distribution of power and rewards work for stability while those denied access to power and resources work for change” (Jhally, 1989, p. 80). At the same time, the position of market-driven journalism hinges on McQuail’s (1992) assumption that “(d)espite the widespread (press institutional) norm that proprietors ought to refrain from using their power to interfere with editorial decisions (ultimately this would destroy credibility, and, some would argue, business effectiveness) most theorists, especially those critical of the monopoly media, hold that proprietal influence is ever-present, even inevitable” (p. 117). To the contrary, Ralston promised, “As always, I will delight in harnessing my source network and analytical abilities to detail how politics really works in this state, taking a sardonic and occasionally acerbic look at every level of government from Clark County to Capitol Hill. No cows will be considered scared, not topic off-limits” (Ralston, online, 2000, January 16, p. 3).

A Structural Marxist Overview

Critical and Marxist scholars have become increasingly interested in the study of the media. A critical Marxist approach to communications “assumes that social relations of communications are inseparable from relations of power” (Good, 1989, p. 53). A critical approach takes up where the more traditional approaches to communications such as content, effects, and media-uses leave off thereby “creating a climate of questioning all that is otherwise taken for granted” (Good, 1989, p. 54).
Marxism "rests upon the notion that the dominant ideas in any society are those which are formulated by the ruling class in order to secure its rule" (Strinati, 1995, p. 130). Marxist theorists consider the mass media to be an essential instrument in this system acting as "vehicles for ruling class ideology which automatically ensures the desired acquiescence of subordinate groups to ruling class domination" (Strinati, 1995, p. 138). Not only did Marx write of "material production" he wrote of "mental production."

Marx wrote:

The ruling class has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that in consequence the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are, in general, subject to it . . . the individuals composing the ruling class . . . rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age. Consequently, their ideas are the ruling ideas of the age. (qtd. in Strinati, 1995, p. 131)

A Marxist approach suggests the media are incapable of genuinely working for the public good because of its inherent class character (McQuail, 1992). Strinati (1995) agrees arguing:

The subordinate classes gain most of their knowledge of the world from the mass media. Since control of this flow of knowledge, information and social imagery is concentrated in the hands of those who share in the power, wealth and privilege of the dominant class, this ruling class will ensure that what is socially circulated through the mass media is in its interests and serves to reproduce the system of class inequalities from which it benefits. (p. 137)
Although journalists would like to give the impression that they are detached from society, reporters and journalistic institutions are very much a part of society. The “mirror metaphor” they consistently invoke to suggest they act like a mirror to reflect objective and impartial reality back to the public eye is not accurate. Instead, the media are integrated within society and, as Rachlin (1988) suggests, “Their societal integration requires them to be responsive to the same social forces that press on all institutions. The press then is unavoidably of reality, of our social context, not removed or detached from it” (p. 12).

Gramsci’s Theory of Hegemony

Hegemony is the process by which a dominant group gains the willing consent of subordinate groups to maintain subordination. According to Gramsci’s (1971) theory of hegemony, “the liberal democratic societies of western capitalism are different in that they have relatively weaker states and much more extensive and complicated civil societies which strengthen the hegemony of the dominant group” (Strinati, 1995, p. 169). Hegemony reworks the idea of dominance, which traditionally rests upon force or coercion, into a much more subtle, intricate, and dynamic process (Good, 1989). By controlling the context in which people think, the media “reinforces, reproduces, and manages the established order of class, power, and control by monopolizing the production and distribution of culture and information, thus obviating the need for coercion” (Smith, 1995, p. 13).

Good (1989) defines hegemony as “a conceptual tool for understanding and potentially subverting the “consent” of the masses to their own oppression” (p. 61). A Gramscian (1971) view of hegemony consists of the theater of “consent” which presupposes an individual’s willing subjugation to the ideology of the state and their
location within the social structure. Individuals are not aware that they are being restrained by hegemonic forces since the oppression is relatively hidden or at least not readily observable. In the United States, unlike Canada and France, "the rules of the marketplace have been accepted unquestioningly as also the rules of cultural activity" (Jhally, 1989, p. 81). This is the culmination of largely unconscious belief systems resulting in an internalized world-view that is propagated, ingrained, attended to, and maintained by the media, the school system, the government, and other societal institutions. The assumptions that we have come to know as "right" and "good" as defined by the state are perceived as the inevitable outcome of a free society. Smith (1995) sums up the process suggesting, "The consequence of hegemonic processes is that the favored way of life is not only dominant and sustained, but also seen as natural" (p. 13).

Gramsci (1971) perceives hegemony to be an outcome of work carried through by intellectuals in their organizational role in society (Bottomore, 1983). Gramsci would see the media as "intellectuals" or "the producers, distributors and interpreters of popular media culture" (Strinati, 1995, p. 171). In their function of weaving the fabric of hegemony through the culture, they are "engaged in the establishment of, and conflicts over, the prevailing hegemony, within the institutions of civil society" (Strinati, 1995, 171). The journalist or "intellectual," operating within the hegemony of the prevailing culture, demonstrates a historical human approach to events in "that they signify and regulate social relationships in ways their users or creators may not consciously recognize" (Gerbner, 1964, p. 480).

The issue of why some controversial views find their way into popular discourse deserves explanation. Although media discourse is inherently favorable to elite groups, it
does allow for a degree of accommodation (Gramsci, 1971). As Bottomore (1983) maintains, “The material basis of hegemony is constituted through reforms or compromises” (p. 202). Strinati (1995) points out that “hegemony is secured . . . because concessions are given to subordinate groups. The culture which is built around this hegemony will thus express in some way these interests of the subordinate groups” (p. 166). He proposes, “But if we accept the fact that hegemony is also about the battle for ideas, and the consent to dominate ideas, then it might be argued that it also includes concessions to the ideas and values of the subordinate groups” (p. 168). Gramsci (1971) himself wrote:

The leading group should make sacrifices of an economic corporate kind.

But there is also no doubt that such sacrifices and such a compromise cannot touch the essential: for though hegemony is ethical-political, it must also be economic, must necessarily be based on the decisive function exercised by the leading group in the decisive nucleus of economic activity. (p. 167)

We should not look at these processes as some vast conspiracy by the ruling elites and their agents. Strinati (1995) suggests, “Hegemony is not a fixed and determinate set of ideas which have a constant function to perform” (p. 170). He argues, “The mass media propagate ideas which underpin the power of the ruling class, and yet the organizations and groups which do this can act with a certain level of autonomy” (p. 146). Hall (1973) confirms this notion positing that members of the media “are able both to operate with relatively autonomous codes of their own, while acting in such a way as to reproduce (not without contradiction) its hegemonic signification of events is a complex matter” (p. 17). Hall (1973) theorizes the system is so complex the media do
not “simply ‘reproduce the dominant ideology’ but reproduces that ideology and its contradictions” (p. 140). He suggests “the media are ‘leaky systems,’ some alternatives do get through, ‘balance’ commits them to ‘more than one point of view,’ their news orientation predisposes them to go to the danger zones, etc.” (p. 14).

Adorno’s Theory of the Culture Industry

Adorno (1991), who labeled the media as such, suggests “the culture industry,” treats culture as a commodity to be bought and sold on the marketplace; the natural outcome of industrial production applied to cultural products. He argues “the power of the culture industry to secure the dominance and continuity of capitalism resides in its capacity to shape and perpetuate a ‘regressive’ audience, a dependent, passive, and servile consuming public” (Strinati, 1995, p. 64). From the perspective of Adorno’s cultural theory, the mass media define the terms in which we think about the world. The media appear to reflect reality while in fact they construct it. Adorno (1991) distinguishes mass culture from the culture industry because mass culture presupposes that the “masses bear some genuine responsibility for the culture they consume” (Strinati, p. 62). Instead, Adorno (1991) perceived popular culture to be “something that has been imposed upon the masses, and which makes them prepared to welcome it given they do not realize it is an imposition” (Strinati, p. 62). As a powerful and ubiquitous presence in people’s lives, the media’s mass production of the symbolic environment determines the way, as Gerbner (1972) suggests, “we reflect on things, act on things and interact with one another” (p. 38). In other words, the media is the creator of as well as the primary instrument in the dissemination of popular culture (Gerbner, 1972; Smith, 1995).

The mass media are seen as legitimating agents of popular culture because they “maintain the established social order by deadening people’s critical faculties and
legitimizing present social institutions and power arrangements” (Smith, 1995, p. 14). Furthermore, as Smith (1995) sees it, the output of the culture industry encourages “conformity and consensus which ensure obedience of authority, and the stability of the capitalist system” (p. 64).

Marcuse’s Theory of Language

Marcuse’s (1964) view of language can be seen as being directly related to the “common sense, taken-for-granted reality that Gramsci used to build a case for going beyond coercion in the analysis of social control” (Meehan, 1993, p. 108). Marcuse (1964) argues that the concreteness of journalistic language tends toward “an authoritarian identification of person and function” resulting in a “functionalized, abridged and unified language which militates against conceptual thought” (p. 44). He believes this type of language circumvents the critical thinking process. Marcuse (1964) wrote, “This language, which constantly imposes images, militates against the development and expression of concepts. In its immediacy and directness, it impedes conceptual thinking; thus, it impedes thinking” (Marcuse, qtd. in Bennett, 1982, p. 44).

Description of Methodology

This study attempts to situate a cultural text, Jon Ralston’s editorial column in the Las Vegas Sun, as a site for struggle within the larger hegemonic forces in operation locally—namely political and gaming interests. A resistant textual reading and content analysis will be conducted on the Jon Ralston column appearing in the Las Vegas afternoon newspaper, the Las Vegas Sun, in the Wednesday and Sunday editions from the period of January 16, 2000 to April 1, 2000. This time period was chosen because January marked the beginning of Ralston’s employment with the Sun. The culmination of the April date was chosen for the reason of completing a master’s thesis for the spring
semester. All twenty-three columns were examined for content and thematic analysis with representative examples being extracted from twenty-one out of the twenty-three columns examined.

The methodology is based upon a detail textual and qualitative content analysis to investigate the ideological underpinnings of the text. Content analysis works by "establishing certain conceptual categories in relation to media content and then quantitatively assessing the presence or absence of these categories" (Woollacott, 1982, p. 92). According to Celeste Michelle Condit (1994), content analysis relies on a close reading with a focus on key words, metaphors, images, and themes. As such, the methodology of this study will articulate aspects of Foss's (1989) directive of four stages in content analysis. These are (1) Identification of the key terms or symbols based on frequency or intensity; (2) grouping of terms that cluster around the key terms with an emphasis on cause and effect; (3) discovery of patterns in the clusters around the key terms to determine the meanings assigned by the rhetor to them; and (4) naming the author's motive on the basis of the collective meanings of terms. Themes will be assembled and counted to investigate "the interaction between the themes voiced in the text and the social placement and interests of the agents who articulate various perspectives" (Condit, 1994, p. 216). Thematic analysis is concerned with "narrative patterns, the broad outlines that establish a context for determining the significance of elements" (Barkin & Gurevitch, 1987, p. 6). In the search for the subtle or hidden structures of control behind mass media messages, the study will analyze content "as expressive of social relationship and institutional dynamics, and as formative of social patterns" (Gerbner, 1964, p. 480). This thesis will attempt to decipher the symbolic code of the content while exposing the underlying messages of control which an ordinary
reader would not detect upon a casual reading—and bring those mechanisms of a social order to light (Gerbner, 1964).

Textual analysis will also be utilized to explain the frames used by the journalist. Of the framing of issues by the media, Rachlin (1988) states, “It is this orientation within which we can recognize and begin to understand the hegemonic frames that shape media presentation of the news, how that presentation shapes our knowledge of the world, and how as a source of knowledge the media are a most powerful social force” (p. 29).

From a Gramscian Marxist point of view, the column will be examined to reveal whether it supports the status quo or offers a resistance to hegemony. It is the hypothesis of this paper that the adversarial stance taken by Ralston in his Sun column is an example of accommodationist discourse and will be examined as such to locate the underlying forces of hegemony. According to Miliband (1969), many newspapers are “extremely concerned to convey the opposite impression and to suggest a radical impatience with every kind of establishment” (p. 223). Furthermore, he argues, “In actual fact, most of this angry radicalism represents little more than an affectation of style: behind the iconoclastic irreverence and the demagogic populisms there is singular vacuity in diagnosis and prescription. The noise is considerable but the battle is bogus” (p. 223).

Additionally, the column will be analyzed for the use of what Marcuse (1964) describes as “hyphenated abridgment.” Moreover, this study will make use of Marcuse’s theory of the concreteness of language and for the unification of opposites. This thesis will consider Marcuse’s criticism of the journalist’s use of what he calls “hyphenated abridgment” in the phrase: “Georgia’s high-handed, low-browed governor . . . had the state all set for one of his wild political rallies last week.” In Marcusian analysis, Bennett (1982) points out: “The governor, his function, his physical features,
and his political practices are fused together into one indivisible and immutable structure which, in its natural innocence and immediacy, overwhelms the reader’s mind. The structure leaves no space for distinction, development, differentiation of meaning: it moves and lives only as a whole” (p. 44).

This study will utilize hegemonic theoretical criticism as opposed to dominant ideology criticism though some elements will be appropriated from the later. To ignore the hegemonic process of the media within the complex of forces of social reality is to not fully understand them. Gledhill (1988) suggests Gramsci’s theory of hegemony “provides a more appropriate model than that of dominant ideology—with its suggestion either of conspiratorial imposition or unconscious interpellation” (qtd. in Stabile, 1995, p. 405). Condit (1994) argues the dominant ideology framework falls short because it “tends to singularize,” suggesting instead, that hegemony arises “on the basis of a plurivocal set of interests, not a single dominant interest” (p. 226). As such, the critic’s task within a hegemonic theoretical framework is not to locate the voice of one singular group of domination but to describe the interests of multiple groups. As Miliband (1969) suggests, “it needs to be stressed that hegemony is not simply something which happens, as a mere superstructural derivative of economic and social predominance. It is, in very large part, the result of a permanent and pervasive effort, conducted through a multitude of agencies” (p. 181).

Condit (1995) proposes the critic should “assess more than the simple claims of the preferred reading offered by the mediator” and, she posits, with “careful scrutiny, the texts usually tell us what parties are involved, and what they have at stake” (p. 220). Furthermore, the critical analyst “assumes that institutions, societies, and cultures manifest laws and order beyond that apparent to large numbers of people at any time, and
that systems of artifacts express objective, even if subtle or implicit, manifestations of this order" (Gerbner, p. 480).

