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Chad Raphael. *Investigated Reporting: Muckrakers, Regulators, and the Struggle over Television Documentary.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005. 304 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-252-03010-9.



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In our era of news as entertainment, where Paris Hilton can get more airtime than the war in Iraq, some of us fondly recall when television featured more documentaries than celebrity gossip. I remember admiring the work of Edward R. Murrow, and I remember talk shows where the guests actually exchanged ideas. But Chad Raphael, associate professor of communication at Santa Clara University, says nostalgic recollections of “the good old days” are not entirely accurate. In his fascinating study of TV documentaries from 1960 to 1975, an era that produced many award-winning investigative reports, he debunks a number of cherished myths. One of the most enduring is the crusading reporter who single-handedly changes society. While the courageous reporting of Murrow, Daniel Schorr, and Morley Safer, among others, did indeed call attention to numerous injustices, Raphael puts the muckraking journalist in a more accurate social context. More often than not, he (and it was usually a he) was met not by the cheers of a grateful nation but by an immediate pushback, often led by government or corporate voices that attempted to refute what the journalist had said. In examples that could have come from our own recent controversy over the war in Iraq, journalists in the 1960s who did investigative reports on the plight of migrant workers (“Harvest of Shame” in 1960), people living on welfare (“The Battle of Newburgh” in 1962) or children going hungry due to poverty

(“Hunger in America” in 1968) were demonized by conservatives from both political parties, accused of being somehow un-American, unpatriotic, or even socialistic. Murrow found himself under attack from Farm Bureau lobbyists, assailed by congressmen from farm states, and accused of bias and inaccuracy by such newspapers as Florida’s *Palm Beach Post*. One strategy that began during the 1960s was for members of Congress to express outrage at the network that ran the documentary. Rather than discussing some reasons why poverty persisted and offering possible strategies to solve the problems raised in “Hunger in America,” Orville Freeman, the head of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), launched a series of angry screeds against CBS. He claimed the documentary had so many factual errors and such a lack of balance that the Fairness Doctrine should be invoked so that USDA could have equal time to respond and set the record straight.

Perhaps in today’s Internet-dominated world, such rhetoric would be countered by the blogosphere, but even today, a single documentary, no matter how effective, is often marginalized by the pundits on talk shows, and the issues the reporter tried to raise get turned into fodder for a shout-fest. Bill Moyers is a good example of this phenomenon. He was the anchor of a weekly current events program called “NOW” on PBS, and in 2003 and

2004, he did segments that criticized President Bush for the war in Iraq and for what Moyers felt were the president's foreign policy mistakes. Moyers was vehemently attacked by right-wing columnists and commentators. Then in 2004, his show was investigated for "liberal bias" by the chair of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a Bush appointee named Kenneth Tomlinson. Whether or not Moyers's programs were accurate became secondary to the effort to stifle his criticism. Another myth that Raphael addresses is that there was a time when journalists were independent and able to pursue a story wherever it led. While he does not deny that some reporters were relentless in finding the facts, he explains that the public's perception of journalistic independence was often untrue. Many big-name reporters got their material from government sources who had leaked information to them, hoping to frame the issue in a particular way or advance their own agenda. Raphael points out how Pentagon officials during the Vietnam war manipulated reporters with a charm offensive. They sent network executives on expensive junkets, showed reporters the newest and most impressive military hardware, and made articulate military spokesmen available to defend U.S. foreign policy. This may have contributed to why the media were so slow to criticize what was happening in Vietnam. The author suggests that without thinking much about it, many journalists had become friendly with their military sources. But it was a Faustian bargain: reporters got plenty of access, so long as they continued to present the story in a way that diminished any antiwar sentiments.

This is one of the most useful elements of Raphael's approach. He not only debunks the myths, but more importantly, in each chapter, he shows what effect specific frames had on the way the story was told. He offers analysis of how liberals, conservatives, and partisans from various advocacy groups looked at a story. Such analysis is especially beneficial for educators who want to show

students concrete examples of how bias can slip into news coverage even when reporters are striving to be objective. In his discussion of a 1962 documentary "The Tunnel," about the Berlin Wall and Germans who wanted to escape to the West, Raphael deconstructs the visual representations, showing how the American way of life was depicted in visuals of happy children playing outside or consumers busy with their shopping; this was contrasted by the images of the Berlin Wall, armed guards, and grim-faced citizens walking down dirty streets.

Raphael's book is filled with details, some of which may disappoint those of us who admired and even idolized certain journalists. Thus, it may not be an easy read, but it is an important one. Educators may want to use it as a reference or to provide some background when teaching the history of TV documentaries. The author's research is thorough; he has nearly fifty pages of endnotes, with much of his evidence coming from government documents, including the *Congressional Record*, memos from senators and representatives of the era, transcripts of decisions from the Federal Communications Commission, and quotes from political journals and newspapers of the time. This research shows that despite the myth of the "liberal media," television news has always been influenced by corporate money, and spin from partisans and lobbyists has found its way into all too many reports.

Despite poking holes in various myths, though, Raphael is not saying that reporters who did the great documentaries labored in vain. Rather, he reminds us that even the most well-meaning journalists have encountered many obstacles as they tried to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. Raphael still believes in the value of investigative, muckraking journalism. But he wants us to consider whether today's journalists can get around the same obstacles that hampered the journalists of the past. This book will help that discussion to occur.

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