AMERICAN AMNESIA:
THE MODERN CHALLENGE OF MEDIA’S ROLE IN GOVERNMENT

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AMERICAN AMNESIA:  
THE MODERN CHALLENGE OF MEDIA’S ROLE IN GOVERNMENT

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ABSTRACT

The American press, citizenry, and government are in a multi-dependent, triangular relationship. The disintegrating role of the media in American government is a threat to America’s federal democratic republic and the liberty that the citizenry enjoys.

The decline of the quality of journalism and the rise in barriers of entry, have followed the rapid conglomeration of media ownership. This has resulted in a media that is more concerned with profits and entertaining the citizenry than fulfilling its important role in American democracy. A role where the media provides a forum for debate and a medium for the process of idea maturation.

The media is not the only one to blame for this phenomenon. The American citizenry seems to forget itself as the information deficit and social capital deficit increase. Combined with a lack of effective civic education, this results in an uninformed and apathetic citizenry. One that does not participate in the functions of civic engagement.
The broken communication lines of the media’s decline in providing a forum for debate and the decline of citizen participation in government, yields a broken triangular system of communication. A system that the American federal democratic republic depends on. Without these communication lines linking the citizenry and the media, lack of participation in media and government will only worsen.

This issue is of vital importance to the survival of the American system because the citizenry comprises the entire triangle. The citizenry is the media, and the citizenry is the government. Much like the warnings of classical thinkers, such an apathetic citizenry results in the loss of democracy as the citizenry no longer values their ability to participate in governance.

Unfortunately, this is an issue that cannot be easily remedied. Will the citizenry be able to educate itself and instill a newfound passion for participation? Or will the few who still value liberty be unable to explain to the apathetic what they are risking? Will the attempt to save the American system be as ineffective as trying to explain a personal history to someone who has amnesia?
DEDICATION

To my father, Michael R. Turner,

& my mentor, Thomas M. Kerch,

who believed in me when I needed it most.
PROLOGUE

If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended –
That you have but slumbered here,
While these visions did appear.
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream

- Robin Goodfellow

A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Act 5, Scene 1
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CHAPTER 1

THE PRESS, GOVERNMENT, AND CITIZENRY

One of the hallmarks of America’s federal democratic republic is an independent press. Spanning from precedent set during the Revolutionary War, the ability for everyday citizens to report on incidents, discuss individual opinions, and debate issue resolutions through an independent press has been an American value. The American Press is just as unique as the combined federal democratic republic that it reports on. Its unique role in serving as both a safeguard and an outlet for the function of our democracy is not only vital but necessary. The traditional functions of media as a gatekeeper, scorekeeper, and watchdog of the government, has served as Government’s unofficial check. Government and media relate to one another as media has become an important byproduct of democracy and a tool of political participation. Without the ability to communicate important issues and arrive at the central facts, political participation is inhibited.

A free press has been an important tool of political participation dating back to the Revolutionary War where the press was used as a tool for communication. This tool continued to serve a valuable purpose during the Ratification of the Constitution. “A “free press” [was defined] as one that was “open to all parties.”¹ Even though “that way of operating came under pressure as the market for newspapers grew and the Revolution raised doubts about the wisdom of giving “all parties,” including Loyalists” access to participate in the Press, it still held value.² With the successful outcome of the Revolutionary War and the subsequent “establishment of a republic, in which all power
came from the people” the argument for a “free press” gained a “new ideological foundation [in that] to exercise their responsibilities intelligently, the citizens of a republic had to be fully informed of different views on public issues.” The founding fathers constructed the American federated democratic republican system as the culmination of thousands of years of political discourse. Considering their own knowledge of the classics and practical political experiences, the Founders crafted a mixed system of government.

A “free press” with limited barriers to entry permitted “all parties” to contribute to the conversation and dissemination of information. The great number of various press titles in America served not only to facilitate discussion, but also kept any one news title from controlling too much power. French-born Tocqueville, in his visit to America in the early eighteenth century, noted that “a few subscribers are enough to cover expenses, so the number of periodical or semi-periodical productions in the United States surpasses all belief.” Tocqueville also noted the uniquely common American press criticism of its own laws. He wrote:

The Americans, having accepted the dogma of the sovereignty of the people. . .never had any idea of founding, with elements that change every day, constitutions that should eternally. . .[therefore] to attack the existing laws is. . .not a crime, provided that no violent infraction of them is intended.

During the mid-twentieth century, the American political system became intertwined with an increasingly conglomerated ownership structure of media. The development of this conglomerated media has overwhelming advantages including: the timely dissemination of information, the ability for politicians to communicate their messages directly to constituents, a platform for constituents to voice their concerns to their
representatives, and an objectively evaluative source drawing from a natural institutional background knowledge, all of which is an invaluable public service. As the number of independent media ownership decreases across conglomerated media mediums, the marketplace for ideas also diminishes. Combined with the modern technological challenge of news to condense stories on an impossible timeline with little ability to fact-check and the added pressure to sell the story to increase the profits of conglomerates, objectivity and critical journalism is declining.

The press has grown and evolved over time to encompass an inherited heir of accountability promoting its three roles as gatekeeper, watchdog, and scorekeeper. History has not always expected objectivity from the media, however, such standards are necessary to permit the political discourse that democracy depends upon. There is no question that a universal standard for media is desirable, but there are several issues in attempting to force and implement such standards. One of the options is straight government oversight of the press, which can evolve to threaten the very democracy that a press with standards is supposed to protect. The opportunity for such tyranny is something America’s Founders actively sought to avoid. However, without some type of oversight or ethical standard the concepts of justice and truth will have no more value than the cost of the paper the Constitution’s words were penned on.

Unfortunately, even with the media’s role in politics which aims to grow participation and discussion, such promised benefits are not evidenced. The decline in media standards and its inevitable effect on the American political system is a reflection in the decline of an engaged citizenry. Such a decline in participation and the merging of the priorities of
media and government, make an Orwellian 1984 scenario seem unavoidable. If the priority of the American citizenry is solely to be entertained by the reality TV culture of the media, then American Democracy will morph and change over time to barely be recognizable as itself. The future of democracy depends on individual willingness to take up civic responsibility and educational standards, which will eventually be reflected in the media.

A valuable institution of the American federated democratic republic is an independent press. However, as the amount of independent media ownership becomes smaller across media mediums, there is no question that a universal journalistic standard for the media is necessary and lacking. The development of the American mixed government, is based on the assumption of an active and engaged citizenry. Engagement that manifests itself both in the utilization of media and in political participation. Democracy today suffers a seemingly unavoidable threat from the decline of the journalistic standards of the media. A decline that is not being effectively challenged by the citizenry. The future of liberty depends on the individual willingness of the Citizenry to engage in civic responsibility.
PART I

MEDIA AND GOVERNMENT
CHAPTER 2
CONGLOMERATION AND THE MODERN MEDIA MONSTER

*Ideas Maturation*

Idea maturation is the process in which an idea is filtered through a variety of perspectives and is developed over time to the point in which it is capable of being presented to the majority in such a way that mandates its immediate addressing. The ability for ideas to be openly debated, developed, and refined is what makes America run. Conflict of ideas that “proceeds by debate” and not alternatively “by force,” has the opportunity to mature into an idea that can be adopted, applying to a vast number of people and perspectives.\(^1\) If ideas, fast approaching from a single set of perspectives, do not have the opportunity to be debated where it has the opportunity to be explained, refined, and accepted by others, then such application of such ideas to a diverse citizenry will be ineffective. After all, “we are not always sure that those who advocate the truth are actuated by purer principles than their antagonists.”\(^2\) After such an idea is refined, it can be taken to the legislature with public support and the plausible thought-out idea can be made a reality. “Liberty when men act in bodies is power.”\(^3\)

Another benefit of idea maturation is that additional opinions and ideas can be included. “When each man is given a right to rule society, clearly one must recognize his capacity to choose between the different opinions debated among his contemporaries and to appreciate the various facts which may guide his judgement.”\(^4\) It is the responsibility of an active citizen in such a republic to exercise the privilege of participation and open discussion. Idea maturation where an idea is debated and refined, morphing into a
realizable concept that is capable of being adopted by a majority is a core function of American liberty and the media is the tool for this function. Small news sources can help raise minority opinion to majority as it finds other local agreement. The maturing of the minority opinion into the majority opinion helps the idea come to full realization. Without the process of idea maturation, the minority opinion will encounter the same obstacles it would have experienced being subject to scrutiny on a smaller scale, only put too quickly on a national scale, may not survive the national scrutiny.

Media in its role of aiding idea maturation is capable of providing a forum where citizens can discuss concerns and issues that may not be readily apparent to others. In this type of constructive discussion, very little is risked and much can be gained by idea maturation. However, “maybe the press is being asked to do too much, making up for problems in education, government, and civil life.” The Press is no longer a static, one dimensional function of democracy. It is morphing into a forum of interconnected individuals on a digital platform.