An Interview with Jon Ralston

In an interview, it was found that the author was thoroughly indoctrinated into elite ideology. Concerning ideological issues, his answers were usually, “I don’t feel qualified to comment on that.” In his assigned beat of local, state and federal politics, he reported full autonomy to select content and suggested no topic is off-limits. He said that he did not have to submit the column for approval before it was published. This would confirm the notion that control in media organizations is not exerted in a coercive fashion but is the function of implicit understandings in the governing of news production. He pronounced that if he took a position contrary to the newspaper proprietors and was told to “kill” a column, he would leave their employment. On the issue of the increasing reach and power of the Greenspun Media Group, he acknowledged its expansion. However, he said the Las Vegas Review Journal had so many readers that the group’s extension might act to “stabilize things and actually prevent monopoly journalism.”

His typical readers, he reported, were political addicts and other political elites. The profile of a typical source is another political elite or an insider who wished to set the record straight or inform on a rival. Additionally, it was clear from the interview the author’s views were colored and permeated by a journalistic business culture and ethos. He wondered why so much attention was focused on the editorial stating, “Nobody reads newspapers anymore.” He suggested his other cultural products, a newsletter and television show, might be better suited for such an investigation. As such, little insight was gained from the interview of how a commercial mass communications writer functions in a capitalist system.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

It has been hypothesized that chain and corporate newspapers "reduce diverse ideas; have a profit emphasis that produces mediocre content; produce less editorializing on local issues; have a unified influence on editorial policies that results in less coverage of local public issues; have more coverage of business news; produce a greater proportion of coverage of government and business; support favored political candidates; and use economic force to eliminate the competition" (Ploughman, 1995, p. 57). Badgikian (1992) suggests, "Some studies of newspaper coverage under independent versus chain ownership conditions show reductions in amount and quality of hard news, fewer journalism awards, higher ad prices, and so on, under chain control" (p. 81).

A group of studies (Becker, Beam & Russial, 1978; Daugherty, 1983; Drew & Wilhoit, 1976; Flatt, 1980) showed "the content quality is about the same or somewhat better, in chain-owned dailies than in independently owned dailies" (Busterna, 1986, p. 61). Another set of studies (Blankenburg, 1982, 1989; Donohoe, Olien, Tichenor, 1985) found the content of chain newspapers and corporate newspapers to be lacking in significant ways. Some of these deficiencies are "they are believed to cause less diversity in the "marketplace of ideas," more homogeneous content among commonly owned media outlets, more "tame" content, loss of local autonomy, and conflicts of interest".
when media and non-media properties are owned by the same firm” (Busterna, 1986, p. 61).

In a study by Borstel (1956), he found no consistent differences by ownership structure of newspapers showing more interest in local affairs than non-chain papers. Hale (1988) published his findings of a study of editorial page content before and after the newspapers changed ownership from independent to chain. He found chain ownership resulted only in modest changes and slight improvement or deterioration. In 1988, Romanow and Soderlund also found a chain ownership purchase resulted in few editorial changes.

However, in a study by R. R. Thrift, Jr. (1977) on “How chain ownership affects editorial vigor of newspapers,” he hypothesized that the editorials of independently owned daily newspapers would become less vigorous after the newspapers were purchased by chains. He contended that “they would publish fewer editorials on local controversial issues, fewer “argumentative” editorials, and fewer containing mobilizing information” (Browning, Grierson, and Howard, 1984, p. 31). The study’s results supported that hypothesis. Thrift found that after their purchase by chains, newspapers were less likely to write editorials that deal with topics of controversy and concluded that independently owned newspaper editorials do become less vigorous after being purchased by chains. Thrift (1977) also found that chain-owned newspapers had fewer editorials regarding local issues than did locally owned newspapers.

Gaziano (1989) concluded that chains tended to be more homogenous, homogeneity meaning duplication of story topics, in their favoring of presidential candidates, but as they increase in size this homogenity declines. Akhavan, Rife and Gopinath (1991) found a high level of agreement among the published editorial views of
journalists at Gannett newspapers compared with independently owned newspapers. In a study that took place from 1977 to 1984, Busterna and Hanson concluded that there is little evidence to substantiate homogeneity. Lacy and Fico (1991) found no significant differences in the quality of news coverage between group-owned corporate newspapers and entrepreneurial newspapers and concluded that news quality depended on the policies of the proprietors and the depth of their financial resources.

Demers (1996) found that the more a newspaper exhibits the characteristics of the corporate form of organization, the greater the number of editorials and letters to the editors, the greater number and proportion of staff-generated editorials, the greater the number and proportion of editorials critical of mainstream groups or sources and found his data partially supported the hypothesis that corporate organizations would publish a greater number and proportion of editorials and letters to the editor about local issues.

Of publisher direction in content, Bowers (1967) surveyed 600 managing editors of daily newspapers in the U.S. and found modest degrees of publisher regulation of content with more likely in independent papers and in relation to local content or content that might affect the personal revenue of the proprietors. Grotta (1971) found no significant differences by ownership structure on the size of the editorial staff, the amount of local coverage, the size of the editorial page and the percentage of editorial as content. In a 1979 survey by the American Society of Newspaper Editors, it was found that editors at chain-owned newspapers were more likely to pursue courses of action that would be opposed by publishers and said they never had to clear their position on a controversial subject with an owner. Romanow and Soderlund (1979) concluded journalists are autonomous enough and likely to make their own professional decisions about news.
content according to the their own experience despite newspaper ownership. A study by Goodman (1982) supported the results of the 1979 ASNE study.

In a survey by Meyer (1987), he also found evidence to show editors perceive they have a fair degree of autonomy from publishers. A figure of 61 percent of editors believed that publishers “never” command them to take on a major investigation of a specific subject. However, when questions were phrased to reflect a more indirect publisher influence “demonstrated by selective use of praise and criticism what he wanted the editor to do, more publisher influence was discovered” (McQuail, 1992, p. 118). Of editors, “only 22 percent replied ‘never’ on this point and the modal occurrence of this kind of influence seems to be a few times a year” (McQuail, 1992, p. 118).

Entman (1985) in a study concluded “On the balance, however, reporters and editors make most of their hundreds of daily news decisions on the basis of journalistic, not economic (audience or advertiser maximizing) criteria” (p. 162). Olien, Donohue and Tichenor (1980) concluded the mixed results of media studies on corporate effects “holds open the possibility that news coverage of community events may be enhanced in corporate-owned newspapers as a result of the organized application of professionalism” (p. 261). They found editors at corporate papers “who have their role organizationally restricted to the single task of editing are less likely to reflect a profit orientation, while the financial survivability concerns of entrepreneurial newspapers result in editors with dual roles—editing and business management” (Ploughman, 1995, p. 58). However, “a Marquette University poll of newspaper editors in 1992 found that 93 percent of them reported that advertisers tried to influence their news, a majority said their own management condoned the pressure and 37 percent of the editors polled admitted that they had succumbed. A recent Nielson survey showed that 80 percent of television news
directors said they broadcast corporate public relation films as news several times a month (Badgikian, 1997).

Several studies have been undertaken to determine if newspapers might use their power to cover up, ignore or provide less zealous coverage on issues that may harmfully effect their economic positions. Browning, Grierson, and Howard's (1984) case study on the effects of a conglomerate takeover on a newspaper's coverage on the Knoxville World's Fair "was to investigate the possibility that a newspaper taken over by a large chain would become less vigorous in its coverage of news items that might have a negative impact on local business interests" (p. 30). The 1982 Knoxville World's Fair was a controversial local issue because of the risk involved in using public tax money to benefit a small group of businessmen promoting the idea of a world's fair in Knoxville. The study concluded "a perceptible change did occur in the Knoxville Journal," which was originally anti-fair, "in a direction favorable to the 1982 World's Fair following the assimilation of the Journal into the nation's largest media organization" (p. 36).

Gribbin (1995) undertook a study to determine if the Michigan press was ethical regarding the Michigan Telecommunications Act which Gribbin argues promised to ease certain restrictions against telephone companies which were rivals of the newspaper for advertisers and information delivery. Gribbin found almost two-thirds or 63.2 percent of the editorials failed to mention their newspaper had a vested interest in whether or not the legislation was passed. Additionally, Gribbin (1995) found more than twice as much unfavorable coverage than favorable. Gribbin (1995) concluded, "Given the lopsided coverage of the Michigan Telecommunications Act and the newspapers' omissions and underreporting, it seems fair to say news coverage of the MTA was not balance and consequently not fair" (p. 146). To the contrary, Ploughman (1995) found a chain
owned local newspaper put the needs of its community first by reporting on the Love Canal hazardous waste landfill disaster. The *Niagara Gazette* exposed the Love Canal story more than two years before it became known nationally.
CHAPTER 3

ELABORATION OF CONCEPTS

The news media have legitimated their position and secured consent with their claims of objectivity, fairness, and impartiality while denying their role in the maintenance and advancement of the prevailing system of power and privilege. Collins and Clark (1992) argue, “The objective standards of responsible journalism become the tool by which narrative “truth” becomes anything but objective” (p. 42). Weaver (1972) argues, “(W)rapped in a mantle to fairness, the media indignantly rebuf their critics as ‘biased,’ ‘extremist,’ ‘self-seeking,’ ‘manipulative,’ or possessed of an irrational desire to punish the innocent messenger who bears the distasteful truth” (p. 59). Rachlin (1988) suggests:

The position of the press, and journalists’ claims of objectivity and fairness, furnish the news media with extraordinary power. The media’s claim to impartiality enables it to maintain its legitimacy. It is this claim, accepted by the public … that gives the media the right to propagate their own distinctive vision. (p. 14)

The tragic reality is it is not their own vision but a system of power relations framed to promote adherence to conventional American ideology. Perhaps Stuart Hall (1985) said it best when he raised the question:
But precisely how is it that such large numbers of journalists, consulting only their "freedom" to publish and be damned, do tend to reproduce, quite spontaneously, without compulsion, again and again, accounts of the world constructed within fundamentally the same ideological categories? (p. 282)

Several media scholars within the critical tradition have tried to answer these questions by attempting to identify the locus of power within the news media. It seems the collective operations of the media in contemporary society maintain their own momentum through normal journalistic routines and "the values implicit in the professional ideologies of prevailing modes of newsgathering" (Curran, Gurevitch, & Woollacott, 1982, p. 16). Curran, Gurevitch, and Woollacott (1982) suggest the media have characteristics similar to any large commercial enterprise including:

- hierarchical structures; an internal division of labor and role differentiation; clearly specified and accepted institutional goals, translated into specific policies and organizational practices; clear lines of communication and accountability which generally follow and represent the hierarchical structure; modes of peer and of superior-subordinate relationships, which regulate the interaction between incumbents in different roles. (p. 17)

Routines ensure "the consistency of media outputs and, more importantly, they produce conformity by media personnel to the overall goals, policies and editorial lines of the organization for which they worked" (Curran et al., 1982, p. 18). Therefore, it clearly could be argued that the factors of "general policy directives, or of the prevailing atmosphere, the force of the taken-for-granted, or of self-censorship, all routine" (Gitlin,
1980, p. 211) all work together hegemonically to reinforce the ideology of the political and economic elite. Working routines circumvent the need to monitor the day-to-day flow of information on an item-by-item basis in the culture industry's social construction of a reality. Simply going about their jobs, reporters "import definitions of newsworthiness from editors and institutional beats, as they accept the analytical frameworks of officials even while taking up adversary positions" (Gitlin, 1980, p. 12). Gandy (1982) in his book Beyond Agenda Setting: Information Subsidies and Public Policy suggests, "Much of the hegemonic process is automatic, unconscious and part of the "normal" practice of professional journalism" (p. 57). His position hinges on the assumption that "(j)ournalistic practice has developed over the years in support of the expansionary needs of capitalism" (p. 57). Hence, he argues, "The control is largely indirect, as the ruling ideology is translated into the professional norms guiding the work of journalists, writers and producers" (p. 210). Good (1989) reinforces these hegemonic functions suggesting, "The ideal view of the press disregards the many complexities of the agenda-building process, such as technical and practical newsroom routines, constrained source-reporter relationships, and market pressures" (p. 53).

All these factors function synergistically together to safeguard the dominant ideology of the ruling classes who own both the material and cultural means of production. Consequently, managerial and proprietal elites do not usually have to intercede in journalistic routines "since their ideological interests are guaranteed by the implicit understanding governing production" (Murdock, 1982, p. 140). This allows the media to operate with a certain degree of autonomy and discretion free from direct interference, though it is tacitly understood, as in any large-scale industrial enterprise, that those at the top of the organizational pyramid carry the ultimate power.
Nonetheless, Gitlin (1980) points out there are limits to journalistic self-regulation, stating:

But the elites prefer not to let such independence “stretch too far.” It serves the interests of the elites as long as it is “relative,” as long as it does not violate core hegemonic values or contribute too heavily to radical critique or social unrest. (p. 12)

It seems that in times of crisis even the routines of news structure cannot work to propagate the cohesive hegemonic interests of ruling class elites. Gitlin (1980) argues, “At these critical moments, political and economic elites (including owners and executives of media corporations) are more likely to intervene directly in journalistic routine, attempting to keep journalism within harness” (p. 12). According to Simon (1982) hegemonic processes “can be seen at work most clearly in periods when the hegemony of the ruling political forces is endangered and is tending to disintegrate” (p. 36).

The period of the sixties, a time of political tension and instability, was a time when the core values of the dominant institutions were disputed. The deepened and sustained crisis of hegemony in the sixties led to the state and its concomitant coercive powers to act to exact adherence to the dominant ideology by using force. Several examples of elite intervention in news affairs as well as the realm of popular culture can be sited. Bodroghkozy (1991) provides an interesting summation of the era positing:

The belief in a consensual society in which all strata of the population were united within a normalized system of shared values and goals—a system that provided the state with the cohesion it needed to operate—began to break down in the late 1960s. (p. 219)
He credits the civil rights movement with opening the eyes of many Americans to the reality that not everyone was represented within the system. As such, he suggests, "Middle class American youth formed a second group to crack the hegemonic armor through civil rights work, anti-war activism, and the construction of a countercultural lifestyle" (p. 219).

In the preceding discussion, this thesis has indicated that hegemony is not static or immutable but a "continual process of articulation—of striving to frame various definitions of reality within one particular ideological formation of the dominant in society" (Lewis, 1992, p. 280). Raymond Williams (1977) argues that hegemony "has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not all its own" (p. 112-113). In a similar vein, Gledhill (1988) argues hegemony is "the ever shifting, ever negotiating play of ideological, social and political forces through which power is maintained and contested" (p. 68).

