

mankind, through revolutionary discoveries in knowledge, realized through technological progress, has consciously advanced the relative potential population density of the entire species by orders of magnitude—something of which no other species is capable.

That uniquely human quality of mind, never enters the pages of *Teenagers with ADD*, of course; nor will one find it in the exhaustive literature churned out on the multitude of disorders and their pharmaceutical companions. One can rave that television producers subvert it, and scream that the schools don't teach it. It were better, however, to remember that we, as a society, have stopped living it, and to decide to do something about it.

Degrading the issues, destroying the mind

by Nancy Spannaus

Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine American Democracy

by James Fallows

New York, Pantheon Books, 1996

296 pages, hardbound, \$23

When a journalist gets attacked in the *New York Times*, it's certainly intriguing. In the case of this book, it was the clue to the fact that journalist James Fallows, now Washington editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, had something trenchant and important to say.

Before *Breaking the News* had been out for two months, *New York Times* managing editor Howell Raines wrote a commentary attacking it. The gist of his attack was that Fallows was demanding that journalists act in the interest of informing the electorate on public policy issues, rather than covering all politics as a "horse race." Raines all but equates the responsible coverage of policy issues, as the equivalent of making "life easy for candidates and officeholders."

Even the *Times* doesn't mind Fallows's attacks on the media celebrities, of course. That they consider part of the genre of mindless, *ad hominem* attack journalism, which they love. They are determined, of course, as tools of the ruling establishment, to be the arbiters of political opinion and decisions, and to feed the cynicism of the population about the political process.

But Fallows has a more important message in this book, than exposing the conflicts of interest and astronomical sala-

ries of "stars" like ABC News's Ted Koppel and Cokie Roberts. He argues that the current mode of journalism is literally destroying the potential for a democratic political process in the United States, both by ignoring substantive policy issues, and by promoting a kind of political contest which is destructive of meaningful citizen participation.

When news became 'entertainment'

It's interesting to note some of the history of journalism's descent, to which Fallows refers. He reports that what are now the major news-entertainment features on TV, were once produced only to meet the rules of the Federal Communications Commission for providing some "public interest" programming. At that point the "talk" or news shows were not even expected to make money for the networks. But, beginning with "60 Minutes" in the early 1970s, Fallows says, that changed. News shows were now supposed to make money, and they gradually became more and more like entertainment, and did bring in mega-bucks.

But this is not merely true with the talking heads on TV. The orientation toward entertainment has also permeated the written press, to the point where it is often impossible to tell anything about a political campaign except "who hit whom?" Fallows puts it this way: "The effect is as flattening and mind-shrinking as if the discussion of every new advance in medicine boiled down to speculation about whether its creator would win the Nobel Prize that year. Regardless of the tone of coverage, medical research will still go on. But a relentless emphasis on the cynical game of politics threatens public life itself, by implying day after day that the political sphere is mainly an arena in which ambitious politicians struggle for dominance, rather than a structure in which citizens can deal with worrisome collective problems."

How opposite to the way in which journalism began in America! At that time, there were often "Gazettes," which concentrated on publishing commercial news, and on publishing government documents, for the perusal of the citizenry. But, nowadays, it is considered anathema for newspapers to publish long government documents, or policy papers by politicians. That's considered "partisan," whereas "real journalism" is located in the back and forth of charges and countercharges between one politician, or political party, and another.

Fallows locates this argument in the opposition of what is called "public journalism" to the standard fare of today. Taking on the institutionalized, and arrogant, dictum of the *New York Times*, he insists that journalism is not, and cannot be, objective and value-free. Journalists all have a point of view, because they have to choose from the massive array of "facts," what they are going to present. So, journalists should be honest and explicit about their point of departure, and deal with the issues they believe to be important in public life.

In the journalism world, apparently, what was called the public journalism movement took off in 1973. The examples which Fallows gives of this movement are not generally im-

pressive; they involve a lot of “dialoguing,” which can be worse than useless. But the concept of providing the materials required for making policy decisions, rather than revving up and sensationalizing local conflicts, is a vast improvement.

The story behind the story

In many respects, this book reflects a naïveté on Fallows’s part. The media “industry” in this country, and the world, is not just a business. It has largely been spun off intelligence operations, and still functions as a means of social control, by the powerful, and centralized, financial interests behind them. It is impossible to understand how the media has degenerated so, without understanding these realities.

In the near future, *EIR* will publish a study of the media, which will document a good deal of the story. It will be clear who the powerful forces are who want to keep the American population so stupid, and why.

As a leader of the LaRouche movement, which produces its own products for print and electronic media, I have a clear concept of the alternative. We have a press which provides for serious study on history, economics, politics, and science; we have a variety of half-hour and hour TV specials which do the same. A market for such media products will be created to the extent that Americans determine that they are going to become qualified to run their republic. That is a decision which is long overdue.

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A disservice to American history

by Nancy Spannaus

Trial and Triumph: Presidential Power in the Second Term

by Alfred J. Zacher

Presidential Press, Fort Wayne, Ind., 1996
349 pages, hardbound, \$24.95

This book shows the folly of trying to address history through the prism of sociology, and, even worse, through trying to predict who will win the next election. *Trial and Triumph* is a review of 18 American Presidents, all of whom served at least two terms. Author Zacher comes up with a metric for predicting their success, by devising 10 measures of Presidential conduct. It all turns out to be either meaningless, or disorienting.

The publicity for this book focusses on its relevance to whether President Clinton will win a second term, and the publishers have even gone on the Internet with a quiz, by which readers are supposed to rank the 18 Presidents Zacher discusses. But there is so much disinformation involved in the Presidential history, that no one could conceivably evaluate their performance, much less use it for generalized predictions.

Case-studies in misevaluation

Two examples will suffice.

One of Zacher’s favorites is President Andrew Jackson, who served from 1828 to 1836. Jackson represented the Democratic Party in its pre-FDR form, i.e., as the party of slavery and treason. His claim to fame was the destruction of the Second National Bank, as well as his racist abrogation of the treaties with the Indians. Jackson aggressively opposed the basic tenets of the American System of political economy—the responsibility of the federal government for infrastructure, sound credit, and industrial development. The destructive consequences of his actions were dramatic, as the economy went into depression as soon as he left office.

Yet, Zacher considers Jackson’s second term as President—when he was in all-out war with the National Bank—to be “glorious.” He claims that “Jackson fought for the worker and the small businessman with high spirit,” although, in reality, Jackson’s economic program was a disaster for