What are the rules of such a limitless forum? Presenting ideas in a short attention span, “140 characters or less” form tends to mean that ideas can only be matured to a certain point. Such idea maturation just does not happen today. Most ideas, bills, and concepts are shoved through without any real thought as to long-term effectiveness or sustainability, or even consideration of how it will live up to what people think it will be. Instead such ideas are touted using bottom line generalizations with little backing on conglomerated media sites. Everyone accepts the information as true and moves on, even if they have experience in their own life that points to the contrary. The continuous 24-
hour news cycle aides this decline in idea maturation where truly important topics can get lost in the noise.

How exactly did we get here? What was the Press before the massive conglomerates and what did we have then that we are missing in today’s modern world? The disappearance of smaller media outlets coincides with the conglomeration of national media sources, just as noticeably as the disappearance of print sources coincides with the rise of electronic media. With the loss of smaller news media outlets, there has been a decline of outlets for local stories and local opinion. This in effect has skirted an important function of the Press in providing local citizens with a forum for productive discussion. Filtering through the various extremes of an idea, moving towards a moderate idea that can be adopted by a majority, which in the American federal democratic republic system that we have, is necessary.

Even one of the most famous concerns of Madison was the powerful weight of factions, which extends beyond the simple translated meaning of modern political parties. Factions are simply organizations that have sway in groups of individuals. Madison’s concern in writing Federalist No. 10 was that the decline of factions could threaten the balance of the American system, but at the time there was so many factions that in Madison’s view, they restrained each other’s power. What would Madison think looking at the limited choice in media factions available today?

*Conglomeration or Bust*

Conglomeration naturally led to the rise of the modern media monster. The appearance of business-centric models for just about everything and the increase in
globalization, left conglomeration making natural economic sense. In a fast-advancing technological world, a safe business move was diversification as “media conglomerates generated impressive revenues.” Matched with deregulation, newspapers expanded from combining across geographic areas to across media mediums including radio, television, and merging with private businesses. “By the 1990s, modern-day magnates were diversified” spanning various continents and media outlets “including newspapers, books, magazines, broadcasting, direct-broadcast satellite TV, and movie studio[s].”

The profit diversification achieved through conglomeration had the exact opposite effect on the availability of content. “Consolidation fostered a numbing sameness in news selection and presentation, reduced the number of distinct editorial voices, and multiplied the opportunities for conflicts of interest.” Conglomeration was highly economical in that media outlets could use the journalistic resources of one another and publicize the same story across their owned mediums. Unfortunately, this meant smaller media outlets could not compete with the quantity of stories produced by the larger conglomerates. Smaller outlets had to merge with a larger conglomeration or go out of business. The “clear financial benefits” were difficult to ignore as “newspapers could use company shares to acquire other properties; they could attract and retain top talent with stock-ownership plans; and they could use proceeds from stock sales to update plants and equipment.”

Those smaller outlets that attempt to compete with the local affiliates of conglomerates, were unable to keep up as the increase in acquisitions of conglomerations overcome their resources. Additionally, “local ownership of newspapers became
increasingly rare as publishing inheritance laws made it hard for family papers to be passed on to succeeding generations” who were not able to “devise schemes that allowed them to take their companies public while still retaining control” like “the Grahams at the Washington Post and the Sulzbergers at the New York Times.”

Most sold out to conglomerate chains. “The result [was] that the share of American dailies that could be considered independently owned fell from 68 percent in 1960 to 30 percent in 1986. . . [and] by 1992, only thirty-seven cities in the United States had separately owned, competing dailies.” With small outlets selling out to chains at desperate prices, conglomerations continued to grow and continued to merge. “At the beginning of the new millennium, most of the country’s papers were owned by [only] seven national chains” and “ninety-nine percent of chain-owned papers were monopolies in the cities in which they operated.”

Standards in Decline

One of the side-effects of rapid conglomereration and an exponential profit return was the decline in the journalistic standards of the news. In the place of media’s traditional roles and attempted objectivity, grew misinformation and rapid fire journalism. The increased role of media in politics and their presence in everyone’s daily lives, fostered a media culture of rapidly generated content. Content that people started consuming at an unbelievable rate. The release of this content at such a fast pace increased the chance for errors. Not only resulting in a decline of media industry standards, but leaving the media-consuming public little time to fully digest or consider such unchecked information. There seems to exist little consequences for the publishing of misinformation further
antagonizing the issue. If there was a professional norm among the press of any universal standard of journalism that includes characteristics such as fact-checking and objectivity, those professional norms seemingly declined in proportion to the rise in media profit margins.

“High quality news is expensive to produce, and in ever shorter supply.”¹³ In its place, a type of “plain vanilla news” has flooded the news market, “generated by a few news companies and sold cheap, like mass produced fast food.”¹⁴ Not only is quality journalism expensive, but there is a large “risk associated with tough investigative stories that might require time-consuming Freedom of Information requests or invite lawsuits and negative publicity.”¹⁵

Combined with “cost cutting” as an “easy way [for corporations] to boost profits, some newsrooms lacked adequate resources to pursue complex stories [while] others replaced older, more experienced staff with younger less expensive reporters.”¹⁶

Publishing quality news stories did not just become unprofitable, but many newsrooms are now simply incapable of the expenditures to pursue a high quality story due to lack of resources and journalistic experience. This puts newsrooms in the difficult position of having to choose between meeting their overall bottom line and taking the risk in producing news stories of journalistic value.

The gap between cheap “vanilla” news stories and hard-hitting journalism continues to widen, making the business choice for media owners simple. Especially when repeat news generated across mediums seemed to satisfy the public’s desire for news just as much as a risky op-ed did. The choice was not always so simple for businesses to make.
“Journalism had always been a business, but professional norms and traditions had kept a sharp separation between the “church” of reporting and the “state” of the counting house.” With the cheap availability of “vanilla” news and greater cost of “high quality” news, this separation no longer exists. Conglomeration meant “the replacement of competition between different kinds of media with cooperation, [meaning] that reporters at some news organizations were called upon to file stories for their company’s newspaper, TV station, and Web page,” which “raises questions about quality and completeness” when a story can be so easily adopted across mediums.

The lack of a universal standard to measure the journalistic performance of the news means the low quality of stories gets very little attention. With the internet and modern technological communication, it follows that it is easier for reporters to confirm their stories. However, the admiration for such ability to confirm facts is not supported by what news sources are actually reporting. The implied standards of media are perpetuated further by the pretense that the media has one. Stories are published with an implied objectivity and assumption that a kind of fact checking occurred. The simple fact that a story is published seems sufficient enough factual validation for the American citizenry.

**Our Brand is Crisis**

The American citizenry craves news that touts the dramatic or sensationalistic. As a result, American newsrooms specialize in branding many stories as a “crisis.” This not only attracts readership but it is profitable for newsrooms to simply label their product or stories much like advertisers. To maximize the potential viewers or buyers, without the potential for consequences. News that may not be “breaking” or a “crisis” is no more
likely to face consequences for such an exaggeration than a local pizza place claiming that its pizza is “the best in the world.” “Wars, murders, strikes, earthquakes, accidents, or sex scandals involving prominent people are the sorts of happenings that excite audiences,” and excited audiences tune in. The attempt at sensationalizing news stories, most of which were “vanilla” to begin with, continues to blur “the line between news and entertainment.”

The production of stories by a network has become “a marriage of information and entertainment values.” A continual competition of two very different sets of values and priorities. One is meant to entertain, appease, in other words to waste time and alleviate the pressures of real life. It is a fleeting priority, that although lucrative for those who aim to entertain, leaves the consumers of such entertainment left with little lasting value beyond the possible increased productivity one may be capable of after having essentially taken a break. The other, is the dissemination of information of current events, developments, and new ideas. A core value in a free society such as America is that we believe in the vast benefit and importance of the free flow of information and ideas, save for the limits of national security and privacy. But do we as Americans really value the free flow of information, or are we more at peace letting others deal with the trouble of complex information and will settle for being merely entertained? Are we satisfied with quick-to-read summaries of complicated topics, or do we value coming to an understanding of a topic by evaluating the facts ourselves? Are we no longer afraid that the translation of facts by others is often subject to the impact of subjective editorialism?
Profit at the Cost of Quality

Not only are quality news stories expensive to produce but “networks [actually] avoid complicated stories for fear of confusing audiences. . . irrespective of importance.”22 For example, a story proposed for a primetime slot regarding the debate of legislation may be passed up for the revelation of a celebrity breakup for the purpose that the story of the breakup will interest more people than the story of pending legislation. Additionally, the story of the breakup is free, and the resources it would take to understand the story of the pending legislation is both costly and time-consuming. Two things that networks consistently avoid. Even though “journalism often underestimates the public’s taste for serious presentations,” the demand for such presentations pales in comparison to the high return received from entertainment stories.23

A profit-driven business model has become the preferred model of media networks. The time-consuming nature of in-depth news simply does not have the economic return that dramatized news does. The selection of stories by a newsroom reflects “the pressure to edit and publish news rapidly, that is why pseudo-events, events created to generate press coverage, constitute more than half of all television news stories.”24 Newsrooms have a limited time for stories and are motivated by private interest, focusing on volume not on diversity or quality of content. “Between 1977 and 1997, soft news increased by an average of 25 percent in all news venues at the expense of hard news.”25 After all, even though there is a 24-hour news cycle, there is a finite amount of “breaking news” a newsroom can fit in a day before it becomes “yesterday’s
news.” Customer satisfaction does not often equal objectivity and fact checking, it involves sensationalism and marketing hooks.