The field of popular culture is a crucial site upon which elite groups attempt to gain consent for their hegemonic agenda. Bodroghkozy (1991) suggests, "By examining popular culture as an institution, as well as a body of texts, we also can see to what extent hegemonic forces must cede to the discourse of the subordinate during periods of turmoil" (p. 218). Bodroghkozy (1991) undertook such a quest in his examination of the sixties television show The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour. The show became the site of a full-blown crisis of authority culminating in the unmasking of coercive power within the institution of television.

He explains how in the beginning CBS did not link the show or the brothers with the dissident youth culture. He suggests, "With their short hair, suits, traditional folk
music, and whimsically loving references to “mom,” the Smothers carried none of the countercultural signs that had made *The Monkees* troubling (p. 218). However, after an initial period of calm, it became apparent that the Smothers Brothers “were committing to showcasing talent associated with the counterculture” (p. 221). As such, the Smothers Brothers found themselves continually locking horns with network bosses. It seems CBS was bent not on only censoring controversial performances but comedy skits as well. Press coverage of these battles of will between the factions was widespread and, as Bodroghkozy suggests, may have played a part in the escalation of the crisis to its inevitable showdown.

When Pete Seeger was scheduled to sing the anti-war song, “Waist Deep in the Big Muddy,” CBS intervened and canceled his appearance. However, as Bodroghkozy (1991) points out, with rampant press criticism of the censorship “the network acquiesced to pressure and allowed Seeger to reappear on the show to sing the song in its entirety” (p. 222). On the other hand, folk singer Joan Baez didn’t fare as well. In an appearance on *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*, Baez dedicated a song to her husband, an anti-war activist and draft resister who was sentenced to serve time in prison. However, the dedication was never aired on network television (Bodroghkozy, 1991). Subsequently, the controversial situation escalated to a crescendo in 1968 when comedian David Steinberg performed a slightly sacrilegious sermonette on the show, and CBS indignantly “instated a policy unique to *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*: all episodes would have to be made available to affiliates to preview before airing” (Bodroghkozy, 1991, p. 222). Bodroghkozy (1991) points out, “The situation led inexorably to CBS resorting to censorship as an enactment within the institutions of network television of similar crises abounding in other sectors of the social order in 1968” (p. 218).
In April of 1969, CBS canceled the show. However, the network maintained it was not due to the show’s anti-establishment perspectives. Instead, CBS attributed the cancellation to an undelivered tape of an upcoming episode for preview (Bodroghkozy, 1991). Bodroghkozy (1991) suggests the show “by pushing the bounds of acceptable political speech within the entertainment TV format, forced the network to reveal what those bounds were and to unmask its own coercive manner of operation” (p. 222). Hall, Critcherson, Jefferson, Clarke, and Roberts (1978) in *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* examine a similar crisis in Britain concluding:

During a crisis of authority, the very foundation of political and cultural leadership becomes exposed and contested. The hegemonic forces of the state shift from relying primarily on consensual institutions to maintain control and begin relying primarily on coercive mechanisms. These coercive mechanisms are part of the state’s legitimate arsenal but are hidden from view except at times of crisis. (p. 217)

The magazine *Newsweek* ascribed the cancellation to low ratings, an explanation palatable to Americans duly indoctrinated in the dynamics of the Darwinian laws of the entertainment marketplace (Bodroghkozy, 1991). Another strategy of “containment” utilized by CBS was to claim that “an entertainment show was not the appropriate vehicle for political views, like the news shows” (Bodroghkozy, 1991, p. 223). As mentioned previously, elites prefer to confine anti-establishment views to news shows where they can be “contained” by managerial routines.

Subsequent to the cancellation, the mainstream popular press mobilized to defend the network’s actions. Bodroghkozy documents that *TV Guide*, in an angry and self-righteous special editorial, proudly took up the network banner stating, “Shall a network
be required to provide time for a Joan Baez to pay tribute to her draft-evading husband while hundreds of thousands of viewers in the household of men fighting and dying in Vietnam look on in shocked resentment?” (p. 224). Bodroghkozy (1991) demonstrates how the press made an effort to diffuse the political nature of the situation by reducing it to the simple matter of “taste.” The press took the position that “(i)t was ‘bad taste’ for Joan Baez to pay tribute to her draft-evading husband not because she was expressing a political position but because she offended the general mores of a nation that supported its boys in Vietnam” (Bodroghkozy, 1991, p. 224). However, more typical of the strategy was to appeal to consensual positions such as, “Good, sensible, citizens who were outraged by the deviant opinions of the Smothers Brothers show” (Bodroghkozy, 1991, p. 224). This is evidence of a situation Hall (1972) describes “whereby the elites of power constantly invoke, as a legitimization for their actions, a consensus which they themselves have powerfully pre-structured” (p. 13).

Gitlin (1980) documents a similar crisis of authority within the time frame of the sixties when the youth movement challenged the core principles of the nation’s dominant institutions. Gitlin (1980) in his book The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left provides a compelling and persuasive account of the disintegration of the New Left, primarily the Students for a Democratic Society, and their “collision with the large scale commercial media” (p. 16).

From 1960 until the winter of 1965, the major media were not interested in covering the SDS, a small group of college intellectuals, and the SDS did not actively seek coverage in the mainstream media. The SDS was as a small conglomeration of radical, left wing students that had organized support on campus for civil rights and held conferences on egalitarian rights and poverty. Gitlin (1980) points out, “In 1962, it had
promulgated a statement of principles and politics, The Port Huron Statement, which gained a significant degree of respect among activists on campuses throughout the country” (p. 33). Gitlin proposes the media was not interested in an “organization so small and tame” and “non-photogenic” (p. 25). Given these circumstances, he sums up, “It was not, in a word, newsworthy” (p. 26).

The media discovered the SDS after the “independent upswelling of the Berkeley Free Speech Movement” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 25). It was at this time the group began to disseminate press releases on a more regular basis and “began to entertain thoughts of a mass student movement’ (Gitlin, 1980, p. 27). Gitlin argues, “With the SDS March on Washington on April 17, 1965, student antiwar protest—and SDS activity in particular—became big news” (p. 27). Gitlin summarizes the dynamics of the process stating, “the moment was amplified” and “it was already selective” (p. 27).

In one early incident that forecast what was to come, documentary film producer Arthur Barron produced a sympathetic documentary for CBS about the youth movement entitled The Berkeley Rebels. It was not designed to be a factual treatment but an evocative film about the everyday lives of a group of Berkeley students (Gitlin, 1980). Upon its completion, both the chairman and the president of CBS began cutting and changing scenes to “domesticate” the film’s content. As Gitlin (1982) insists, “In liberal capitalism, hegemonic ideology develops by domesticating opposition, absorbing it into forms compatible with the core ideological structure” (p. 450). First to go was a Bacchanalian fraternity house party that was “shot to contrast Joe College self-indulgence with the rebel’s disaffection; the executives called this a slander against nice kids” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 64). They commanded Barron to go back to Berkeley and return with scenes of professors making such condescending comments as, “The kids are immature
and impatient. It will blow over" (Gitlin, 1980, p. 64). They coerced Barron into writing a disparaging introduction, narration, and conclusion for Harry Reasoner. At the last minute, Clark Kerr, the president of the University of California, wrote a letter to the president of CBS, Frank Stanton, calling the film “dangerous and unfair” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 65). Gitlin (1980) argues, “The high network command intervened, in other words, when they were jarred by a prominent and influential class ally” (p. 65). Only after being thoroughly “domesticated” did the film finally air. As Marcuse (1964) describes it, “The absorbent power of society depletes the artistic dimension by assimilating its antagonistic contents” (p. 61).

On the SDS, Gitlin (1980) points out, “At the beginning, the Times set out a respectful exposition of SDS’s activities and goals; then it proceeded to trivialize and denigrate the movement” (p. 32). By 1965, The New York Times’s frames for the SDS drastically switched course as “journalistic routines kept coverage of the New Left within the hegemonic framework of the elite political consensus” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 77). Gitlin (1980) argues, “Deprecatory themes began to emerge, then to recur and reverberate” (p. 27). For example, instead of emphasizing the themes of participatory democracy on which the organization was primarily focused, the press emphasized violence in demonstrations, the carrying of Viet Cong Flags, and the so-called deviant dress and style of some of the demonstrators—longhair, beards, beads, etc. Bodroghkozy (1991) suggests “by 1966 and 1967 those signs themselves—even outside a clear political context or discourse—were being read as rebellion and threats to hegemonic control” (p. 218). The media placed the disaffected youth within the frame of a chanting, angry, and irrational mob. In turn, they transposed these images against the rational, sagacious
images of such familiar authority figures as Walter Cronkite and Harry Reasoner (Gitlin, 1980).

Gitlin (1980) suggests, "What makes the world beyond the direct experience look natural is a media frame" (p. 7). The packaging of information by the purveyors of mass information for mass audiences via media frames refers to the "persistent, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual" (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7). Of the importance of media frames, Gitlin (1980) maintains:

Any analytical approach to journalism—indeed to the production of any mass-mediated content—must ask: What is the frame here? Why this frame and not another? What patterns are shared by the frames clamped over this event and the frames clamped over that one, by frames in different media in different places at different moments? (p. 7)

According to Tuchman (1983), "The cultural vocabulary used to structure the news is not simply a shared vocabulary; instead" as she suggests, "the frame offers an encoded preferred reading" (p. 335). An important part of his critique is set down by Chandler (1999):

Dominant readings are produced by those whose social situation favors the preferred reading; negotiated readings are produced by those who inflect the preferred reading to take account of their social position; and oppositional readings are produced by those whose social position puts them into direct conflict with the preferred reading. (online, 1999, December 10, p. 1)
Gitlin (1980) provides compelling reasons for the framing of the SDS as an extremist, deviant and dangerous organization. He suggests, “the archetypal news story is a crime story, and an opposition movement is ordinarily, routinely, and unthinkingly treated as a sort of a crime” (p. 28). Gitlin (1980) proposes, “But the media routinely present performers who are deviant—that is, unrepresentative of the values, opinions, passions, and practices of the larger society. Deviance constitutes their very news value” (p. 152). Moreover, he asserts, “Serving the political and economic elites as it does, the Times must function as a distant early warning system, an instrument of general surveillance” (p. 52).

The news system’s structured need for “newsworthy” celebrities coalesced with some movement leaders “who enjoyed performance, who knew how to flaunt some symbolic attribute, who spoke quotably” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 153). Underlying this reasoning is the assumption that “what defines a movement as “good copy” is often flamboyance, often the presence of a media-certified celebrity-leader, and usually a certain fit with whatever frame the newsmakers have construed to be the story at a given time” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 3). Hence, the media latched onto the most colorful personalities and “those among them who most closely matched prefabricated images of what an opposition leader should look and sound like: articulate, theatrical, bombastic, and knowing and inventive in the ways of packaging messages for their mediability” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 154). Some leftists with “star quality” arose from the movement that had little actual base and very little real authority. In turn, the movement lost some of its best leaders—the sensitive, the intellectual, the serious, and the reflective. With the media actively selecting the movement’s leaders for their “charisma factor,” the New Left involuntarily ceded its right to select and control its leaders. Additionally, when the
media selectively zeroed in some movement leaders while ignoring others who wished to enter the spotlight, jealously ensued, sparks flew, and factions split. For these reasons, it is not surprising the movement suffered from lack of credibility in the leadership arena and could not be taken seriously by mainstream audiences. Gitlin (1980) proposes, "Reduced to roles in the spectacle, celebrated radicals become radical celebrities: four-star attractions in the carnival of distracting and entertaining national and international symbols" (p. 162).

With the advent of Chicago and the King assassination in 1968, the collective media took a sharp turn toward the right. Gitlin (1980) argues, "As established journalism had opposed the Populist and Socialist movements at earlier historical moments, now it wheeled its routines around to confront the new incarnation of a traditional nemesis" (p. 77). It was after the summer of 1967 that Johnson administration pressures heated up. Gitlin (1980), emphasizing the power relations between the "coercive" state apparatuses of government and "consensual" civil institutions such as the media, points out, "After the Newark and Detroit riots, the Justice Department convened a conference for news executives with Federal Communications Commission representatives sitting in" (p. 213). Gitlin (1980) explains, "The conference centered on the need for "guidelines" in covering racial disturbances and, in general, the ways that television could help ameliorate or "cool down" the tensions in the ghettos by "better news treatment"" (p. 213). Even though many networks resisted such interference and abstained from attending the conference soon after "all three networks had adopted their own guidelines for covering riots, more or less matching the governments' suggestions" (Gitlin, 1980, p. 213).

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Gitlin (1980) argues, "the central command and structures of this order are an oligopolized, privately controlled corporate economy and its intimate ally, the bureaucratic national security state, together are embedded within a capitalist world complex of nation-states" (p. 9). According to Epstein, by January 1969, by "the time of the Nixon inauguration, full-fledged censorship was in force at NBC" (qtd. in Gitlin, 1980, p. 214). As such, in November, Vice-President Spiro Agnew posed the rhetorical question, "How many marches and demonstrations would we have if the marchers did not know the ever-faithful TV cameras would be there to record their antics for the next news show?" (qtd. in Gitlin, 1980, p. 216).

In the end, the New Left was actively contained by the media. Gitlin (1980) argues:

By accenting the difference between legitimate and illegitimate movements, by elevating the former and disparaging and/or withdrawing attention from the latter, they could work to restabilize American politics around a new moderate antiwar consensus, while remaining responsive to the administrations definition of the situation both in Vietnam and at home. (p. 216)

Additionally, the movement became old news to a novel-hungry news media and coverage tapered off to a few isolated incidents. Gitlin (1980) concludes, "The isolated, inexperienced movement that came from the shadows caught fire under the glass, illuminated the landscape, and burned out; then, dialectically, so did the administration that pushed repression one or two burglaries too far" (p. 246).

In marked contrast to the leftist slant of the sixties, as Landy (1994) points out, "the political situation of the 1980s was . . . a much harsher one that anything the Left has
known since the 30s” (p. 43). Few would disagree that the era of Reaganism with its rightward movement was a particularly conservative time in U.S. history. Reaganomics with its tax cuts for the rich, big business scandals such as Wall Street takeovers and insider trading, was a time of capitalist greed running unfettered. The authoritarian regime of the Reagan era (albeit functioning within the theater of consent) was a time when political resistance of all sorts was silenced and the news media routinely performed hegemonic functions for the administration’s conservative agenda.

