

## THE KINGDOM, THE POWER ... AND THE GLORY?

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Some years ago in his book, *The Kingdom and the Power*, Gay Talese chronicled the history of *The New York Times* and commented on the change in its editorial policies which followed the death of its founding publisher, Chattanooga Adolph Ochs, in 1935. However, Ochs' dislike for frivolity and his credo "To Give the News Impartially and Without Fear or Favor" continued to guide *Times'* policy for years, beyond the death of his son-in-law, Arthur Hays Sulzberger, in the 1950s and until the influence of his ageing widow, Iphigene, diminished in the 1960s. Under the changed leadership of Orvil Dryfoos (husband of Ochs' first granddaughter), Clifton Daniel (Margaret Truman's husband), and James Reynolds, the once dull, "good, gray *Times*"—a bastion of fundamentalism sympathetic to conservative interests, Wall Street and capitalism—progressed quickly to become, in the 1960s, a champion of all liberal causes and emerged as the voice of powerful Eastern seaboard intellectualism.

Accompanying change in *The Times* editorial direction has been a progressive increase in its ability to influence not only the character of news reporting in general, but also an ability to alter the course of national political history. A similar change occurred over the same span of years in the influence and character of news management on the three major television networks. Together, these major communications giants, along with the national news services, wield tremendous power and shape news reporting in this country as well as abroad, since most of the foreign correspondents are concentrated in the New York-Washington area and depend on them for much of the information relayed overseas.

It has become evident now that for almost two decades, the power of a free press to shape political events in this country has been growing. There were some indications of this during the last Eisenhower years, but since then, the fate of each administration has become increasingly dependent upon its relations with the media and upon the manner in which the media has chosen to report news and use its influence. The myth of Jack Kennedy and his ascent to the Presidency owed much to the media's acceptance and efforts in promoting him as a national figure. In the next election after the Kennedy assassination, it effectively destroyed Goldwater and aided Johnson to a landslide victory. It just as effectively demolished Johnson a few years later, making it practically impossible for him to consider running again in 1968. Nixon's narrow victory over Humphrey that year did not sit well with the media powers, nor did his massive win over McGovern in 1972, but since that time, the media's continued antagonism mounted and culminated in the climactic successful effort first to eliminate Agnew and finally to discredit and destroy Nixon.

No thoughtful American can have any objection to a free press, nor to its forts in exposing fraud and deceit in politics and elsewhere; nor should anyone complain about its power to force change. One should be concerned, however, that the media use its power wisely, pursue its practices evenhandedly and operate without any suspicion of double standards. We would really feel much more comfortable about the recent Watergate affair if there were not the gut feeling that both Agnew and Nixon had been discredited and ruined politically for some of the same deceits and offenses that a great number of politicians have gotten away with in the past and, in the present, are still getting away with: vote stealing, misuse of power, accepting bribes, influence peddling, covering up misdeeds, lying to the public, profiting from inside information, illegal lobbying, personal use of public funds, disguising contributions, campaign irregularities, obstructing justice. The list is endless and the list of instances in which these have occurred in most administrations since 1900 is just as endless. The fact that such practices have gone on for years and will undoubtedly continue to go on indefinitely is disturbing but must be accepted as a human weakness inherent to political life. Our political parties will never be without fault, and the media deserves much credit for both exposing these latest instances and forcing decisions.

Now that the present crusade to enforce honesty in government has been brought to a successful conclusion, we should hope that the media will not rest on its laurels to bask in glory but will continue to pursue with equal diligence and effort the exposure of all political wrongdoings. It has set a new standard of what is acceptable in politics. Let it follow through, now and in the future, with no regard to personalities, political ideologies or party partisanship. All of us will be happy to wish it well.

Looking to the future, it seems likely that the Democratic nominee for Chief Executive in the next election will be Ted Kennedy. In spite of our own personal dislike for this candidate, we hope he will choose to run. In that event, a test of media sincerity may come in 1976. It should be interesting to see how the power of the press will be used.