It appears that news media in their attempt to sensationalize everything, is attempting to “race to the bottom.” Racing to beat their competitors out of stories by publicizing stories before facts can be confirmed. “Unsubstantiated allegations may get more attention than ever before as media outlets “race to the bottom” in accuracy in order to be first in this highly competitive industry.”\textsuperscript{26} This race to beat competitors out of stories by publicizing stories before facts can be confirmed, results in publicized stories that are underdeveloped or just plainly false. Newsrooms are far too comfortable and proficient in drawing information from very little facts and publishing quick judgments. Even if afterwards such facts are proven to be false, the information disseminated in the world of the modern media monster has already done its work. Not many have the time or attention span to be concerned with finding out if a retraction is appropriate, and even if one is, there is little to be gained back from a public who has made their judgement and moved onto the next story.

Predictable, audience-attractive, cheap stories meet the goals of a newsroom in their considerations of stories to put on the air. “Audiences are most likely to remember the drama than the underlying serious problem.”\textsuperscript{27} As a result, “emphasis on excitement leads to a stress on the more trivial aspects of serious stories” such as an issue like “inflation [becoming] a human-interest drama about John and Jane Doe.”\textsuperscript{28} Viewers will remember the story of the John and Jane Doe, but will they remember the underlying
issue of inflation? More concerning, are viewers able to articulate the general meaning of such an issue as inflation?

This trend towards lucrative entertainment news is “troubling for journalism’s editorial mission” as it intensifies “the tension between news values and commercial values.”29 One of the purposes of the Press as a constitutionally protected institution of democracy, is to support the flow of information and to protect the integrity of the American political institution. The trend towards branding normal news stories as “crises,” without information support or discussion, encourages disorder. It encourages despair and panic. A crisis if deemed unsolvable is often a precursor to chaos which is “the extreme of disorder, where all attributes assignable to order vanish.”30 Chaos is the antithesis to an American system that was designed to withstand the wavering passions of mankind that often succumb to disorder induced by despair in the face of an unsolvable crisis.
CHAPTER 3

MEDIA’S CHANGING ROLE IN GOVERNMENT

Media’s Dependency on Government for Content

The amount of traditional new stories that are reported on have been in decline with the rise of conglomeration, but “straight news” has typically remained by percentage the most reported topic.\(^1\) Straight news or “Traditional topics, [such as] Government, Military, Domestic Affairs and Foreign Affairs, [have] lost space to Feature topics, which include Entertainment, Lifestyle, [and] Celebrity Crime. . .between 1977 and 1997.”\(^2\) “The CCJ [Committee of Concerned Journalists] found that straight news accounts went from 52% of stories in 1977 to only 32% in 1997.”\(^3\)

Traditional topics have been on the decline in overall reporting. However, even in 1997 where the Network reporting on straight news was only 32%, it still was the largest percentage of all news reported with “scandal” news coming in second at 15.1% of news.\(^4\) In third place was “quality of life” news at 7.8%.\(^5\) Additionally important to note, with the decline of overall media reports on traditional topics, the “tone of many stories about elections grew more critical.”\(^6\) The correlated reason behind the decline in information regarding traditional topics and the citizenry’s rise in disapproval is discussed in Part II. Traditional stories by percentage makes up the largest percentage of all news stories.

With the development of media conglomeration, it is no mystery why the majority of media news stories are traditional topics, including government-related content. This content is often dramatically partisan, openly available, continually generates content,
and, most importantly for networks, free. “Cultural transformations in politics and the media since the 1960s provided a new openness to government sources.”

Consequentially it no longer takes a Watergate-level type of investigative journalist to obtain the necessary content for an editorial. Following in the 1970s “the movement toward open committee meetings and roll-call votes in Congress. . . at both federal and state levels, made journalism a better partner to democracy than had been previously possible.”

This relationship between Media’s desire for content and Government’s need to communicate with the American citizenry is a codependent partnership that developed over time. Media has served as the fuel in support of the protection of our liberties against the threat of tyranny that is not entirely absent from any political system. However, at what point is media furthering the Citizenry’s interest in the absence of tyranny from our system? And at what point is it furthering the opposite interest?

Government officials, candidates, “public relations experts and campaign managers know the deadlines of important publications such as the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and Newsweek.” They know that if they are going to be able to be heard or be able to make a statement it is on the media’s timeframe not their own. This was not always the norm of the communication lines between the Government and the Media.

**Government’s Growing Dependency on News Media**

When it comes to the utilization of media in communication with the citizenry, government officials have very different relationships with the press. Some are frequent commentators, others are a magnet for scandal, and others have a minimum media
presence to support their necessary name recognition. The use of the media by political
government officials has changed over time with the rise of conglomeration, but also with
the advances in communication technology. The Presidency is a perfect, large-scale
example to point out landmark shifts in the relationship between the Government and the
Media.

“There has been no period of American history. . .when the presidency was free
of media influence.”\textsuperscript{10} Some administrations were ridden with scandals but some were
“so dull that most reporters ignored it.”\textsuperscript{11} An example from President Grover Cleveland’s
administration, was as follows:

One reporter won a five-dollar bet by calling the President on the newly-
installed telephone and asking whether there was any news. The President
answered the telephone himself and told the reporter that there was no
news, and that therefore the reporter could safely go to bed.\textsuperscript{12}

The development of technological media and how information is disseminated by
news sources has influenced how Presidents have communicated with the American
citizenry. In effect, personal strengths of Presidents that have served presidential ability
to communicate via certain media mediums has changed not only how Presidents
communicate; but what the citizenry looks for in who they consider to be “presidential.”

Jeffereson’s First Inaugural Address

Jefferson’s first inauguration speech in 1801 took place in what is now the old
Senate chamber of the U.S. Capitol building, but at the time was part of the “still-
unfinished building.”\textsuperscript{13} Although there was “more than one thousand onlookers,”
Jefferson’s main focus of his speech was the publication of his words after the official
delivery.\textsuperscript{14} “Jefferson wrote two earlier drafts of [his] address, he delivered the third and
final one. . .and saw to its immediate publication in the *National Intelligencer*, in Washington which was copied nationally.” The audience present on the day of Jefferson’s inauguration and the delivery of the speech was nowhere near as important as the following publication and dissemination of the speech’s text. The official delivery served little purpose beyond ceremonial. Jefferson’s focus at the time would have been to write a speech that was an engaging read, capable of comprehension by the average citizen, and a tolerable length so as not to lose the interest of the reader.

The publication of Jefferson’s address was the newly inaugurated President’s chance to communicate his vision of his Presidency directly to the people. Jefferson took the opportunity to convey many of the sentiments that we remember him for today, including his look towards western expansion. His words of American fellowship made even those with the greatest doubts about the longevity of the new country feel assured. Jefferson’s speech read in part:

> Every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle. We have called by different names brethren of the same principle. We are all republicans, we are all federalists. If there be any among us who would wish to dissolve this Union or to change its republican form, let them stand undisturbed as monuments of the safety with which error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it.”

Jefferson spoke to remind everyone that we all have opinions and they differ from many others, but in the forum of discussion in the American system, reason will prevail leading us to a refined opinion and protecting our core principles. Indeed, “Americans read his speech in the newspapers [and] found a moving testament of democratic faith.”

Jefferson’s written words when read are thought-provoking and affecting. Luckily for Jefferson, that is all that was necessary to make the speech a memorable one.
Jefferson’s delivery of the speech, turns out, was far from effective at communicating the ideas it is remembered for. It was noted even in the small size of the room in which he was speaking, the presentation of his speech did not go well. One observer wrote in their journal of the occasion that “his audience was disappointed” as “his trembling voice barely carried past the first few rows of the chamber.”  

*FDR’s Fireside Chats*

Delivery of information, although inconsequential for Jefferson, became the focal point of presidential communication with the invention of the radio. President Coolidge was the first President to broadcast over the radio, but no President used the radio like President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR). FDR used the radio to communicate weekly directly to the American citizenry. This revolutionary direct communication of policies and current events from the President to the people was a “pioneering and effective use of the airways by the Presidency to advance the Presidential goals.”

One “Brooklyn listener wrote: ‘as I listened to the President’s broadcast, I felt that he walked into my home, sat down and in plain and forceful language explained to me how he was tackling the job I and my fellow citizens gave him.’” FDR’s “public speech in intimate spaces were part of the unique allure of network radio.” FDR would broadcast from the White House to the homes of the American public, whose homes he was able to reach with the growing presence of the radios. “Between 1930 and 1937, the percentage of homes with a radio grew from 40 percent to 80 percent.” This novel communication of the President directly to the people challenged the gatekeeper role of the media.
FDR “was made for radio” with his eloquent voice and ability to discuss complex issues in a casual manner.\textsuperscript{23} FDR even had a “special dental bridge custom-made to eradicate the faint whistling sound his voice made over the air.”\textsuperscript{24} Roosevelt’s aversion to photography because of his battle with polio and use of a wheelchair, made radio the ideal medium for his use. This communication was important to Roosevelt and the furtherance of his policies. Not only was the World War a constantly changing event, but the furtherance of his New Deal policies took explaining. The opportunity that Roosevelt had to talk personally “reach[ing] corners of the country he could not possibly have reached otherwise,” uninterrupted for about “thirty minutes apiece” gave him a chance “to articulate the New Deal’s rearrangement of public and private spheres in American life.”\textsuperscript{25} With public support behind the President’s actions, Roosevelt was able to successfully implement the changes.