Rachlin (1988) illustrates the extent to which hegemonic perspectives have been internalized by the press in their coverage of the 1983 downing of Korean passenger airliner, KAL 007 killing all 269 passengers and crew onboard. Coverage by Time Magazine indicated the airliner “Had been cold-bloodedly blasted out of the skies,” that “it was wantonly destroyed,” and the incident was “a crime against all humanity” (Time, September 12:11). Newsweek reported it “served as a telling demonstration of how the Soviet Union uses power” (Newsweek, September 12:17) and “the world witnessed the Soviet Union that Ronald Reagan had always warned against” (Newsweek, September 12:30). The New York Times exploited the opportunity to promote the presidency of President Reagan writing:

The point, if it needed affirmation, was that the leadership of the Soviet Union is different—call it tougher, more brutal or uncivilized—than most of the rest of the world. President Reagan said the incident was “horrifying” and cause for “revulsion,” whatever the exact or possibly the extenuating circumstances. (New York Times, September 2:1)

Although the facts surrounding the incident were unclear, press reports “seem free from any ambiguity or uncertainty” (Rachlin, 1988, p. 53). Press responses crystallized a
typical rhetorical strategy of proclaiming total U.S. innocence and complete Soviet culpability. Skepticism was totally reserved for the announcements of the Soviets rather than any official statements from the administration violating the investigative news tradition "associated with the idea of the watch-dog, critical of the 'Fourth Estate' role, according to which the media are supposed to represent the interests of the public and to adopt an adversarial stance in relation to government or powerful interests" (McQuail, 1992, p. 191).

Of course, the people who were killed in the crash were innocent but the media exploited the fact that "they were killed" rather than providing accurate and objective information on "how they had been killed." The entire incident was proclaimed as the triumphant embodiment of Ronald Reagan's "Evil Empire." The possibility that the Soviet Union believed it was shooting at a spy plane, not a commercial airliner, was not explored in press responses. Moreover, as information presented itself to suggest that it was the practice for both Soviet and American commercial passenger flights to make a habit of "wandering" into each other's airspace on recognizance-gathering missions, these facts were either ignored or hardly mentioned. Rachlin (1988) argues:

The issue here is not whether KAL 007 was part of an intelligence gathering mission. The issue is instead, how, given the acknowledgment of the existence of information that, at the very least, suggests the possibility of intelligence involvement, and the magazines intently deny that involvement. (p. 43)

Rachlin contrasts the KAL coverage with that of a Sudan Airways passenger jet that was shot down as it took off from Malakal on its way to Khartoum, killing all 63 people on board, including passengers and crew. In this particular instance, there was no
question as to who downed the plane—the Sudanese People’s Liberation Army. Lacking
the requisite ambiguity to fill in with hegemonic ideology, press coverage was minimal.
It seems without the frame of the Soviet Union committing a vicious, inhuman and
atrocious act, the story was downplayed. This led Rachlin (1988) to conclude, “It was
not the act of murdering innocent civilians that provoked the press response in the KAL
incident as much as it was the actor who committed the murder” (p. 124).

The neoconservative strategies of Ronald Reagan were continued under the
presidential administration of George Bush. Henry (1981) illustrates hegemonic effects
through his analysis of the news media’s nationalist agenda during times of war. He
argues, “In the early days of the Iran hostage trouble, print—and especially broadcast—
reporters including the networks, readied us for war” (p. 272). Their actions become akin
to those of public relations practitioners for the war effort, absorbing all alternatives
while subtly moving their audiences to the conclusion that war is the only “common-
sense” solution. According to Gitlin (1980), “In every sphere of social activity, it
(hegemony) meshes with the “common sense” through which people make the world
seem intelligible; it tries to become common sense” (p. 10). During times of extreme
crisis, the internal union and cohesiveness of journalists, both conservative and liberal,
becomes clearly apparent. In times of war, the nationalist agenda of the press begins to
rear its unified head. As Henry (1981) observes, “whatever the normal detachment, in
times of crisis reporters spontaneously become nationalists” (p. 272). The “media as
mirror model” strays far from its particular version of objective reality. On this idea,
Rachlin (1988) suggests, this “seems to indicate a shared willingness of journalists to
engage in war hysteria rather than a commitment to maintain journalistic detachment” (p.
6). Henry’s (1981) analysis illuminates a news media more consistent that dissident and
more interested in perpetuating an aggressive nationalistic and reactionary agenda than
providing a forum for democratic debate on whether war is the only acceptable course of
action. As Miliband (1969) argues, the “process is intended, in these regimes, to foster
acceptance of a capitalist social order and of its values, an adaptation to its requirements,
a rejection of alternatives” (p. 182).

Communications has played a crucial role in propagating the utopian vision of
democracy in the U.S. while downplaying class conditions. As a cultural system, the
institutions of the media function as an ideological state apparatus largely concerned with
the reproduction of the dominant values of free enterprise and the celebration of the
indomitable “American spirit” (Hardt, 1998). Media discourse promotes a strong belief
in upward mobility while clouding the true nature of privileged class realities. The work
of Lewis (1999) offers possibilities for understanding the concept of democracy in
America. He states, “Thus in the U.S., the rest of the world is regarded as either
totalitarian or—in some indistinct way—less democratic or less secure in dramatic
traditions. This discourse has been undeniably powerful in discouraging comparisons
with other systems” (p. 258). Through hegemonic functions, the citizenry of the U.S. has
literally been programmed to accept class inequalities as natural, which Miliband (1969)
calls nothing more than a massive indoctrination. Miliband’s (1969) stresses the
reinforcement of ideological constructs stating:

There stand guard many different ideological sentinels, called freedom,
democracy, constitutional government, patriotism, religion, tradition, the
national interest, the sanctity of property, financial stability, social reform,
law and order, and whatever else may be part of the potpourri of
conservative ideology at any given time and place. (p. 190)
Hardt (1998) suggests, "The illusion of living in an egalitarian society is kept alive by a media system that hides gross inequities from public view" (p. 58). Miliband (1969) suggests "the free expression of ideas and opinions mainly means the free expression of ideas and opinions which are helpful to the prevailing system of power and privilege" (p. 220). Writing on the media and ideological issues, Hardt posits (1998) that the media have manipulated the American social consciousness within "a traditional ideology that champions equal rights and opportunities and recognizes economic and social inequalities as personal conditions rather than problems of class relations" (p. 57). As such, Badgikian (1997) points a finger toward the media for their lack of reporting on the unequal distribution of wealth in the U.S., one of the highest inequities among the advanced industrial societies. He suggests, "But the minimal appearance in the news during the years when the maldistribution was clearly developing has kept both its cause and possible solutions largely invisible—and therefore out of the political arena" (p. 34). This silence has helped to strengthen the belief that economic disadvantage and deprivation result from the failure of the individual rather than an unfair system of economic opportunities and rewards. When the media limit our social and political knowledge to the benefit the particular interests of a privileged minority, when they use the state as its instrument for the domination of society, when people cannot even imagine a qualitatively different universe, these purveyors of mass media violate the very purpose of democracy. In this case, "Democracy would be the most efficient means of domination" (Marcuse, 1964, p. 52).
CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

Under the aegis of an “editorial,” Jon Ralston’s column in the Las Vegas Sun establishes a specific cultural and ideological frame of reference for readers to make sense of the local and state political and economic power arena. The work of Altheide (1996) suggests the format of the newspaper opinion editorial invites certain presumptions of content. Of formats, Altheide (1996) explains, “Formats, basically, are what make our familiar experiences familiar and recognizable as one thing rather than another—for example, we can quickly tell the difference between, say, a TV newscast, a sitcom, and a talk show” (p. 29). Jameson (1981) has said of formats that they “provide clues which lead us back to the concrete historical situation of the individual text itself, and allows us to read its structure as ideology, as a socially symbolic act, as a prototypical response to a historical dilemma” (qtd in Fishman, 1999, p. 284). The tried and true formula of the editorial is that of critiquing the established order or working through social contradictions in the form of a narrative. Ralston provides a familiar critique of contemporary political life that satisfies reader expectations of the format. Moreover, in the same way that sex-and-violence themes are necessary to the entertainment format as an audience-maximizing strategy, political corruption narratives are necessary to the editorial format.
The author presents a continuing narrative of the matrix of political relationships among local, state, and federal government and the corresponding interests of the gaming industry. In examining the political scene, the author creates a symbolic universe of cause and effect in which events are bound together in a continuing saga which Lyotard (1984) calls a grand narrative. These narratives venture to "explain the world in terms of patterned interrelationships" (Agger, 1991, p. 25). Agger (1991) is critical of grand narrative theories and their totalizing assumptions in that they "reduce the social world to patterns of cause and effect" (p. 24). Fiske (1989a) underscores this criticism suggesting, "News is like history in its discovery of, and emphasis on, links between events, structuring them into a monosemic, cause-and-effect relationship. The continuity is presented, however problematically, as inherent in the events themselves and not as a function of history-news as a discursive practice" (p. 153). Collins and Clark's (1992) critical analysis suggests of narratives, "The events of a story exist as a continuum that narrative discourse segments, foreshortening, stretching, and reordering events to create a narrative truth" (p. 37). As such, Lyotard (1984) "maintains that one cannot tell large stories about the world but only small stories from the heterogeneous subject positions of individuals and plural social groups" (qtd. in Agger, 1991, p. 25). Consequently, Landy (1994) proposes social critics should "demystify totalistic and undialectical conceptions of politics and culture that are filtered through unitary and linear notions of history as progress" (p. 30).

This study centers on the thematic content of the narratives under examination. A theme is "a viewpoint which can be seen as a coherent whole" and frames an issue or topic to promote a particular viewpoint (Carney, 1972, p. 159). The main theme is corrupt politicians, comprising eleven of the 23 columns. Additionally, four columns are

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centered on the Las Vegas economy, two on the new mayor, one on casino-mining
tensions, one on an April Fool’s joke, one on an introductory column explaining the
move to a rival paper, and three on the disenfranchisement of the state of Nevada by
federal officials.

The ideological thrust of the narratives is the powerful, corrupt system and its
corrupt representatives. The prototypical plot features a statement of the problem, a brief
history of what led to the problem, a naming of the social actors, a plot to maximize
emotional and thematic effects, and the framing of a rhetorical open-ended question in
the finale. Meanings that group themselves around political corruption are hypocrisy,
selling out, misplaced priorities, self-interest, backstabbing, going back on one’s word,
the granting of favors to campaign contributors, and political maneuvering to get elected.

The subtheme is the insidious nature of profit-hungry gaming interests. Meanings
that group themselves around gaming are opportunistic gaming organizations, gamers
who want to build casinos in every neighborhood, the gaming industry as an oligarchy,
hypocritical casino executives, gaming cashing in on human weaknesses, and an industry
that tries to promote its own agenda through campaign contributions and lobbying.

The column under examination from a critical perspective expresses a sense of the
author as being in direct contact with the reality of the political and economic scene and
is, therefore, the rightful mediator between the truth and the people. As such, the column
showcases univocal, top-down expressions of technocratic knowledge in, what Agger
(1991) calls, our “self-perpetuating expert culture.” Agger (1991) offers a point of entry
into this line of argument with the position that “technocratic elitism has got the better of
public dialogue” (p. 5). Ralston establishes himself as an all-knowing and all-seeing
presence by virtue of his access to the closed, dark rooms of political/economic intrigue.
He invites the passive, presumably naïve reader along for the ride in a one-way, univocal relationship that converts readers to "passive receptacles into which these encoded messages are poured" (Agger, 1991, p. 13). As Habermas (1987) contends, an "expert technical and managerial knowledge is used by those in power to disenfranchise citizen participation in political debates by fostering the impression that many issues are inherently too complex for a layperson to comprehend or debate competently" (qtd. in Jansen, 1983, p. 348). As a result, the site is ungrounded in the nurturing of egalitarian dialogues. This type of univocal discourse conditions readers to uncritically accept the ideas and values sold in the cultural marketplace by the culture industry which, for the most part, exists to represent capitalism as a rational social order. It is as Hoggart (1957) has noted, "essentially a 'showing' (rather than an exploration) a presentation of what is known already" (qtd. in Conrad, 1988, p. 186).

Of the role of discourse in shaping the public environment, Agger contends that "technocratic capitalism is supported by a scientization of ideology that not only discourages dialogue between laypeople and experts but encourages a "socially structured silence" among citizens" (qtd. in Jansen, 1983, p. 348). This notion is validated by Jansen (1983) who suggests, "Constrained power talk entails failure to engage in dialogue or, once engaged to offer rational justifications for one's advantaged position" (p. 350). This limiting of freedom of action by the reader is extended by Marcuse (1964) who states, "And if the individuals are pre-conditioned so that the satisfying goods also include thoughts, feelings, aspirations, why should they wish to think, feel, and imagine for themselves?" (p. 50).

Nevertheless, Ralston's stance is one of privileged moral authority. He writes, "With those two seemingly irreconcilable in style, substance and goals, no matter what
they say publicly, the question isn’t where they’re parked at City Hall. It’s where they’ll collide again and who else will be injured” (Ralston, online, 2000, January 19, p. 4). In this stance, the author raises a moral question against a backdrop of the political actor’s misplaced priorities and selfish interests. This perspective also attempts to provide a moral frame of reference of the author as a protector of the weak. In the following passage, which clearly invokes common sense, the word “exculpate” implies the judgment of guilt or innocence: “I come not to exculpate Mr. Mayor Pro Tem, who has made significant contributions to his current predicament that has resulted in a full-blown Ethics Commission hearing next month. But because he has chosen to wear his special interest jersey . . . on the outside rather than trying to conceal it, does he deserve to be the new poster boy for ethical transgressions?” (Ralston, online, 2000, February 2, p. 1). The author attempts to exercise his powers of moral judgment by directing the reader to the actions of unethical politicians in the following passages: “Erin Kenny, Mary Kincaid and Lance Malone succeeded in accomplishing something much more pernicious: they unfurled a red carpet for other neighborhood casinos” (Ralston, online, 2000, January 23, p. 2) and “Thanks to Sen. Harry Reid’s ruthless attempts during his last campaign to turn the dump issue into a partisan issue” (Ralston, online, 2000, January 26, p. 3). He asserts his privileged moral authority of knowing what is best for the city in the following passage: “That’s why His Honor must realize that the State of Oscar is inextricably intertwined with the State of the City” (Ralston, online, 2000, January 30, p. 3). As such, Gitlin (1980) succinctly summarizes Gramsci’s theory of hegemony as “uniting persuasion from above with consent from below” (p. 10). Agger (1991) stresses, “Elites must legitimate their monopoly of system-administering privileges, notably through a theory of social-problem solving that cedes all conversational and symbolic rights to a
technocratic minority” (p. 128). Furthermore, the ideology is reinforced as the author calls upon his unnamed sources to legitimate his moral superiority. The implication is the author has access to important resources the public does not. As such, he is omniscient and ever alert, functioning through a network of sources to enlighten naïve audiences. Notwithstanding, the use of veiled sources frequently conceals the anonymity and invisibility of more dominant elites. Moreover, the personality of the author, with his tell-it-like-it-is, muckraking style, and his masculinity embodied by white, upper-middle class, Western, mainstream values, is used towards the service of his claim of “journalistic objectivity.” Hall (1982) suggests, in order to remain hegemonic, media institutions “secure consent precisely because their claim to be independent of the direct play of political and economic interests, or of the state” (p. 86). This is especially problematic for Agger (1991) who suggests, “A postured objectivity is a secret vehicle for an imperial subjectivity that is the more potent the more it disguises itself merely as a disinterested quest for knowledge” (p. 45).

In analyzing to whom and for whom the author speaks, it seems the author wishes to align himself with the masses, as someone who stands apart from the influences of the power elite. This is evidenced by the use of what Marcuse (1964) call’s false familiarity. For example, he writes, “From now on when you hear politicians give their word or insist a neighborhood casino really isn’t a neighborhood casino, and ask you to believe them, your retort should be brief: Nevermore” (Ralston, online, 2000, January 23, p. 3). He is directing the passive masses to distrust politicians as a whole while acclimatizing them to the inevitability of a corrupt system. However, the hierarchical concentration of control of the mass media that prevails in technocratic societies endows the journalist with the special position of an institutional power holder. The reality is the author is a technical
specialist at the upper-echelon of a journalistic corporation. Hall (1972) has noted, "In formal democracies, though power is centralized within the elites, the elites gain legitimacy by this continuous process of 'mentally referring themselves' to the public at large" (p. 12). The author is an institutional spokesperson in a hierarchically-dominated mass media criticizing an elite group of high-status, mostly upper or upper-middle class, white-collar males, in positions of institutional power—a group to which he belongs. This is enhanced by the author's position as a cultural entrepreneur producing media commodities to turn a profit.

Marxist media analysts have suggested that public figures and the media tend to sustain close ties thereby reinforcing one another in a system of mutual dependency and symbiosis. As Morgan (1989) contends, "political systems and media systems are tightly intertwined" (p. 240). This idea is reinforced by Habermas (1987) who contends that "the monopoly of capital goes hand in hand with the monopoly of information and of dialogues-chances" (p. 9). Without any real distance from the practices of the power elite, the author can only reproduce the dominant ideology. As Gripsrud (1990) has noted: "Interpretation implies a distance between the interpreter and that which is being interpreted" (p. 124). Thus, as an insider within the power structure, the author is speaking to elites in a frame they can understand, organizing and defining the characters and the relations among them.

Consequently, Ralston seems more concerned with the upper reaches of political power than serving to enlighten and empower members of subordinate groups. As such, Gramsci made a distinction between traditional intellectuals and organic intellectuals. Traditional intellectuals refer to those who serve the dominant hegemonic interests. Organic intellectuals, or those who write for the people, would seek to "combine
theoretical and practical knowledge in the interest of revolutionary change and serve a legitimization function occupied earlier by traditional intellectuals” (Landy, 1994, p. 50). Using Gramscian criteria, Ralston would be classified as a traditional intellectual. A case in point is the following passage in which the author takes a decidedly corporatist stance:

“The fact that [Governor Kenny] Guinn appears to be following a casino industry agenda just as his predecessor did before him surely will rankle some observers who, for some reason, don’t believe the public interest and the Strip’s interest could ever coincide” (Ralston, online, 2000, March 15, p. 2). The key term is “who, for some reason” which acts to deny the existence of class antagonisms between the dominant and subordinate classes while endorsing the dominant, free trade ideology of corporatism.

To put it in Gramscian terms, the author is attempting to make the world appear reasonable and common-sensical to individuals and groups whose interests might be better served by challenging these structures. As Fiske (1989a) contends, dominant ideology presented as common sense “wins the more or less willing consent of subordinate groups to a set of meanings that serve the interests of theirs, and thus work to deny social differences, especially the differences of power” (p. 169-170). Meehan’s (1993) critical analysis suggests, “Hegemony comprises the common sense, taken-for-granted reality that Gramsci used to build a case for going beyond coercion in the analysis of social control” (p. 108). Gramsci (1971) distinguishes between common sense and good sense:

Every social stratum has its own ‘common sense’ and its own ‘good sense,’ which are basically the most widespread conception of life and of men. Every philosophical conception of life leaves behind sedimentation of ‘common sense’: this is the document of historical effectiveness.
Common sense is not something rigid and immobile, but is constantly transforming itself, enriching itself with scientific ideas and with philosophical opinions which have entered ordinary life. Common sense creates the folklore of the future, that is a relatively rigid phase of popular knowledge at a given place and time. (p. 326)

In other words, common sense is the “uncritical and largely unconscious way in which a person perceives the world” (Simon, 1982, p. 63). Thus the question comes down to what sense is established as common and whose class interests does it serves.

What emerges from the narratives is “a politics that buys into the dominant power order by using its own currencies of exchange value, hierarchy, division of labor, and the like” (Agger, 1989, p. 30). In four of the twenty-two columns under examination, the theme is the possible loss of income to Las Vegas. Despite the fact that capitalism rests upon the exploitation of labor, in only one column does the author actually mention how such losses could affect the collective labor community. While capitalist elites own the means of production, subaltern classes own only their labor power which they sell in exchange for wages. Consequently, under a system of capitalist wage-labor, the loss of jobs would be the only issue with which these working classes can readily identify. For example, Ralston writes, “The company could bring hundreds of jobs to Southern Nevada, contribute millions of dollars to local and state governments and help diversify the economy” (online, 2000, February 27, p. 1). Even with this particular, and only, reference to jobs, the framing supports the munificence of free-market capitalism, revealing that the author is essentially more pro-corporate rather than pro-labor.

Another telling example of this lack of working class ethos is a column warning of how Internet gaming could affect the Nevada economy. The author offers no framing...
in working class values in terms of job losses. Instead, he assimilates subaltern classes into an ideology that is not their own but borrowed from another group. Consider the passage: "Perhaps the cities of Paris, Venice and Bellagio want to put up invitations: Don’t settle for imitations. Come see the real thing on your next vacation" (Ralston, online, 2000, February 20, p. 3). This passage would be consonant with the commonsense operations of the text that focus on “what’s good for General Motors is good for the country.” As is characteristic of common sense, the narrative frames the problem of Internet gaming to uphold and reaffirm the vested interests of the corporate regimes of gaming. As Olien, Donohue, and Tichenor (1980) suggest, “Where there is diversity in social power, media tend to reflect the orientations of those segments that are higher on the power scale. In the American experience, this means having the general outlook of the business community” (p. 224).

In our contemporary, urbanized, and commodified society, issues are defined in direct relation to the narrow framework of the ruling elites. Ralston frames his body politic in terms of upper-class values within the context of capitalist patriarchy by linking the general economic interests to the interests of the subordinate classes. Despite his attempts to critique capitalist ideology, the wheeling and dealing of the major political and economic players is never cast against a framework of working class values. In the following passage, the author rhetorically places the burden of tax increases along with the trimming of public services in the hands of the people of Nevada rather than the economic and elected elite: “The crisis is coming, as Guinn knows and an NRA study found: ‘Nevada residents will soon have to face the difficult political problem of cutting back on accustomed levels of public services or increasing taxes, or both’” (Ralston, online, 2000, March 15, p. 2). This passage provides evidence of shifting of blame from
those in power to the powerless. This strategy is similar to blaming the defects of the capitalist system on the American people for their failure to turn out for elections when the problem is “inertia born of a system whose political economy is, in very concrete ways, stacked against them” (Lewis, 1999, p. 258).

Becker (1984) offers an explanation of the problem suggesting “the working class has no common ideology, no consensus on key values” (p. 72). Some scholars have suggested that “workers are compliant not because they are indoctrinated with ruling class values but because they have no alternative set of values on which they agree” (Becker, 1984, p. 72). Becker (1984) argues that “if the media are to communicate in terms which are comprehensive to most people they must do so within the ideology that is most generally familiar—and that is the ideology of the ruling classes” (p. 72).

From a Marxist perspective, this lack of class ideology fosters the creation of a “false consciousness” defined as the “imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (Aron, 1965, p. 177). The culture industry creates false needs while diverting people from their true needs. As Marcuse maintains, “A ‘false ideology’ is an ideology not linked to one’s class. Thus, for the workers in a nonsocialist society, the dominant ideology is a false ideology because it does not mirror their interests” (Becker, 1984, p. 69). Consequently, these notions secure ruling-class hegemony by neutralizing class antagonisms and harnessing working-class resistance to serve dominant hegemonic principles.

By taking into account the complex orchestration of ideology within media texts, it is the contention of this thesis that the fundamental issues of race, gender, and nature are constantly obscured and mistakenly described by the culture industries. Recognizing the importance of these misrepresentations, Agger (1989) suggests, “As such, ‘texts’ are
nucleic units of an everyday life only entrenching its domination by the imperatives of capital, patriarchy, and racism" (p. 29). To examine how the schematic nature of the text represents the dominant ideology through common sense, folklore, and myth, this study will attempt to uncover the dominant ideology residing in a series of editorials. As this thesis will demonstrate, Ralston’s is a male-dominated, male-defined world rich in patriarchal symbolism and hegemonic masculinity. This being so, the author allows no space for alternative constructions of reality by individuals or groups who fall outside the mainstream. The author addresses the audience as a monolithic grouping in a monochromatic society ignoring any diversity of values, thereby obscuring class, race, and gender differences. The author has no concern for empowering under- or unrepresented social groups as opposed to the legitimation of the existing groups in power. Of the lack of out-group representation in prevailing forms of discourse and practice, Marcuse (1964) suggests, “The conflict perpetuates the inhuman existence of those who form the human base of the social pyramid—the outsiders and the poor, the unemployed and unemployable, the persecuted colored races, the inmates of prisons and mental institutions” (p. 53).

In an editorial covering a city council meeting centering on the competition over plum parking places and the placement of photographs in the City Hall portrait, Ralston attempts to enlighten the reader to the politicians’ misplaced priorities. However, what emerges is a fundamental class formation in which the interests of the working class are subordinated to the elites. Parking places and City Hall portraits are status-giving objects that reflect community standing and prestige; all issues directly related to the upper-class’s never-ending quest/competition for the aristocratic trappings of the “good life.” Consequently, it would matter greatly to the affluent where they are seated at a charity
ball or whether their photograph makes it to the society page. In contrast, these issues would be of little concern to the subaltern classes whose lived experience does not constitute an ongoing consumptive relationship with status symbols. This is exacerbated by the working classes being situated within the rigors of the Protestant work ethic with its insistence on self-denial and restraint. Adorno (1991) wrote “the real secret of success . . . is the mere reflection of what one pays in the market for the product. The consumer is really worshipping the money that he himself has paid for the ticket to the Toscanni concert” (p. 34). In a similar vein, the status of a parking place which imparts social standing is more important than the actual parking place and its supposed convenience or proximity.

Even on the issue of neighborhood casinos, the author frames the treatment to remain complicit with the dominant ideology, citing the possibility that lack of gaming-free neighborhoods could be detrimental to corporate and other moneyed interests who are deliberating moving to Las Vegas. In a process that maintains hegemony, the author devotes very little attention to the effects on “quality of life” for those who live in the neighborhoods themselves only suggesting in passing that neighborhood casinos “could affect the overall quality of life in Southern Nevada” (Ralston, online, 2000, February 16, p. 1).

Stuart Hall and other members of the Birmingham School have observed that journalists, without necessarily intending to do so, tend to internalize the dominant frame of reference. Most journalists pen narratives “without being consciously aware of their ideological intent” (Meyers, 1992, p. 86). Consequently, they tend to marginalize any individual or group which deviates from the norm. This observation would include hegemonic constructions of appropriate gender identities. From this standpoint, Gramsci
“is aware of the role of sexual politics as a powerful force in producing the existing social relations of production” (Landy, 1994, p. 32). In a column focusing on the new mayor, Oscar Goodman, and his “State of the City Address,” the author utilizes the phallogocentric discourse of male mastery. It seems Mayor Goodman does not want to be perceived in the same light as former female mayor, Jan Laverty Jones, whom Ralston describes as a “dynamic, charismatic force who had ideas but little follow-through” (online, 2000, January 30, p. 2). It is interesting to note that the qualifying word “good” usually used in conjunction with “ideas” is conspicuous by its absence. Ralston writes, “Indeed, what he fears most is that he will be seen when he leaves office the way some observers saw his predecessor” (online, 2000, January 30, p. 2). The marginalization and subordination of the female by a male who bases his entire political agenda on distancing himself from the female is portrayed as natural, true, and common-sensical. Consequently, the author draws lines on the sexual-politic with “the idea that men are political and rational, while women would be more personal, emotional and inclined to nurture” (Zoonen, 1991, p. 41). Trujillo’s (1991) work offers possibilities for an understanding of contemporary mass culture and women. He suggests, “achievement and successful performance (the primary definers of masculinity) are the fundamental requirements of capitalism” (p. 295). This would especially be true of the new mayor, with his close associations to the hyper-masculine world of organized crime, and who embodies what Trujillo (1991) calls a “form of masculinity which emphasizes sanctioned aggression, (para)militarism, the technology of violence, and other patriarchal values” (p. 292). To countervail the female’s “lack of follow-through,” Goodman uses, and Ralston reiterates, the metaphor of a report card to symbolize male accountability while devaluing and diminishing the credibility of women. The author, in a process of naturalizing
hegemonic masculinity, writes, “Goodman will describe the document as a detailed report card, inviting the media and the public to grade him later on promises he makes in his speech” (Ralston, online, 2000, January 30, p. 1).

In the column mentioned previously on the issue of parking places, the council’s almost comedic antics accelerate into a calculation of whether or not to oust the city manager who is vacationing out of town. It seems it was the city manager’s deputy who dispersed the parking place memo that sparked the controversy. Ralston’s treatment of the situation proscribes sex-appropriate behavior structured by codes of capitalist work relations that assign women to the low-status, service sector. One councilman, when asked if he participated in the conspiratorial discussion to cast out the City Manager Virginia Valentine contends, “Why would I fire someone who gets all my stuff done?” (Ralston, online, 2000, January 19, p. 3). The mayor, in reference to the female city manager, has a similar point of view grounded in institutional male dominance. Ralston writes, “Indeed, Goodman gushed about the manager Tuesday: “Without Virginia Valentine, I wouldn’t know what to do” (online, 2000, January 19, p. 3). It is demonstrated here that women are only allowed into the world of masculine politics via the traditional role of cooperative nurturer or “humble servant” who is indispensable to men. Hearn (1987) sees this type of situation as the "patriarchal feminine" in that it is “feminine as it conforms to the feminine ‘caring’ stereotype: patriarchal because in doing so it complements and thereby reinforces the masculine stereotype and specialization” (p. 128).