\textit{Nixon v. Kennedy Presidential Televised Debate}

Delivery and the ability to effectively articulate information became an important tool in the successful Presidencies of those that followed. Until of course, television was invented. With television, viewers could appreciate the full delivery of a speech or presentation, not simply the words in a publication or the vocal inflection of delivery. The first Presidential televised debate was between then-Vice President Nixon and Senator Kennedy. It highlighted that beyond delivery and content, the appearance and stature of a presenter greatly affects people’s view of who was “presidential material.”\textsuperscript{26}

“Since John F. Kennedy’s narrow election victory in 1960, observers, even while lacking clear data, have suggested that television was Richard M. Nixon’s undoing.”\textsuperscript{27} In
the televised debate “Kennedy was able to demonstrate that he was capable of coping with the presidency despite his youth and relative inexperience.” Adding to the speculation of Nixon’s downfall in the race, Kennedy appeared much younger and more put together. Nixon was not used to appearing on television during a live broadcast and appeared to many viewers as disheveled and nervous. The appearance of the two candidates became a factor in the viewers’ perception of how the debate went, with radio listeners favoring Nixon’s performance and television viewers favoring Kennedy’s.

During this debate, the “two presidential candidates charged into relatively unchartered political waters by agreeing to go on live television, together, without scripts or notes.” This set a new tone in American political scrutiny, giving the American public an opportunity to evaluate candidates based on their ability to think on their feet and articulate a message directly from their own knowledge. Kennedy in this instance did very well. This method of live televised debate would have turned out very differently for Presidents who successfully used media in the past. The perception of Jefferson’s muffled voice or Roosevelt’s limited mobility would not have come off as powerful as Jefferson’s mastery of the written word or Roosevelt’s commanding voice.

Watergate & Investigative Journalism

While television was making its prominent debut, investigative journalism became popular following the Nixon Watergate scandal. The scandal broke the illusion of the Presidency, producing “a people who do not trust anything that comes out of the White House.” The Media’s watchdog role rose to full force when in “1972 Bob Woodward a low-level metro reporter at the Washington Post” tracked down the facts
behind the incident “when five men broke into the Democratic National Headquarters in the Watergate complex and got caught wearing rubber surgical gloves and carrying fancy bugging equipment and $2,300 in cash.”

The “aggregate of [Woodward and his colleagues] work was the fruit of thousands of man-hours by talented reporters, and it took every bit of that commitment by news organizations to finally force the truth to emerge.” The achievement of Woodward was not simply to expose a secret, but the exposure of an illegal event that was successful despite “efforts to keep information secret.” The Watergate scandal and Nixon’s subsequent lying about what occurred led to his resignation in 1974. What resulted was a “shift toward advocating a social responsibility ethic in journalism.”

The “climate of apprehension” following Watergate set the precedent for the exposure of similar scandals, and a rise in the interest of investigative journalism. Some of “the best reporters and editors” were drawn to journalism by “the prospect of doing serious news” and “hard-edged reporting aimed at making the world a better place is central to democracy.” The production of such reporting not only sparked the interest of quality reporters, but caught the attention of the nation, beginning the exponential increase in the American citizenry’s demand for the media’s watchdog news.

**Deregulation & The Rise of 24-Hour News**

The demand for news and rise of media conglomeration met with network deregulation during the Reagan administration led to the birth of the 24-hour news networks. The “demand for “you are there” journalism grew,” fueled “by the introduction in 1980 of CNN, the first twenty-four-hour cable news network.” Reporting about the
President’s actions from the newsroom no longer sufficed as news trucks lined up outside of the White House reporting live on the President from outside the building where he was currently inside.

The Reagan “administration favored less involvement by the FCC in the media business.” As a result, “in 1985 the FCC . . . rolled back the so-called 7-7-7 rule, which barred an owner of TV and FM and AM radio stations from having more than seven of each” making “the new limit 12-12-12, as long as no one company’s stations reached more than a quarter of the nation’s homes.” In addition to expediting the rise of conglomeration, it began a string of large network mergers where “ABC merged with Disney Company. . . General Electric acquired RCA and NBA. . . [and] Westinghouse took over CBS.”

Conglomeration and deregulation were met during a period of increased globalization during the Reagan administration. A great knowledge and awareness among the American public of what was happening overseas left reporters with the ability to report on international occurrences. Whereas “earlier era producers had worried whether there was enough news to fill a thirty-minute evening broadcast” networks were now faced with the question of “what do we leave out?” With the media’s increased global reach, “Governments watched history with their publics, losing the luxury of time to deliberate in private before the imperative to “do something” stood on their doorsteps.” The media with their 24-hour airtime and enhanced means of cooperation came into full realization of its scorekeeper role.
The norms and lessons learned from the rise of print, radio, television, investigative journalism, and the 24-hour news media seem at a loss to help explain or comprehend the rise and effect of the Internet. Indeed, the modern government communication conundrum is social media and its unprecedented level of interactivity. Leaving the question what does this mean “for the future of constitutional representative democracy?”⁴³ “The Internet may provide a means of rejuvenating internal debate and participation within political parties, and offer a way of involving more people in its processes.”⁴⁴ The growing interactivity of the Internet, begs the question: what is next?

Broken Communication Lines

The modern communication lines connecting the government, the media, and the citizenry have given the appearance of a great level of political predictability. But how dependable are these lines? One need look no further than the Presidential election of 2016. News reporters, political analysts, politicians of both parties, the citizenry, the losing candidate, and Trump supporters were all shocked by the results of the election of President Trump. The only one who seems none too shocked by the election results was the newly-elected President Trump himself. However, Trump’s confidence had little to do with any data that supported his victory.

Trump and his opponent, Hilary Clinton, approached the campaign from two different spheres, and neither of them were tied to the people. Trump relied on his previous business experience and personal utilization of social media to communicate his message during the 2016 election, in addition to his self-financing. Clinton was already
firmed established in the political realm. Even though she carried significant negative political baggage from her many lives in politics, she mobilized her strong political connections and wealthy contributors to run her campaign. Clinton and Trump were both already extremely established political and business figures who were playing a campaign game far above the typically understood, grassroots mobilization that cause people to choose sides early. This can make an election more predictable with the sophisticated use of polling, but in an election where many do not make up their minds until the final weeks, it can be impossible to predict. After all, people do not always vote with their registered parties.

President Trump’s use of social media and his strikingly underdeveloped communication skills seemed nothing compared to Clinton’s political finesse. After the election results, many inquired: how did Clinton lose against someone who seemed to destroy their own campaign with daily tweets? Clinton came at the campaign from a politically structured, message based platform that was dedicated to the Democrat party line. Trump approached the campaign with a business perspective of “all news is good news,” bouncing between anti-party sentiments and Republican party loyalty.

Media has long condemned the amount of money that is spent on campaigns, even though a vast amount of the money that is spent in campaigns is spent on the media. Regardless, media has long been entangled with the process of campaigns and elections. From the media’s perspective, they considered Trump’s election impossible because of his childish outbursts. Trump believed he would be victorious because of his self-proclaimed “winner” character. Clinton believed she would be victorious because of her
experience as a Clinton. None of these viewpoints are connected to the citizenry or reflective of how the citizenry viewed the candidates. All three of these viewpoints are how Clinton, Trump, and the Media saw themselves.

The Media’s disconnection with the citizenry is one thing. With the effects of conglomereration and business-centric ideology, the media’s disconnectedness with the citizenry is to be expected. Regardless of its negative implications or abandonment of its role as an institution of democracy. The President’s disconnection with the citizenry, however, is another issue entirely. The concern is greater as “the President must continually seek ways in which to reconcile violent differences between various factions and people and even nations. . .to reporters, on the other hand, conflict is the stuff of which headlines and careers are made.”45 Trump’s victory, because he considered himself a “winner,” does not support the missing link that he too is not connected with the values of what the citizenry considers “presidential”, one of which is being an effective communicator.

Where did it happen that the news and the government have become so out of touch without even knowing what the citizens are thinking? What is the future of such a development? Where are the people? Are they protesting because they do not know what else to do? Are they posting on private social media pages for their friends to see because that medium is the most accessible? The citizenry voted, so we know they are out there. How is it that neither the Government nor the Media has any idea what they are thinking even with the aid of computerized predictions?
Consider a series of communication lines running in between Government and the Citizenry, and likewise between the Citizenry and the Media. Add these lines to the already established ones in between Government and Media. The lines between Government and Media are running strong to the point of interdependency. The consumption line from content running from Media to the Citizenry is keeping them in business. The line from the Government to the Citizenry has transformed over time but is still prominent. However, the lines running from the Citizenry to Government and the Citizenry to the Media are at best unidentifiable. The American federated democratic republic depends on the participation of the Citizenry. So, where are they?
PART II

BROKEN COMMUNICATION LINES

The People, as it were, are going through a modern transition. Where nothing is tangible, everything is immediate, predetermined, and appears to have been done before. Modern life mixed with the decline of political participation and the information deficit makes connecting the Triangle of Communication between Media, Government, and the Citizenry increasingly challenging. An increasingly conglomerated media aggravating the populace’s information deficit combined with the growing social capital deficit yields a set of broken communication lines between the three. Why are these lines broken and how can we fix them before it is too late?46

GOVERNMENT

MEDIA ← → CITIZENRY
CHAPTER 4

THE INFORMATION AND SOCIAL CAPITAL DEFICITS

The Information Deficit

. . . those who are persuaded to change their minds or those who forget, because time, in the latter case, and argument, in the former, takes away their opinions without their realizing it.\(^1\)

- Plato

There is an information deficit among the American citizenry. Knowledge of current issues and the historical background of such issues is quite simply, abysmal. It is not what it should be when we have citizens who do not have the basic knowledge that they would need to make a reasonable decision when voting or participating in civil society. There have been surveys taken about citizen’s approval of congress generally or how informed people believe themselves to be. There are not as many surveys that are this specific, as one would think. Even more surprising, are the conclusions that have been made from the surveys that are available discussed later in this chapter. First, people get the majority of their information from news sources. Second, people know that they are uninformed. Third, an individual is more likely to approve about what they are informed about then what they are not. Fourth, there is a disconnect between informed individuals, approval ratings, and voting results.

The most accessible and sadly highest quality of information the average citizen has access to is information that is publicized by the news media. “People inevitably must learn most of what they know about current events and political figures from the news media, since few have any direct way to obtain this information.”\(^2\) “Not surprisingly, people who say they regularly watch, read, or listen to the news know more than those
who do not." In absence of news media there is very little methods of obtaining information, other than by word of mouth. Which would, granted, have to come from a mouth that was informed in a place of community interaction. Both of which are becoming increasingly rare. Where exactly this deficit comes from or how it can be remedied is debated. However, the fact that it has been increasing past the normal levels of fluctuation, is not.

Public interest in current events and politics have always fluctuated. Depending on “what’s in the news,” interest in the information disseminated by media sources has wavered. However, a normal base level of interest of those who keep up with the news on a daily basis is “gradually fading, as an older generation of news and politics junkies pass slowly from the scene.” These “news and politics junkies” are individuals who can be expected to read the paper, follow certain stories, and have personally build up their own base knowledge of political and current events to be capable of consuming current event news. Such individuals as they have grown older have kept up with the consumption of news via traditional sources like television and papers, are not being replaced by younger generations who get their news from alternate sources, some of which include the internet, Facebook, and smartphone media apps. News sources that contain the minimal amount of information necessary to convey the story, or sometimes at best a descriptive headline.

Normally, consumption of news that was of interest to an older generation would often overlap with those of interest to a younger generation. Stories would include what one would consider “breaking news” or major “headlines.” However, today not even the
sensationalized stories of the news media are capable of turning the heads of a younger generation. “Even from the earliest opinion polls in the 1940s to the mid-1970s, younger people were at least as well informed as their elders were, but that is no longer the case. This news and information gap, [affects] not just politics, but even things like airline crashes, terrorism, and financial news.”

This leaves the question, where are these younger individuals getting their news or their facts on which they base their opinions? The answer is, they are not.

Social Media: More of the Same

Social media was expected to be the answer to all that was lacking in modern media. Its promise was to supplement a gap in social interaction, access to both large media conglomerates, and politicians who are catering to an ever-growing constituency. It promised to be, in a way, a great equalizer. It is a forum where we could all comment on and receive information concurrently. The rise of the barriers to entry in media that occurred as a side-effect of conglomeration, were at long last able to be circumvented through the use of social media. However, this glowing promise of social media, never materialized. News networks quickly were able to utilize social media as simply another medium in their horizontally-integrated networks. Ironically at the same time, networks are attempting to hire “millennials” to operate such functions as networks are not quite sure what to do with social media.

On social media platforms, comments and interactions are made on such a large scale and at such a rapid pace that the value of such interactions do not go far beyond providing data to networks of the visibility of their content. The use of network TV or
radio or social media revolves around how many “likes” or “views” or “listeners” do we get? Why? This is because networks can sell their Facebook space or air time to advertisers. Privacy concerns prevent statistical data or real participation to go beyond anything more contributive to civil society than a numerical priority level on someone else’s news feed. Arguably, privacy should. Advertisers and networks have far too greater a view in determining our likes, despite the appearance of security settings on such sites. That, however, is an entirely separate issue which will only come to light through time. How can we judge such businesses that provide us with such conveniences at a price that we have not yet realized we have paid?

Social media has enhanced the ability for politicians and larger organizations or corporations to communicate directly to individuals. There has been an expectation that social media would somehow be able to meet the tall order of supplementing our political and media participation gaps. It is greatly debatable whether social media has met those gaps. Furthermore, the greater issue is: how, without social media, will the Media and Government be able to reach the citizenry as the younger generation becomes increasingly prominent? The core purpose of social media is brevity. How can it offer the kind of in-depth evaluation the way that a lengthy essay or editorial can? How can you fit the ideology of a Federalist essay inside of a 140-character Tweet? The potential for misunderstanding and manipulation in such a short method of communication is exorbitant.

The illusion of connectivity created with social media has created the mirage of supplementing communication lines that are on the verge of extinction. Social media
promised to be the great connector, however, it became an increasingly greater form of isolated participation. There are many forms of political participation, some of which are performed within the community, others of which are performed in isolation. The aggregate benefit of both is that community participation and discussion far outweighs that of an isolated action. That loss is the discussion and exercise of commonality in the struggle between opposing views that could have benefitted others in their struggle. In isolated versions of civic participation, there is not much to be gained among other citizens. We vote alone, we write letters to our Congressman, often alone, we call our leaders alone, and we make Facebook posts alone. Even worse, we make Facebook posts concerning politics alone, that are only visible to those who we have preapproved as our “friends.”

The promise of interconnectedness that social media held was a great promise that has only increased the great isolation that we were all hoping to escape. This illusion of interconnectedness has replaced the true isolation that was experienced in between the invention of communication technology and the common use of such technology. Telephone calls used to be expensive, so many wrote letters to their loved ones. That is a foreign concept now. It doesn’t take much imagination to wonder how many people have mailed a letter for personal communication purposes in the past five years.

Social media was praised as the future of communication, but all it gave us was the quantitative measurement of proving how few people seemed to “follow” us, or even seemed to be aware of our existence. It has aided in our journey as members of a modern society to become Passive Isolationists. We are individuals so overwhelmed by the
pressures of modern society, it has become impossible for us to have an in-person conversation. Anxiety starts to weight in, as the incredible rarity of such an interaction messes with our heads. Will we as young modern members of society mess up our one chance of social interaction? Are these interactions really so rare that they actually are affecting our mental capacity to function in society? Have we really lost social interaction capability? Are our streets that dangerous? Or are we that comfortable in our own homes?

**Social Capital Deficit: Decline of Associations**

Prior to the social media modern culture of isolationism, there was a decline of community involvement. The decline of interest in joining community associations has resulted in a deficit with what Putnam refers to as “social capital.” “The core idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value. . .social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups.” Putnam’s idea of social capital revolves around the common idea in civil societies that there is power in numbers, especially organized numbers. “Social capital refers to the connections among individuals - social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them.” This type of Putnam’s social capital concept does not result from a collection of individuals who have come together briefly for a demonstration. No, “a society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital.” A group rich in social capital requires aspects such as trust, experience, and group collaboration.

One of Putnam’s major works is “Bowling Alone.” The title not only perfectly depicts his concept, but creates a visual image of the conundrum that has occurred as a result of the decline of associations. How can one go bowling by one’s self? It is
impossible. By definition the game of bowling involves other players. Likewise, the “game” of civil society involves the participation of citizens. “A well-connected individual in a poorly connected society is not as productive as a well-connected individual in a well-connected society.” In other words – a poorly informed individual is useless unless there is a community which can support the political involvement of such an individual. Unfortunately, as Putnam notes, there has been a dramatic decline in community outlets for such an individual.

“Social connections are important for the rules of conduct that they sustain.”

Some rules of conduct include the rule of law, challenges of advocacy and solidarity, as well as general public manners which permits us all to reasonably live together in society. Social connections establish and reinforce such norms of behavior. Possibly also attributed to the rise of “anti-society” movements, the decline of associations and avenues in which one can participate politically has been met by a decline in the trust necessary to support a citizen’s participation in community associations.