In a column forewarning the expansion of Indian casinos in California as a threat to the local economic base, the ideological operations of the text frame Indians as “outsiders,” or “groups whose behavior is viewed as transgressing or threatening the
cohesiveness of dominant social norms” (Bennett, 1982, p. 288). To further set the non-whites apart from whites, Ralston labels the day Californians are to approve an expansion of Indian gaming as “Black Tuesday”—a fitting name to describe a people of color’s likely encroachment into Nevada territory (online, 2000, March 5, p. 1). Bennett (1982) contends, “By casting such groups in the role of ‘folk-devils,’ the media serve to strengthen our degree of commitment to dominant social norms” (p. 296). Writing on racism in America, Omi (1989) suggests, “A crucial dimension of racial oppression in the United States is the elaboration of an ideology of difference or ‘otherness.’ This involves the defining ‘us’ (i.e. white Americans) in opposition to them” (p. 114). Additionally, the association of Nevadans with frontier mythology is still strong. Hence, the author strikes deep chords of prejudice in a state whose “brave, white, and civilized” pioneers only a few generations ago fought off fierce bands of “barbaric” Indians. This time, however, the enemy is much more ominous because instead of being armed by the white man with guns, the “other” has been given something even more powerful—socioeconomic power. As the narrative progresses, Ralston ominously forecasts, “By the end of the year, most of the major properties here will be Indian investors anyhow” (Ralston, online, 2000, February 20, p. 3). Notwithstanding a history of genocide in a system of Western colonialism and imperialism, the author boldly writes, “Let’s face it: The Indians learned from the best oligarchy I know, the one headquartered on Las Vegas Boulevard South” (Ralston, online, 2000, March 5, p. 2). The meaning contained within the key term “learned” embodies imperialist ideology similar to that found in Dorfman and Mattelart’s (1975) book How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology and the Disney Comic. The Indians would be akin to indigenous peoples of the Third World and represent the “students;” the gaming industry executives would be an example of the First World order.
and embody the "teachers." As Dorfman and Mattelart (1975) would see it, Third World people, or in this case Indians, are "pictured as innocent children who simply do not understand the value of the objects surrounding them, often symbolically stand in for the First World workers in popular fantasies. Within a racist ideology that pictures Third World people as intellectually limited savages, the text can allow the hero to step in, as representative of First World reason and logic, and help the natives exploit their treasures" (Marchetti, 1989, p. 189).

The author draws lines along the class axis with the chastisement of Councilman Michael McDonald and his predecessor, Frank Hawkins. Becker (1984) maintains, "the class system is the primary axis of the social system, and, hence, must play an important role in any theory about communication and society, both as a dependent and independent variable" (p. 67). Neither McDonald nor Hawkins are members of the professional-managerial class, although they engage in a series of attempts, albeit unsuccessful ones, to rectify that situation. City Councilman McDonald is a former policeman, a traditionally working class occupation, who has attempted social ascendancy through "forays into business—a private investigator's company and a proposed limousine service" (Ralston, online, 2000, March 12, p. 2). Similarly, Hawkins has aspired to transcend class position in a myriad of ways with his final undoing being "an ill-fated venture, a for-profit golf tournament" (Ralston, online, 2000, March 12, p. 2). Motivated by the "false consciousness" of capitalism, these lower-class men are obsessed with traditional signifiers of wealth, i.e. limousines and golf tournaments. In an attempt to forge a new class identity, McDonald lacks the requisite socialization in the political scene by virtue of his inexperience and class standing, and hence, makes a lot of errors in judgment which Ralston calls his "demonstration of ineptitude as he plays the
state sport of political incest” (online, 2000, February 2, p. 3). Both Hawkins and
McDonald are condemned for their ignorance rather than their self-serving deeds. For
example, McDonald is seen about town, or as Ralston calls it “too openly struts around”
with those in power while a more seasoned politician might meet members of special
interest groups in a private club or behind the closed doors of their walled mansions
(online, 2000, February 2, p. 2). As Ralston writes, “But because he has chosen to wear
his special interest jersey . . . on the outside rather than trying to conceal it, does he
deserve to be the new poster boy for ethical transgressions?” (online, 2000, February 2,
p. 1). As the narrative progresses, the author illustrates how this lack of personal ethics
permeates the whole complex of local and state politics: “If the new baseline is
McDonald’s relationships with the Silver Staters, though, then I know a few other
politicians who had better start lengthening their disclosure speeches” (online, 2000,
February 2, p. 3).

In a column comparing and contrasting Senator Harry Reid, the “son of a hard
rock miner” to candidate for senator, John Ensign, “a scion of a mining family,” Ralston
ideologically sanctions, promotes, and naturalizes the efficient exploitation of nature
through what Hearn (1987) calls the “nature-conquering” labor of mining (online, 2000,
March 19, p. 3). Marx underscored the destructiveness of this type of capitalist mode of
production on nature writing, “From the standpoint of a higher socioeconomic formation
[i.e. socialism] individual private ownership of the earth will appear just as much in bad
taste as the ownership of one human being by another” (qtd. in Bottomore, 1983, p. 138).
Marx contends, “Capitalist production, therefore, only develops the techniques and
organization of the social processes of production by simultaneously undermining the
sources of all wealth: land and the worker” (qtd. in Bottomore, 1983, p. 138). The line of
argument is validated by Marcuse (1964) who suggests, "The industrialized society which makes technology and science its own is organized for the ever-more-effective domination of man and nature, for the ever-more-effective utilization of its resources" (p. 17).

Although the author exposes the unethical acts of local, state and federal politicians, the mayor of Las Vegas and the Governor of Nevada are for the most part presented uncritically. In fact, it is evident from the text that Ralston has unqualified respect for these symbols of dominant patriarchal capitalism. Moreover, it is one thing to take to task a low-level city councilmen or a senator busy going about the business of legislating or even a distant presidential candidate. It is another to criticize extremely powerful men with official status in the highest positions of the all-powerful state, an institution which retains the monopoly of force. As Hearn (1987) suggests, "The modern state . . . is the most fully developed complex of specifically patriarchal and fratriarchal power within modern societies and nations" (p. 93). For example, Ralston writes on Guinn: "And only one man can make it happen this time in a comprehensive (yes, that means business will have to pay) and politically palatable (yes, that means gaming will have to pony up, too) fashion. Judging by his remarks today, Guinn might just be that man" (online, 2000, March 15, p. 3). Praising the governor, he writes, "Guinn, to his credit, began this discussion during the State of the State speech last year. He told anyone who was listening carefully, as he announced $250 million in cuts, that growth wasn't going to pay for growth" (Ralston, online, 2000, March 15, p. 2). The key phrase "listening carefully" betrays the fact that the governor probably glossed over or downplayed the issue to his audience. Of Goodman, Ralston writes: "His enthusiasm and
workaholism have yet to abate, and any concerns that City Council ennui might afflict him have not been realized" (Ralston, online, 2000, January 30, p. 2).

Even when the author does criticize the governor, it is not scathing. The author makes use of religious metaphors such as the "anointed one" (Ralston, online, 2000, March 8, p. 1). The religious metaphor actually does work to "anoint" the Governor with god-like qualities. He writes, "Not since Kenny Guinn offered his ring for kissing to a horde that swarmed the Las Vegas Racquet Club" (Ralston, online, 2000, March 8, p. 1). His criticism of Goodman is similarly non-threatening as reflected in the passage: "Goodman has two qualities that are at once refreshing . . . and also threatening to his effectiveness. The man who once consorted with killers retains an astonishing naiveté about politics and government. And he still has the tendency to shoot from the lip . . . ." (online, 2000, January 30, p. 2-3).

The author’s choices of words are a reflection of the capitalist economic-technological system and the language of advertising. Both language systems induce people to accept (or buy) uncritically that which is offered for consumption. The widespread use of this kind of language by journalists, advertisers, public relations practitioners, infomercial hosts, and all manner of commercically-motivated persuaders attests to its effectiveness. Marcuse’s (1964) work on the overconcreteness of language centers on the type of word-choice that leaves “no time and no space for a discussion which would project disruptive alternatives. The language itself no longer lends itself to ‘discourse’ at all” (p. 101). Marcuse (1964) argues “The closed language does not demonstrate and explain—it communicates decision, dictum, command” (p. 101). The Marcusian model would tell us that simplifying complex issues through language “does not search for but establishes and imposes truth and falsehood” (p. 103). Marcuse (1964)
describes this type of language as “hypnotic” stating, “Magical, authoritarian and ritual elements permeate speech and language” (p. 85). He suggests overly concrete language in its directness acts a declaration to be accepted without question thereby impeding critical thought. Ralston’s editorial column contains many instances of such language. In Marcusian thought, these passages are “evocative rather than demonstrative” written in a language “which constantly imposes images, militates against the development and expression of concepts” (p. 95). For instance, Ralston’ statement, “George W. Bush has set a new standard for geographically convenient rhetoric” pretends to grasp the complexity of the situation but is an oversimplification of Bush’s lack of concern for the state (online, 2000, February 22, p. 2). The line, “A capricious Californian elected elite or a governor and legislative contingent swimming in Indian gaming campaign money” simplifies the unethical relationship between California’s elite and Indian gaming money (Ralston, online, 2000, March 5, p. 3). The excerpt, “He revels in thumbing his nose at the city’s high-profile political consultants” smoothly integrates as truth the mayor’s supposed resistance to the prevailing power structure on the local level (Ralston, online, 2000, March 1, p. 3). The passage, “Isn’t Rogich a friend? The speculation, not surpassingly, is that McDonald is fronting for another friend,” simplifies the interrelatedness of local politicians and the economic elite existing in a system of favors (Ralston, online, 2000, March 1, p. 3). Ralston writes, “If he doesn’t commit to Neal and the teachers to extract money from gaming and put more money into education—which he actually does have on his drawing board—they will not relent” (online, 2000, March 15, p. 2). The language, especially the phrase “they will not relent,” reveals an anti-labor bias as the author frames organized labor as a greedy, parasitical encumbrance whom the capitalist elite must constantly cater to and pacify. The metaphorical phrase, “Candidates
producing rhetorical candy while in the company of one audience, though the words may be less sweet elsewhere” conceals in its descriptive language the candidates’ deliberate attempts to mislead the electorate to win elections (Ralston, online, 2000, February 23, p. 1).

Since the author positions himself as a technical specialist, he does not need to incorporate large doses of the false familiarity Marcuse (1964) suggests the media use to sway audiences. Still, this approach does at times does prove beneficial to his writer-reader relationship. The phrases, “At one point in the discussion Tuesday, one of the three mayors boldly proclaimed, “I get whatever I want on the City Council. You don’t have to guess which one said that,” privileges more informed members of the public as privy to relations of power (Ralston, online, 2000, March 22, p. 3). The line, “Just the melodramatic musings of a feverish pundit, you say?,” indirectly privileges the author as an elitist intellectual in a position of moral superiority (Ralston, online, 2000, February 16, p. 1). The passage, “Note to my readers: my advice, for your health and lest you be judged a fool is to read until the end of this column,” is a foreword in a column recounting a series of fantastic political events that supposedly happened during that week (Ralston, online, 2000, April 1, p. 1). However, it turns out the column is an April Fool’s joke. As theorized by Marcuse (1964), this language of familiarity acts to actively engage the reader in a high-level of involvement that “hits him or her in the informal atmosphere of the living room, kitchen and bedroom” (p. 92).

A term so frequently used by Ralston to negatively describe the intrusion of casino properties into residential areas is “neighborhood casinos.” This would be an example of unification of opposites similar to Marcuse’s (1964) examples of “clean bomb” or “harmless fall-out.” Marcuse (1964) contends, “The syntax of abridgment
proclaims the reconciliation of opposites by welding them together in a firm and familiar structure” (p. 85). Marcuse (1964) suggests this is “one of the many ways in which discourse and communication make themselves immune against the expression of protest and refusal” (p. 90). The word “neighborhood” (a place to raise families) merges with “casino” (a commercial establishment geared to adults) and reconciles the two formerly antagonistic spheres into a firm concept. These advertising-like tactics work to promote and sustain the dominant agenda. Another example of unification of opposites functioning to close down critical thought and circumvent logic is the term “urban neighborhood” (Ralston, online, 2000, January 30, p. 2). The mayor is promoting the development of an urban neighborhood “in the last frontier of Kyle Canyon” on the outskirts of the city. The mayor, reinforced by the author, uses archaic, outmoded capitalist/industrial thinking to view nature as a commodity to be exploited—much like the worker in a capitalist mode of production. The mayor expresses the worth of land by the profits it will provide to short-term commercial interests rather than confronting the long term ecological effects of development. Another unification is the use of the term “city insider” to denote an unnamed source (Ralston, online, 2000, January 19, p. 2) and the line “The Democratic-sounding Republican” (Ralston, online, 2000, March 18, p. 1). Both of these images work to create a fixed image in the reader’s mind.

As Marcuse (1964) contends, hyphenated abridgment or the “use of inflectional genitive makes individuals appear to be mere appendices or properties of their place, their job, their employer, or enterprise” (p. 92). He maintains, “We see the man or the thing in operation and only in operation—it cannot be otherwise” (p. 94). Ralston uses hyphenated abridgment mostly to disparage local power mongers as demonstrated in the following excerpts: “megadeveloper brothers Ghermezian” (online, 2000, January 23, p.
“consultant extraordinare Sig Rogich” (online, 2000, March 1, p. 1), “the spinmeister’s team” (online, 2000, March 1, p. 2), “Rogich’s lobbying armada” (online, 2000, March 1, p. 2), “one of the best lawyer-lobbyists in Las Vegas” (online, 2000, March 1, p. 2), and “Stewart Avenue insiders—and Rogich’s advocacy team” (online, 2000, March 1, p. 2).

However, he also uses hyphenated abridgment as a matter of course to describe political and economic officials: “Nevada Resort Association Chairman Mike Sloan and Chamber of Commerce boss Bob Forbuss” (online, 2000, March 15, p. 1), “Rick Henry, McDonald’s aide-de-camp, and Bill Cassidy, Goodman’s lieutenant” (online, 2000, January 19, p. 2), “Anti-gaming preacher Tom Grey? Capitol Hill gaming-basher Frank Wolf? Local casino taxman Joe Neal? (online, 2000, March 22, p. 1), “American Gaming Association President Frank Fahrenkoph” (online, 2000, February 6, p. 3), “Senator Joe Neal’s tax initiative” (Ralston, online, 2000, March 29, p. 2) and “the veterinarian who would be senator” (online, 2000, March 8, p. 2). Additionally, he also uses this technique to validate himself and his sources describing himself as “All of use fourth estaters” (online, 2000, February 2, p. 1) and his unnamed source as “one 10th floor source” (online, 2000, January 19, p. 2).