Any type of “legal and political order is only possible. . . in a society where there is a lot of active, successful trusting and a relatively intense level of civil life.” The average American citizen who does not trust those around him in society, negatively impacts their active involvement. The lack of involvement destroys the connection to the community further driving the existence of associations into the ground. Is it crime? Is it individual isolationism? It is modern technology that drives us away from community involvement? Have we reached the point of modern individualism where we simply have nothing in common to discuss in a community association?
The value of civic engagement is one of the most underrated aspect of the American political system. “Civic engagement and social capital entail mutual obligation and responsibility for action.” Social capital and civic engagement are both the movement of community citizens contributing to the discussion of civil society. Social capital is done, however, on a much more informal level. Civic engagement is the lifeblood of the American system. The American system is federated to permit local autonomy, while democratic to give direct national involvement, in a representative republic. Without an engaged and personally informed citizenry, the potential for the degradation of all three facets of our mixed government is imminent.

The American federated democratic republic depends on the citizenry. It was also designed to depend on a citizenry that remained in one place for most of their life. In the developing modern society, how can the American political system depend on something that is no longer there? People are moving, not staying in the same place, and not valuing the same things they used to. The decline in community organizations, smaller newspapers, and generally any type of platform for local discussion and involvement outside of general protesting, is causing a great disconnect between the Government and the Citizenry. This disconnect is further antagonized by the appallingly low level of information we as a citizenry care to consume.

An additional side-effect of the decline in community involvement, is the rise of isolated types of political involvement or a type of “passive citizen.” “Voting and following politics are relatively undemanding forms of participation [and] they are not, strictly speaking, forms of social capital at all, because they can be done utterly alone.”
In the American system there are many “avenues for expressing our view and exercising our rights - contacting local and national officials, working for political parties and other political organizations, discussing politics with our neighbors, attending public meetings, joining in election campaigns, wearing buttons, signing petitions, speaking out on talk radio, and many more.”15 However, the decline and inevitable disappearance of these participation avenues results in the rise of a passive citizen which leaves a community with little social capital to utilize. This does not leave many people appeal to for grassroots campaigns or aid the effective mobilization of local advocacy groups.

The disconnect between decline in community involvement and an uninformed citizenry is antagonized by the reemerging barriers to entry in media. The information deficit we are experiencing as a citizenry is unprecedented. Although as mentioned, interest in news has fluctuated over time, but now the base line of keeping up with the times is on a steady decline. Even prior to the citizenry having the opportunity to consume news as easily as today on their own internet devices, Americans received news by word of mouth which required community interaction in common areas of the community. With the disappearance of such common areas, a rise in the barriers to entry in media have hindered citizenry involvement in the discussion.

With the aforementioned rise of conglomeration, entry into credited media mediums has become not only more difficult but increasingly rare of an opportunity. The use of limited reporters to supply information and stories across several mediums cuts the job opportunities for reporters. In a business model media, the controllable cost of production when it reaches its lowest possible level can yield the highest return. The
disappearance of smaller newspapers or community associations that often had their own forum for political discussion or sometimes their own community publication have created insurmountable barriers to entry in media. With the presence of the internet, social media, and blogs, these barriers to entry seemed to be fundamentally challenged. However, the level of entries and content, in addition to media networks utilizing their own social media pages and blogs for content dissemination has rendered social media as more of the same in keeping the status quo in media’s high barriers to entry.

**Facts: The Crucial Part of Anything**

The disappearance of associations and the rise of barriers to entry in media have left little forum for the manifestation of civic engagement or the discussion of information. A discussion not only fuels civic engagement, but encourages the revelation of facts. In order to consume news to achieve any kind of literacy on current events, one needs to have a baseline knowledge of certain terms and facts. These terms and facts can be learned relatively quickly, simply by starting to pay attention. Equally important is the discussion among peers.

Beyond the modern lack of forums for such discussion, how modern information is disseminated is too fast paced to permit this kind of debate. The decline in discussion forums has not been met with a supplemental one. With the disappointment of the ability of social media, there has not been a movement for the setup of an alternate forum. This is a phenomenon where we seem to be losing our ability to gain information and are not interested in doing anything about it. Even worse, we know that as a citizenry we are generally uninformed.
People seem to have a generally accurate view on how informed they are. A study was taken sampling “863 US college students enrolled at a large Midwestern university” in order to determine “their actual knowledge of current events.” About 53% of “those who scored 80% or above. . . reported themselves “very well informed” [and] no one who had assessed himself or herself as “poorly” informed attained a score of 80% or higher.” “As measured by actual test results, self-appraisals were quite realistic.” A further finding of this study was not only that people who rated themselves as uninformed did not score as well on a survey of current events as those who rated themselves as informed, but about 80% of those surveyed admitted that being informed was important. Over 50% “characterized the need to be well informed as “usually quite important” and 29% deemed it “vital” or “essential” or “extremely important.”

The importance of discussion and being informed is necessary to know all of the facts. “Knowing all the facts is necessary for. . . competence.” If you have the correct facts you can come naturally to a reasonable conclusion within the values that one holds. “There are many things that people do not know about politics, policy, and government [and] this ignorance prevents them from making competent choices. . . that they would have made had they known certain facts and sought to act consistently with certain values.” Like Jefferson mentioned in his Inaugural speech, the ability for each of us to be informed of the facts and come to a reasonable conclusion is an important characteristic of our political system. More poignantly Senator Moynihan states that “everyone is entitled to his own opinions, but not his own facts.”
Civic Education

Consider that even if one is informed and that they have an outlet for discussion of ideas and an ability to realize the facts, what use is this information if it is unsupported by an education that informs one of how to engage with Government? It is well-accepted that “citizens who do not understand how laws are made or which powers the President wields cannot fully participate in our democracy.” After all, “if you do not know the rules of the game. . . you’re unlikely to try playing yourself.” Even with the overabundance of news media available and “the amount of information and commentary about public affairs,” there is “no substitute for formal education about government and civic life.”

A survey “released by the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania” showed that 35% were “unable to name even one branch of the federal government” and “only 36% could identify all three.” This means that when asked to name a branch of government, one third could not even come up with Congress, the Supreme Court, or the Presidency. The balance of which is central to the concept of the American political system. When “asked which parties control the Senate and House of Representatives, only 38%” were able to choose the right party. Considering that currently there is a two-party system, even by the laws of chance, the potential of picking the right answer is 50%.

The age requirement for how long you have to stay in school until you drop out varies by state. For example, in Ohio, as in most states, you have to turn 18 before you are able to drop out of school. This takes most children through the completion of high
school. The national dropout rate for high school in Ohio in 2014 was 6.4%. This generation would then be more educated than the current one with the dropout rate in 1960 being 27.2%. Although the level of students attending college after high school is not as high, the completion of school up until 18 includes a form of civic education or even at the minimum a history course which covers American government. “Since civics knowledge is boosted by formal education, it is surprising that civics knowledge has not improved accordingly.”

The overall quality of education appears to have been in an overall pattern of degradation. After all, “when John Adams entered Harvard. . .in the 1750s, Harvard demanded that he be able ‘to read, construe, and parse Tully, Virgil, or such like common classical authors, and to write Latin in prose, and to be skilled in the making of Latin verse.’” Indeed, “college entrance requirements, which remained remarkably stable for almost two hundred years, mandated a basic knowledge of the classical languages” during the early days of America. One would be pressed to find a high school that offers Latin as a language course, nonetheless a college that considers the knowledge of Latin as an entrance requirement.

The goal of education is to see the manifestation of the values of freedom and to cultivate the realization that students can through work come to actualize their individual talents. If “ignorance prevents [one] from making competent choices,” then knowledge of facts should provide students with the necessary tools to make informed decisions. There is an individual benefit that we all receive from education that is essential to the development of individual liberty.
To live life to the fullest extent in a free society means the actualizing of our individual talents. This includes the discussion of facts and opinions in an atmosphere that encourages such debate. The facts and lessons we have learned so far as a society are not ones that can simply be conveyed or recited to students, but require interaction. Through such interaction students have the opportunity to realize where their talents and passions lie. This is not a new concept. In ideal cities envisioned across time, including Plato’s *kallipolis*, “everyone. . .practices the craft for which his natural aptitude is highest.”

When the competence of citizens is called into question, “the potential for educators to provide substantial net benefit arises.” The challenge of a civic educator is not a simple task. They are charged with meeting state standards of information as well as attempting to communicate the full weight of the meaning behind the American system. “All of these civic educators face significant challenges. The challenges include limited time and energy, having to choose from all the different kinds of information that can be conveyed to others, and the fact that every person who attempts to learn has limited capacity to pay attention to new information. As a result, educators face important choices about what information to present.” Often times this manifests itself not in the exploration of individual talents or methods of civic engagement, but in an individual, unguided, reading of the Constitution.

“Education was by far the best predictor of engagement in civic life. . .education seemed the key to both greater tolerance and greater social involvement.” One must know how to use a system to actually be able to engage in it. After all, you cannot operate
a car without some type of driving course or proper instruction. The impact of education is an opportunity to supply the information students need in methods of civic engagement and participation in the exercise of governance. The American system is simply too mixed, complex, and intentionally so, to go unstudied. The Federalist Papers themselves, beyond the popular Federalist 10 and 5, are wonderful examples of just how intentional the Founding Fathers were in their construction of our Constitution. The opportunity for citizens to learn in-depth about our theoretical roots is in the classroom and can foster the value of civic engagement that our system depends on.

**High Tensions**

A lack of understanding, information, and outlets to discuss or learn about issues surrounding politics results in a cycle of high tensions among everyone. Citizens feels as though they are not understood by the Media or the Government. Is this because of the loss of art for individuals to convey their ideas to others through the disappearance of political debate and opportunity for idea maturation? Is it because of the modern individual isolationist viewpoint where it seems every individual believes it should be “my way or the highway?”

It seems as though one of the most recently popular, or satisfying, forms of political participation among the citizenry are nationally organized protests. These protests are organized by individuals or relatively new organizations with access to large groups of unaffiliated people via social media. These protests grab national attention, sometimes result in violence, and have little lasting effect. Their ability to bring issues to
rapid national attention is envious to many issues that have fought for national attention for decades. However, there are dangers in these protests.

The most concerning danger is the undermining of one of the most coveted Constitutional rights that the American Citizenry enjoys, the right to organized peaceful protests. There is great power in the organization and demonstration of individuals, but just like the maturation of ideas in political discussion, the rapid mass organization of disconnected people leaves little social capital or momentum after the protest is over and everyone has gone home. Individuals participating in these demonstrations are not contributing to an important debate. It is a loss on both sides when such perspectives and ideas could have been considered.

These large, nationally organized protests, are often uncoordinated lead to temporary highly-visible news stories and have no real lasting effects. Additionally, these organizations have little life span to sustain the large numbers that they originally attract because they attract people whose ties to one another disappears once they have expelled their political frustration and returned home to their opposite ends of the country. Those who they mobilize are not what can be considered “social capital.” They are individuals who joined a Facebook event or were motivated to join based on the underlying concept they are protesting.

Organizations such as the Tea Party came to be known as erratic older individuals with tea bags hanging off of their hats, just as the Women’s March on Washington is being remembered for the pink hats with cat ears they wear. None of these concepts are policy oriented. Standing vaguely for liberty, for diversity, and for women, does not
translate much onto the political field of discussion. In fact, those who participate and donate to unknown leadership of these organizations are enabling a group of values undetermined or whose leadership is unchecked. The danger for individual participants of being taken advantage of is high. Indeed, the high level of participation and visibility that these gatherings achieve is desirable. However, without specific goals or a cohesive ideology, such gatherings render themselves as ineffective as the policies they are protesting against.

In a modern society where town halls have become screaming matches and large organized protests serve little lasting purpose beyond satisfying an emotional reaction of frustration, what will become of political discussion? And who can blame the frustrated? Exempting of course, those who act violently. Citizens are left with feelings of great injustice without the ability to effectively communicate to those of the other side what they are against, to coordinate among their own participants, or with any other effective outlet for their frustration. The information deficit and the loss of social capital with the decline of associations yields a rise of isolated forms of political participation and a citizenry that is overwhelmed, frustrated, and disconnected. So we protest, yell, scream, post on social media, and what is it exactly that we are expecting to happen from those high profile and ineffective forms of participation?

This type of radical political participation makes it impossible to have a constructive conversation whether it is at the local grocery store or on the floor of the House of Representatives. No one is on the same page, and getting through a political conversation to get on the same page typically results in an emotionally heated discussion
on both sides. A discussion antagonized by little ability for anyone to articulate what they know, or how they know it, makes us all defensive. We know what we individually know and we really think we are right, and that is probably true based on our individual perspective. But if we have no ability to discuss our opinion or those reasons why we think what we do with someone else, we have no hope of being able to demonstrate to another our own perspective. With the growth of these broken communication lines, we seem to have lost the ability to talk to one another.

**Cognitive Dissonance of the Electorate**

Beyond the challenges of attempting to run a political system dependent on civic engagement that is experiencing a decline in associations, an information deficit, individual isolation, and lack of civic education, the American electorate seems to be suffering from a type of cognitive dissonance. Polling data has been enhanced throughout the past several decades with the use of modern technology, advance computer systems, and greater access to a pool of citizens as an increased number has access to technology. The evidence of polling data supports the idea that the Citizenry does not approve of areas in which they are uninformed and has a preference for local leadership.

Cognitive dissonance is a recognized concept in psychology that “describes a psychological state in which an individual’s cognitions – beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors – are at odds” with one another.\(^{37}\) When such cognitions are at odds, such as not acting in accordance with one’s beliefs, people “are motivated to resolve the inconsistency between their discrepant cognitions.”\(^{38}\) This “phenomenon has implications for many areas of psychology, including attitudes and prejudice, moral cognition, decision making,
happiness, and therapy.”

Normally the awareness of the discrepancy is extremely difficult to identify and resolve since different factors point to opposing conclusions. An individual may try and resolve the discrepancy by overcompensating or overcorrecting one cognition that does not match up with another, “decreasing the importance of the elements involved in the dissonant relationship, or simply changing one of the dissonant elements.”

The cognitive dissonance exhibited by the electorate is most notable in their approval of Congress. Congressional approval rating recorded by Gallup experienced “the worst on record [at] 10% [which was] recorded twice in 2012.” The cause for the high disapproval can be linked to involvement in the Middle East and the slow recovery from the 2009 financial crisis. A 10% approval rating means that 90% of American disapproved of Congress. However, “although Americans overwhelmingly disapprove of the job Congress in general is doing, voters re-elect most members of Congress in every election.”

Most Members of Congress win their elections by a comfortable margin. Only a few races are very close, resulting in few dramatic shifts in Congressional Members every election cycle. This is because even though Americans overwhelmingly disapprove of Congress as a whole, “many Americans actually approve of the job their own district’s congressional representative is doing.”

Compared to the 10% approval rate of Congress overall in 2012, results from the survey the following year in 2013 reported about 50% “of Americans say they approve of the job the representative from their own congressional district is doing.” The conclusion of which can only be that “Americans have significantly more positive views
of their own representatives than they do of Congress overall."\textsuperscript{45} The American Citizenry overwhelmingly cannot stand Congress and thinks they all should be thrown out. However, they also reelect their own members by a majority. Americans think that Congress is not performing their duties, but approve of the job that their own Congressman is doing. These findings are not consistent with one another.

Further supporting the conclusion that the American Electorate is experiencing a type of cognitive dissonance, of those who said they knew who their representative was, their approval of that person increased by half. Out of the general polling group, "35\% of respondents surveyed knew the name of their representative," out "of this group . . .62\% approved of" their Congressperson.\textsuperscript{46} "The difference between the 62\% approval rating among [the] group" who was able to identify their representative "and the 46\% among all Americans suggests that those who do not know their representative’s name hold [them] in lower regard."\textsuperscript{47} This 2013 Gallup survey concluded that "people who do not know the name of their representative may be evaluating that person largely on their generally negative feelings about how the broader institution is doing."\textsuperscript{48}

Survey results support the fact that individuals who are more informed about their representative, approve of them, while relating disapproval when considering their representative as part of the overall Congressional body. There are several factors of these conclusions that do not make sense in the results of this survey. If the electorate approve of their own representative, why do they not approve of Congress? Why do they disapprove of Congress as a whole? Where are the Electorate getting the information that
seems to consistently tell them that Congress overall is less than inadequate but their own representative is more than adequate?

Even if by a coincidence, it was the case that all Congressional districts approved of their representatives in the aggregate, how can the electorate overwhelmingly disapprove of Congress, and believe they all should be thrown out? Paradoxically, how can the Electorate overwhelming disapprove of Congress, believe they all should be thrown out, but still consistently elect their own representatives by a majority? This leaves the only reasonable conclusion to be an internal battle within the electorate to resolve the inconsistency by bouncing between the two extremes.

Making additional conclusions about the American approval rate of Congress is difficult as most popular polls ask specific, pointed questions that constrict the meaning of the answers. This survey conducted in 2013, which was the year following the lowest approval rating of Congress on record, inquired about approval ratings for Congressional representatives nationally versus individually. This inquiry is not among the core polling questions typically asked by Gallup. When Gallup took this poll in 2013, they hadn’t asked the question since 1992.

There is evidence which supports that citizens who are informed or are engaged are more approving of parts of the Government then are not. Ignorance seems to breed dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction seems to be countered by approval of issues that one is familiar with or informed on. Bouncing in between the two has very little logical connection or reasoning associated with it beyond a type of cognitive dissonance and subconscious attempt to overcorrect one way or the other. It is the difference between the
perception of having knowledge and the act of participation in obtaining such
information.

This type of dissonance can lead to unexplained phenomena in voting and
inconsistency in political participation. It is the back and forth battle of the American
Citizenry going between extremes since the outlets that previously existed to supply
forums for the dissemination of information and sources of political participation are
disappearing. The broken communication lines between the American citizenry to the
Government and the Media if they continue to go un-mended could have serious
consequences for this American federated democratic republic.
CHAPTER 5

MENDING BROKEN LINES

What the Role of the Media Should Be

The traditional roles of media in government are as gatekeeper, watchdog, and scorekeeper. The Media has been expected to be the gatekeeper for stories they select to tell, the watchdog over symptoms of tyranny, and the scorekeeper of recent history. These roles have morphed over time, but have generally kept their traditional meaning. With the rise of conglomeration as well as the information and social capital deficits, how these roles consistently manifest themselves in modern reporting is difficult to identify. The rapidity of published news stories, the disappearing process of idea maturation, and the increasing presence of extreme partisan viewpoints have made the fulfillment of these traditional roles nearly impossible to separate from the sensationalized stories they produce.