If the reader accepts the framework of the prevailing sociopolitical arrangements as presented by the author, the text works to be more disempowering than empowering. This is demonstrated by the passage, “it’s a political system that is one large bedroom where the politicians are constantly lying down with and perhaps for those who serially supplicate for their votes” (Ralston, online, 2000, February 2, p. 1). Or consider the unethical relationship between politics and industry which works to vitiate utopian imagination by its negativity: “Lobbyists who come before local government boards also
raise money for the politicians, often from clients who will then seek favors from them" (online, 2000, February 2, p. 2). Agger (1989) provides a strong theoretical framework to explain this phenomenon suggesting, "the disempowering of textuality secretly empowers writing to provoke system-serving behavior on the part of muted readers who approach texts as nature-like objects reflecting unalterable being" (p. 26).

In examining the particular issues that hegemony raises, the following is an extreme example of domesticating oppositional content into a safe form. As Agger (1991) suggests, "late capitalism swallows virtually every resistance and opposition, requiring dissent to find unconventional, even nondiscursive, forms" (p. 182). In the April 1st column, Ralston reports that a source has informed him that Sun owner Brian Greenspun is in the process of buying the rival Review Journal and once this is accomplished will run for Senate as a Republican. The reader is impressed that the author would report on such a controversial matter concerning his superior only to read the next line: "Happy April Fool’s Day, folks" (Ralston, online, 2000, April 1, p. 3).

The perspective provided by critical theory maintains that by emphasizing concerns about specific individuals in the system rather than the system itself, the underlying conditions go unquestioned. It is no coincidence that the power elite are never portrayed as trying to improve society. For one thing, the treatment is not newsworthy. For another, the subtle processes of acculturation into acquiescence and silence are actually empowered by the unethical acts of the actors. By centering on the foibles of a set of politicians, and their gaming comrades-in-arms, without disturbing the foundation of the dominant ideology of the capitalist system, the author, as Condit (1995) suggests, makes "a single cause or value the issue, when multiple causes are at stake" (p. 220). Motivated by the news media’s omniscient search for what Gitlin (1980) calls the
"dramatically personal" the problem is directed towards the private actions of personages rather than the flawed system of capitalism. The problem becomes "who is doing it" rather than "how should it be limited, shaped or regulated." Condit (1995) summarizes the dynamics of the process stating, "They thereby induce audiences to focus on single interests that unites them and downplay different interests that might divide or produce different policy outcomes" (p. 219).

Although the author examines particular political and economic elites who inhabit positions of power and wealth and how they use these positions to further their own interests, no radical social change is proposed. Lewis (1999) contends "practices and institutions in the U.S. are made to seem natural by the absence of any clear points of comparison" (p. 258) making political alienation a symptom of contemporary advanced capitalism. As such, the pseudo-democracy of representative democracy goes questioned. The text itself becomes an uncritical but adaptive mode of thinking based on Gramsci's concept of folklore, a historically-situated conception of the world. Gramsci's explanation of folklore is:

Folklore should instead be studied as a 'conception of the world and life' implicit to a large extent in determinate (in time and space) strata of society and in opposition (also for the most part implicit, mechanical, and objective) to 'official' conceptions of the world (or in the broader sense, the conceptions of the cultured parts of historically determinate societies) that have succeeded one another in the historical process. (qtd. in Landy, 1994, p. 87)

Ralston's corruption narratives read like folklore-laden modern morality plays with their archetypal conflicts between good and evil. However, instead of receiving their due
punishment, the actors, or rather the villains, are usually rewarded for their unethical behavior. In Ralston’s narratives, the folkloric laws of the jungle lurk under every rock in the political sphere: envy, ruthlessness, power mongering, and exploitation of the weak. In a column on gaming/mining tensions, the narrative draws on Nevada history, going back one hundred and thirty six years to a time when mining was “pursuing an exemption from taxation” (Ralston, online, 2000, March 29, p. 1). As is necessary in folklore, the author uses the past to critique prevailing conditions, as in the passage: “Oh, how the gamers have always been envious of the miner’s seat at the table when Honest Abe admitted Nevada into the Union” (Ralston, online, 2000, March 29, p. 2). In this particular folkloric vision of the world projected by Ralston, he states: “In the end a constitutional prophylactic was applied, and the industry was protected” (Ralston, online, 2000, March 29, p. 1). In constructing a narrative around the elite concerns of the state’s two most powerful industries, the author invokes a sense of deja vu interrupted from time to time by a reminder of the present: “Does this sound familiar? An unelected oligarchy that pulls the strings for elected marionettes? A tax threat headed off by arguments about how the main economic interest drives the state’s financial engine?” (Ralston, online, 2000, March 29, p. 1). He writes, “In 1864 the territory’s miners feared what was happening in California, with wealthy parent companies siphoning off needed revenue. A depression in the industry came along conveniently to help them make their argument” (Ralston, online, 2000, March 29, p. 3). He posits that with the threat of Indian gaming in California, “the gamers should realize that while the names of industries may change, history does tend to repeat itself” (Ralston, online, 2000, March 29, p. 3).

Gramsci’s (1971) political thought as set down in his Prison Notebooks illustrates how dominant interests use counter and oppositional discourse for its own purposes. As
Meyers (1992) suggests, “Hegemony is neither monolithic or totalizing” (p. 86). Within the context of post-industrial capitalism, Ralston conceals hierarchy under what appears to be a space resistant to dominant ideology while, at a deeper level, normalizes a lifetime of accepting its superior power. The column under examination exercises only a marginal scope in departing from dominant cultural and sociopolitical. As Stabile (1993) suggests, “A text must have a particular brand of distinction to sustain any kind of commercial value” (p. 409). A cultural product can only be successful insofar as it distinguishes itself from other commodities, while remaining within the limits of the dominant ideology; thus refraining from authentic subversive strategies. Stabile (1993) argues, to remain competitive with other texts, they have to “push the limits of existing conventions and regulations” (p. 410). She proposes, “Nevertheless, if agents are not to incur exclusion from the game itself, these strategies have to remain within certain limits” (p. 408). Barthes (1973) observes that “potentially radical contradictions are injected as carefully controlled doses that serve only to strengthen the dominant order” (qtd. in Fiske, 1989a, p. 175). Fiske (1989a) argues:

Much of the struggle is a struggle for meanings, and popular texts can ensure their popularity only by making themselves inviting terrains for this struggle; the people are unlikely to choose any commodity that serves only the economic and ideological interest of the dominant. So popular texts are structured in the tension between forces of closure (or domination) and openness (or popularity). (p. 5)

Hence, certain myths are functional to the system and one is that “power corrupts and absolute power absolutely corrupts.” Myths “have a powerful communicative capacity to justify and naturalize beliefs and actions and thus bring a sense of coherence
and unity to a society” (Fishman, 1999, p. 283). By reinforcing the myth that “power corrupts” the narrative has the potential to reinforce the prevailing system as an extension of natural phenomena. As Conrad (1988) suggests, “Structures of meaning are naturalized, that is, they come to be viewed as normal and inevitable” (p. 181). By unraveling multiple layers of deceit only to expose more deceit, Ralston fatalizes readers into passive acquiescence. Because political corruption is construed as natural and inevitable, although somewhat problematic, Marcuse (1964) believes “the insanity of the whole absolves the particular insanities and turns the crimes against humanity into a rational enterprise” (p. 52). As Agger (1991) points out the difficulty stems from the positivism, or a codified scientific method which creates expert cultures thereby disempowering those on the outside, suggesting it “functions ideologically where it reinforces passivity and fatalism” (p. 24). Since there can be no change, the reader contributes to his or her own colonization. The text is created for uncritical consumption and, exhibits, as Marcuse has proposed, a one-dimensionality of thought. Marcuse (1964) contends, “One dimensional thought is systematically promoted by the makers of politics and their purveyors of mass information. Their universe of discourse is populated by self-validating hypotheses which, incessantly and monopolistically repeated, become hypnotic definitions or dictations” (p. 14).

For example, George W. Bush is taking campaign money from the electric power industry who are advocates of the Yucca Mountain Project. Of the situation, Governor Guinn, the penultimate embodiment of paternal capitalism, questions the possibility that Bush may be beholden to the power industry with a ludicrously system-serving statement, “it is unfair to judge anyone just by who is raising or donating money to his campaign” (Ralston, online, 2000, January 26, p. 2). The futility of resisting the
hierarchical, capitalist system continues ad infinitum. Councilman Malone, who reneged
his vote on the neighborhood casino issue, the defining point that helped him win his seat
in the first place, said, “All an elected official has sometimes is his word—and this time
I’ll have to back off my word” (Ralston, online, 2000, February 13, p. 2). The unethical
councilman Frank Hawkins is replaced by Michael McDonald, who is now facing ethics
charges. County Commissioner Yvonne Atkinson Gates, “the reigning queen of ethical
transgressions, dissembled about her business solicitations to Strip bosses and then about
her relationships to proposed airport concessionaires” is the favored candidate for
reelection (Ralston, online, 2000, February 2, p. 2). Malone is “a political cadaver just
waiting for the gravedigger. But who will bury him?” (Ralston, online, 2000, February
13, p. 3). However, with two equally unworthy opponents, Ralston predicts he will
probably win anyway. To score points with the religious right, Bush castigates McCain
for taking money from gaming interests. However, this denouement comes from “a man
whose mother came to Las Vegas last year to raise money for his campaign at a casino
executive’s house and from dozens of gamers” (Ralston, online, 2000, February 23, p. 2).

The gaming industry is represented and construed in the column negatively in
eleven out of twenty-three columns. For example Ralston writes, “No matter how many
figures are published about how much the casinos contribute to the state economy or how
much they donate to charitable causes, the gamers can’t get away from their record of
hypocrisy and shifting loyalties” (Ralston, online, 2000, March 5, p. 2). He suggests, “It
is hard enough to defend an industry that, while it fancies itself in the entertainment
delivery business, is perceived too often as cashing in on human weakness and
compulsion” (Ralston, online, 2000, February 6, p. 1). Ralston writes, “So, too, will this
be a barometer for the gaming industry, which will see if its millions poured into
lobbying and campaign contributions can drown a proposal that not only threatens its bottom line but could be the first of many taxing ideas it succeeds" (online, 2000, February 6, p. 2). He points to gaming executive "Bill Boyd . . . and his unofficial partner, the Clark County Commission" (Ralston, online, 2000, February 27, p. 1). He informs readers that: "Lobbyists, especially those for the gaming industry, serve as confidants for legislative leaders, strategize with them during campaigns and occasionally help pick committee chairman" (Ralston, online, 2000, February 2, p. 2). He writes, "Companies wail about other jurisdictions and then invest there to meet shareholder demands" (Ralston, online, 2000, March 5, p. 2). He uses a ravenesque Poe metaphor to describe the unrelenting nature of gaming interests in the passage, "But those birds of prey from the Strip, ever flitting, still sitting above those government chamber doors" (Ralston, online, 2000, January 23, p. 1). He exposes their rhetoric of convenience with: "Gaming Control Board Chairman said, 'The mischief makers, the criminals may be attracted?' Really? Then isn’t there a dissonance at home with the ‘gaming is wonderful and has no adverse impacts’ message the industry is offering in Washington?’" (Ralston, online, 2000, February 27, p. 2). He suggests how powerful economic elites are able to influence the political agenda with: "We would not be here today . . . if state lawmakers in 1989 and 1997 had not kowtowed to gaming and development lobbyists looking for their projects to be grandfathered and for the neighborhood casino door to be left ajar" (Ralston, online, 2000, February 27, p. 2).

This opposition to gaming and moneyed interests is credible, but it fails to move beyond itself toward questions of dismantling the system. The discourse fails to reinvent in the audience a sense of what is possible. Implicit in Agger’s (1991) critique of domination is that hegemonic discourse “does not mobilize the consciousness of the
exploited to challenge the present system and to work toward a new one” (p. 161). As Lewis (1999) contends, it makes “it easy to resort to a defeatist assumption that certain problems are inevitable because it is difficult to imagine how else things could be. Existing structures are naturalized rather than scrutinized” (p. 258).

What becomes evident in Ralston’s narratives is that democracy is fragile, assailable, frequently corrupt, and always corruptible. By depicting a world where everyone has the capacity to be corrupted by power and money, as Agger (1991) suggests, “scripts a ritualistic obedience to authority simply by appearing to reflect authority’s ubiquity” (p. 46). For example, the David and Goliath metaphor is used to demonstrate the inevitability of selling out to power. The sequence of events residing in the thematic of the narrative reinforces the sense of the organic naturalness and inevitability of the political actor’s actions. Harry Reid, the son of a miner from Searchlight who ascends to Senator (invoking the myth of social mobility) initially ran as a David “trying not to be crushed by a Washington, D.C., Goliath” (Ralston, online, 2000, February 9, p. 1). In a reverse David and Goliath story, the author points out, “And 14 years later David has morphed into Goliath as Reid is reveling in the trappings of Capitol Hill power as the Senate’s minority whip” (Ralston, online, 2000, February 9, p. 1). He writes, “But Reid will find he must leave his David days behind and accept the role of Goliath—he has become what he once railed against, the consummate Washington insider” (Ralston, online, 2000, February 9, p. 2). Ralston takes it a step further proclaiming, “What we do known is that Harry Reid has now risen to the level of a political boss that has not been seen in this state since the days of Pat McCarran. But let not a word escape his lips ever again about campaign finance reform. Yes, David is dead. Long live Goliath” (online, 2000, February 9, p. 3).
Central notions of the dominant hegemonic order are sanctioned by the negation of alternatives and passivity is actualized through the symbolic manipulation of the disenfranchisement of the entire state of Nevada. Challenges to established federal authorities to facilitate change in Nevada are diminished by the state’s paltry four electoral votes. The column imbues the reader with the knowledge that Nevada is so powerless it is the nation’s choice of the site of a massive nuclear waste dump. Ralston calls the dump itself “a classic manifestation of an imperious federal sovereign” (online, 2000, January 26, p. 2). Within this context, Jansen (1983) stresses “this disenfranchisement has led to the collapse of “the public sphere” and passive acceptance of technocratic elitism” (p. 348). The text validates the sense of political futility while making it appear common-sensical and beyond one’s control with phrases like “Nevada’s quadrennial insignificance in the White House race” (Ralston, online, 2000, February 23, p. 1). This line of argument is reinforced by Ralston’s statement, “And because Bush seems to have an allergy to the state and because he has been mute on the dump, he is allowing conclusions to be drawn based on the available evidence” (online, 2000, January 26, p. 2-3).

Despite all the author’s protestations, the implicit message is that political corruption is the unavoidable fate of all democratic systems. Hence, the system of technocratic capitalism is more or less impervious to change. As such, the contemporary capitalistic, patriarchal scheme of things is presented as the most attractive system in existence despite its imperfections. Consequently, the reader is indoctrinated into a world of acceptance and passive acquiescence to dominant ideology in terms of an organic common sense that tells us “politics is an injustice which nothing can set right.” Enough negation of the status quo is articulated to give the appearance of reform and to illustrate
the alleged openness of the system without upsetting the balance, hence, keeping the
general hegemonic values intact. Gitlin (1980) confirms this notion suggesting, “The
liberal media quietly invoke the need for reform—while disparaging movements that
radically oppose the system that needs reforming” (p. 4). As such, if the system is
intractable, there can be no rebellion against the established authority. After all, to
actually refuse and negate the dominant world order while proposing a new order might
stimulate revolutionary opposition and organization. This notion is reinforced by Jhally
(1989) who contends, “All societies seek to reproduce their constitutive social relations
over time. If they cannot accomplish this then a new set of social relations will develop
and a new type of society will emerge” (p. 67).

The acquiescence is communal. All people, with the exception of the elites,
suffer the same fate and share in the same injustices of the author’s existential
community. In a Gramscian sense, the discourse:

    holds together a specific social group, it influences moral conduct and the
direction of will, with varying efficacy but often powerfully enough to
produce a situation in which the contradictory state of consciousness does
not permit of any action, any decision or any choice, and produces a
condition of moral and political passivity. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 326-327)

Consequently, the system, a collective cultural ideal, must be accepted “as is”
because there are no other options. Although the political superstructure of supposed
representative democracy is contradicted by political and economic domination reported
on by the author within the confines of the text, he offers no illusions of salvation. Life
will not be improved. The author holds out no hope for change. The common sense of
the text eradicates the possibility of alternatives, paving the way for the present state of
affairs to be perceived as nature-like and inevitable. As Agger (1991) contends, "texts turn into the disempowered lives they script" (p. 2). Since there is no way out of a system legitimated by powerful hierarchical authorities, there is no reason to pursue any action. By perpetuating existing social practices, the working class is forever condemned to subjugation.
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Results

This thesis will return to the question it initially proposed: does this column stand in opposition to the status quo of the dominant ideology or reinforce it? The answer is clearly the later. The ideology in Ralston's column, as seen by this study, functions to uphold the dominant interests of central government, big business, and corporate managerial politics while locating itself in a supposed framework of resistance. As such, the column only engenders an illusion of resistance to the economic and political system. This study suggests a text cannot be the site of a struggle for power unless radically alternative and competing economic and political alternatives are presented. This type of cultural artifact so thoroughly colonizes people's consciousness, they are no longer able to even conceive of an alternate system let alone any idea of a revolution.

In examining the site of an editorial as a struggle for meaning, the author is able to accommodate political controversy in a safe and clearly domesticated way while keeping the main hegemonical thrust intact. For the reader, participating in Ralston's universe is attractive because it gives them the illusion of political mastery. They are led to believe by consuming the text they are privy to an arcane world of those who wield power in government and industry. However, in the act of participating in the symbolic universe, the reader is internalizing the hopelessness.
This study acknowledges that the traditional site of an editorial rests on being more analytical and exploratory than prescribing change and offering alternatives. However, it is the contention of this study that this type of writing constitutes a major blockage to democracy. People must be offered real alternatives, and more importantly, be in the position to choose between these alternatives. The model of an ideal society is equal access to discourse “in which all sorts of activities are democratized and opened to general public participation” (Agger, 1991, p. 166). Without the give and take that produces meaning, monologic communication impedes the development of autonomous individuals who decide consciously for themselves and participate as critical citizens. As Jansen contends (1983) citing Habermas (1987), “In an ideal speech situation all potential participants must have equal opportunities to criticize, ground, or refute all statements, explanations, interpretations, and justifications; and discourse must be free from the external constraints of domination, e.g., violence, threats, sanctions” (p. 349).

This study finds Gramsci’s concept of hegemony to add a powerful dimension to Orthodox Marxism. Given Marxism’s emphasis on the base/superstructure model, which is heavily situated in economic theory, this research points to the superiority of Gramsci’s hegemony over classical Marxism. Adorno’s (1991) concept of the culture industry and Marcuse’s (1964) theory of language, although somewhat informative, are limited in the fact that they do not delve deep enough to located the source of capitalist domination. This study suggests hegemony, with its consensual and folkloric mechanisms, is so effective that the use of force and coercion are only needed in times of crisis. However, as suggested here, some opposition is needed to maintain the legitimacy of the patriarchal social order.
With increased citizen apathy and dissatisfaction with government, and electoral participation at increasingly low levels, information and education are simply not enough. Instead, conversation and dialogue must be made the ultimate goal (Agger, 1991). Marcuse (1964) stresses, "Similarly, intellectual freedom would mean the restoration of individual thought now absorbed by mass communication and indoctrination, abolition of "public opinion" together with its makers" (p. 4).

Fiske (1989b) cites Barthes who distinguishes between two kinds of texts and "the reading practices they invite" (p. 103). Barthes (1975) suggests:

A readerly text invites an essentially passive, receptive, disciplined reader who tends to accept its meanings as already made. It is a relatively closed text, easy to read and undemanding of its reader. Opposed to this is a writerly text, which challenges the reader constantly to rewrite it, to make sense out of it. It foregrounds its own textual constructedness and invites the reader to participate in the construction of meaning. (qtd. in Fiske, 1989b, p. 103)

Undoubtedly, what are needed in discourse are more writerly texts.

As Simon (1982) suggests, the task for the Marxist theorist is to criticize common sense "and to enable people to develop its positive nucleus—which Gramsci called good sense—into a more coherent, critical outlook" (p. 64). To provide people with a more critical and coherent conception of the world, Becker (1984) argues communication critics need "to keep jarring both the audience and the workers in the media back from becoming too accepting of their illusions so they will question them and their conditions" (p. 67).
Badgikian (1990) suggests this means teaching "serious media literacy in the schools, using independently created curricula" (p. 40). The positivist faith in science and technology has depleted much of the educational curricula of the critical and subversive edge that was once advanced by the humanities and social sciences. Agger (1991) writes on the technocratic stage of capitalism, the age we now occupy:

The more we rely on canned computer knowledge and culture, the less we can think, speak and write critically about the social totality, an insight central to a postmodern version of critical theory. There may be an inverse relationship between privatized passive reliance on canned entertainment and knowledge and a critical literacy that allows us to transcend the pregiven categories of possible knowledge insinuating themselves into the discourse of bytes, text editing and software. (p. 130)

Agger (1991) argues that "high technology is even more impervious to radical critique than, earlier, religion and market economic theory because science and technology seem to banish the realm of political values and instead reduce all decision making to pragmatic instrumentality" (p. 124).

As the reins of power are increasingly handed over to technical elite, as the control of information is increasingly concentrated in megamedia corporations, as workers experience an increasingly administered (colonized) work existence, it is up to researchers to find ways to help raise people's consciousness, help people understand their condition, and help people realize the kinds of changes that are possible.

Directions for Future Research

The issue of class that is so necessary to Marxist thought needs to be extended to include gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, and sexual orientation. Marx's original
concept of the working class as a social force is outdated and limiting. The “working class” is very diverse, containing many divisions of labor, both genders, and a range of races, ethnicities, religions, and cultures.

A weakness of the study was that it was of limited duration. Central also to this study is the assumption of researcher bias. Stabile (1988) warns media analysts to “address the possibility of the critic’s own pre-constituted interest in resistance” (p. 417). In a similar vein, Bourdieu (1979) suggests that the media interpreter needs to question his or her position in relation to dominant social order. As such, it is clear to this researcher that these biases are probably painfully obvious to the reader of this thesis.

As to the conclusions found in the text, a resistant reading of the same text by two different researchers would yield very different results. Critically interpreting texts to locate ideological mechanisms in media representations by reading against the grain of domination is a very complex matter. For this reason, Condit (1994) has questioned the notion of a single dominant condition considering the multiplicity of forces which act on mass communication.

This thesis has not utilized reader reception though it recognizes its importance. However, it was not possible within the confines of this study to undertake a reader reception analysis. Researchers working in the Marxist tradition have often been criticized for omitting the cultural consumption of consumers from their interpretation of media texts. Analysts from other disciplines have suggested that Marxists theorists perceive audiences as mindless, passive, totally subsumed victims of the cultural industry. In marked contrast, Landy (1994) points out Gramsci’s “own experiences in Southern Italy taught him that peasants and workers are not mindless automatons, that, in spite of the mythology of primitivism, subalterns have an understanding of their world”
As Gripsrud (1990) suggests media consumers are "conscious, active, critical people, often resisting the ideologically repressive messages of mass media texts" (p. 124). Hall (1981) put it this way: "Since ordinary people are not cultural dopes, they are perfectly capable of recognizing the way the realities of working class life are reorganized, reconstructed and reshaped" (p. 232). Marxist critics have responded to this criticism and have begun to give audiences more active roles. On the other hand, Dow (1990) suggests, "Although audience research can enhance our conclusions and perhaps offer some sociological comprehension, it does not replace critical insight" (p. 272). As Agger (1991) suggests, "Texts are dispersed into the texture of everyday life in such a way that they are not read critically, at one remove, but are received and enacted vicariously" (p. 2). Scholarly readings should be expected to differ from audience readings in that they are more critical, act to demystify and denaturalize ideology, and are more likely to avoid the preordained reader response built into the text's structure.

As a conceptual tool in the analysis of the media's ideological functioning, content analysis is increasingly being called into question. As Brown, Bybee, Wearden and Straughan (1987) point out, "by the time an issue reaches the public, the key decision making has already been exercised. Thus, while content analysis may give us some indication of the status quo, it cannot document how the given issues came to be included on the agenda in the first place" (p. 54).

This study has relied heavily on theoretical perspectives. Critical scholars often dismiss traditional, mainstream quantitative research as positivist. However, research should be developed to build grounded theory around the Gramscian concept of hegemony through the systematic development of empirical data. Through the process of quantification, the social phenomena that contribute to hegemony can be reduced to
primary qualities of an objective reality. More research is needed to determine if antitrust laws might be a viable option to break up large megamedia corporations and prevent increasing domination of information by the culture industries. In the technologically-sophisticated corporate era of industrial giants, it is important to ascertain why people are no longer concerned about capitalist monopoly or, for that matter, why they are remaining silent on the matter. Research is needed to find out why people sacrifice their civil disobedience for a modest living and the illusion of upward mobility.

Research in the semiotic vein needs to be done on the language of domination by locating the totality of meanings embedded in language with the ultimate goal being liberating words “from distortion of their meanings by established systems of domination” (Jansen, 1983, p. 347). Gramsci saw the study of language “as a political act aimed at significantly altering attitude and behavior” (Landy, 1994, p. 20). The public lacks the access to language systems that would empower them to rebuff the definitions offered by the establishment in favor of oppositional ones. Landy (1994) endorses this concept suggesting “subaltern groups are particularly repressed by not having self-conscious forms to articulate the nature of their oppression” (p. 26). Fiske (1989a) agrees contending, “The basic power of the dominant in capitalism may be economic, but this economic power is both underpinned and exceeded by semiotic power, that is, the power to make meanings” (p. 10). On transforming the vocabulary of ideological control, Elshtain (1981) sees the struggle toward a new language being the only way to a new order of being:

I am searching for a new language—one that breaks us out of our engendered prisons—a language in and through which we could all, men and women, see that dependence and independence, powerlessness and
power, are deeply related and that not all forms of human vulnerability, can or should be rationalized out of our theories and our ways if being in the world. (p. 131)

The model for this kind of research should be the black protest movement of the sixties. Stokley Carmichael once said, “The first step of a free people is to be able to define their own terms and have the terms recognized by the oppressors” (Graber, 1968, p. 302).

The term “black power” may be the most powerful rhetorical and liberating phrase of our time. Similarly, Marcuse (1964) maintains that “so far, black Americans have been the most effective agents of linguistic therapy. He cites their refusal and aesthetic reversals of the language of oppression as expressed in words and phrases like “soul,” “black power,” and “black is beautiful” (Jansen, 1983, p. 347).

This thesis suggests that Gramsci’s theory of hegemony is very subtle and dynamic. Research should be undertaken to develop a fuller understanding of the communicative processes that maintain hegemony. Research is needed that focuses on questioning the complicity of institutions and technologies in the power function. More long-range, in-depth work needs to be done on the specific handling of major issues and social movements by the press that is similar to Todd Gitlin’s (1980), Allan Rachlin’s (1988), and Aniko Bodgroghkozy’s (1990) exemplar work.

Conclusion

It seems that elitism is not only a problem of the right, but also of the left. The traditional charge against radical theorists has been of “academic obscurantism” or that “they write obscurely in order not to have to enter the fray, exhibiting the intellectual’s usual disdain for the people” (Agger, 1991, p. 84). As Landy (1994) has suggested:
The practice of traditional intellectuals is condescension toward forms of popular cultural production. "Low" or mass culture is viewed as escapist and diversionary, lacking in moral qualities and seriousness of purpose; "high" culture is uncorrupted by the "marketplace," and any signs of a connection to economics and politics must be erased. The bias against mass or popular culture further reinforces the separation between the "ignorant masses" and the educated elite. (p. 37)

A limitation of present day radical discourse is it tends to aim at their own elite, namely, other leftist radicals, in a process that circumvents the general public. This situation should be remedied by creating strong communication links between Marxist intellectuals in academia and the masses. In other words, as Agger (1991) suggests, critical theory needs to go public.

The reading that has been offered here is a step toward understanding the complex questions of power/class/race/gender inequities in a capitalist system. As Agger (1991) suggests, to act politically is to "refuse the dominating western order of value—production over reproduction, capital over labor, men over women, text over commentary" (p. 77). By reading texts through the deconstructive lens of critical Marxist thought, people can begin to resist the elite culture. As the study has tried to suggest, and as Agger (1989) rightly insists, "The most pressing strategic problem is not to convey esoteric truths to a dulled public but to empower them to the same conclusions through their own education and self-education" (p. 30).
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