Regardless of the challenges of the modern day media monster, there is not a solid consensus on what the role of the media should be outside of their traditionally understood roles or how those roles should be actualized in the practice of journalism. The media serves an important role in America’s federated democratic republic, but “the media’s relationship to politics is much more complex than traditional media-centered accounts allow.” ¹ The relationship between the government and the media has morphed and changed over time, and with it the citizenry’s expectations of it. As this medium develops and this relationship continues to transition, what are the constants in the media’s role that we should expect it to fulfill? What should the media prioritize outside

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of its own profit margin? The critical roles of the media that should be protected include its function as a marketplace for information, a forum for debate and idea maturation, and as a watchdog against tyranny.

The Media has great value and impact on the daily lives of citizens as it is a marketplace for information. The ability of Media to disseminate information and gather facts on a scale otherwise unavailable is a significant advantage of the Citizenry. Without effort spent in reading news and educating oneself in current events, the information that one can obtain on a daily basis becomes a power that can be used to affect policy. The Media has an obligation to “keep people informed about public affairs so that individuals are adequately briefed when they take part in the processes of” Government.\(^2\) Without the proper information or background knowledge on a topic, constructive participation in the political democratic debate loses its effective policy impact.

As the Media keeps the Citizenry informed, it also supplies a forum for the debate of ideas and discovery of facts. In providing a forum for debate, “the media serve[s] democracy by contributing to representative processes.”\(^3\) It is considered the “primary democratic tasks of the media to inform, scrutinize, [and] debate.”\(^4\) Without the supply of a forum for the debate of the information that is presented, it defeats even the democratic purpose of supplying information. Having the information that is reported to a citizen is useful only when addressed among other members of the community in a constructive forum for debate.

The Media has a unique advantage to be able to supply such a forum for the testing of ideas without spending limited political capital to test ideas at the Government
level. There is value in the process of idea maturation in that ideas can be refined and presented at the Government level in a manner in which they will be most effective and likely to achieve. “The media should enable organized groups to present their concerns and solutions to a wider public, “if these concerns are viewed as legitimate and win support, the media system should mobilize public pressure for a response from government and the political system.” This by no means makes “the media...a surrogate for the representative processes of society.” It does, however, provide a forum for debate that has access to a number of citizen perspectives that will allow ideas to mature.

One of the Media’s most important roles is what is traditionally understood as the “watchdog” role. That is, it must give public attention or a level of oversight to Government to protect from tyranny. Tyranny is something that cannot be condoned even once or otherwise gotten rid of without significant struggle. Tyranny, once it infiltrates a system, can spread like a cancer. The Media’s function as a watchdog is to prevent the Government from entering into a “state [of] tyranny...which is the potential threat to the welfare of society.” Although tyranny is the greatest of offenders, the role of watchdog also sheds light on issues such as corruption, scandal, and illegal activity.

Media serves not only the marketplace where citizens obtain information, or a common forum for the debate of ideas, or democracy’s alarm bell for tyranny. The Media has the opportunity to assist in the process of idea maturation by filtering through information to get to the facts. The Media can greatly expedite such a process by putting in the effort and time it takes to get to the facts. However, the facts arrived at are not
always those that are true. When the Media publishes stories that are underdeveloped, generalized, conclusory, or false, it directly affects the democratic process by delaying the process of idea maturation and debate. In today’s every-increasing fast-pace modern society, citizens take insufficient facts or underdeveloped stories and form opinions and actions based on those conclusions. The Media’s access to information must be met by the Citizenry’s demand that they recognize some type of standards in their practice. Otherwise misinformation and hastily formed decisions could be as threatening to the democratic process as tyranny itself.

A type of recognized standards requires a type of consistent values. Values hopefully that include that of attempted objectivity, a good-faith effort on fact-checking, and an understanding of the overall goal of protecting our country from the downfalls of acting in opposition to these values. This type of quality reporting is time-consuming, makes it difficult to process through information, expensive to produce, and comes with little glory. These values are, however, extremely important to the function of the American free press. If the Media keeps the core goal and standard of accuracy, even in admitting where there are gaps in stories or reporting different versions of a story, it can be trusted to be the fuel for constructive political discussion. This constructive role is being replaced by what we are experiencing in today’s modern media monster, which is for-profit and caters to what their viewers are looking to hear and not exactly what the facts are.

The critical roles of the Media as a marketplace for information, a forum for debate and idea maturation, and as a watchdog against tyranny, should be protected as
more than just beneficial for the communication lines between the Citizenry and the
Government, but as a check on Government. However, none of these roles can be
realized without the core standard of accuracy. Will we be able to demand more from the
media? Will we as the Citizenry value this type of standard in Media? Without the value
of this standard, the Citizenry as consumers of the news are effectively accepting the
tailored-made entertainment news that is being produced.

If a citizen does not necessarily care about accuracy in the Media and its role in
the democratic process, it is more than likely that the citizenry does not value their
individual duty to engage in politics either. If the citizenry itself is unwilling to demand
the standard of accuracy in Media, even as a consumer customer of that news, how then
can such standards be implemented and the democratic process be protected? Sometimes
Media sources have a business culture of valuing accuracy in reporting, sometimes
lawsuits are filed when stories are published to the contrary, and sometimes there is
Government regulation that seeks to protect these standards.

**Danger of Government Regulation**

Media needs standards, however, the level of Government regulation should
remain minimal. There are dangers in Government regulation of the content of Media.
However, if Media continues on their decline of substance, will there be another choice to
resolve the information deficit? What type of Government regulation would be
constructive? Associations that can enforce such standards may be necessary but cannot
be purely government sponsored. There is danger in this type of centralization and
increased barriers to entry. Such universal standards cannot be government-enforced or it
will defeat its own purpose. Although the current situation is dire, there is hope for media to be able to fulfill its important role in democracy as long as there is minimal regulation of content and barriers to entry.

“Government involvement with the press is not unique, nor is government support of endeavors involving research, artistic, and journalistic enterprise.” Government can be a beneficial contributor to the marketplace of information and ideas in the Media. Beyond regulation, the “National Public Radio and the Public Broadcasting System are journalistic enterprises partially supported by government subsidy.” These enterprises supply news, information, and entertainment on a partially government-funded and partially private viewer funded basis. This is a special type of media news that is controlled by both the Government and the Citizen viewer, not by private interest alone.

Unfortunately, the potential for the manipulation of facts can be as prevalent in Government as it can be in private-interest Media. This is also the traditional viewpoint for the support of a “free press,” under a government that minimally restricts content. The traditional notion against Government regulation of content in the dissemination of information, rests on the fact that such restriction of content can be an opportunity for such tyrannical leaders to force their own fiction on a public who does not have the luxury of a debate forum where such fictions can be realized.

Political theorists, such as Edmond Burke, wrote: “we have never dreamt that parliaments had any right whatever to. . .force a currency of their own fiction in the place of that which is real.” The recognized danger of Government regulating Media content poses just as much potential for tyranny and danger to the democratic process as Media’s
abandonment of its traditional role. In short, Government regulation of content is incredibly close to exclusively Government supplied content and the resulting effect of which includes Media becoming nothing more than a channel for propaganda.

Partially Government-funded broadcasting has contributed significantly to the marketplace of information in their sponsorship and syndication of programs that other Media outlets would not view as profitable. However, Government-regulated Media content in the form of Government oversight of Media content is dangerous. Ethical standards, such as accuracy and objectivity, are not only important for the democratic process but also for the Citizenry and society. Such standards are not profitable nor easy to implement, in fact most of the time implementing these standards is the hard way.

The value of such standards is in their self-imposed nature. The regulation of Media content in ethical standards should be self-imposed in order to carry any kind of value. “The ideal must be capable of being publicly avowed and endorsed as a yardstick,” where media outlets can measure themselves by.\textsuperscript{11} Such virtues involve a type of personal responsibility and social value that does not seem to exist in modern culture. If Government regulation of Media content is a danger, then it is up to the Citizenry to take up such values and expect them of not only ourselves, but of our institutions of democracy.

\textit{Duty & the Passive Individual}

Where is the sense of duty for the American Citizenry to fill their role as the caretakers of the system that our forefathers fought desperately to build? Where is the duty that Cicero touted that “no part of life. . .can be free from duty,” and where
“everything that is honorable in a life depends upon its cultivation, and everything
dishonorable upon its neglect.”\textsuperscript{12} This overall loss of any sense of duty is a natural
evolution from the individual isolation that the Citizenry is experiencing in modern life.

The decline in social associations and outlets for political involvement, feed into a
passive citizenry culture. In a modern fashion, the American Citizenry has the luxury of
returning home in the evening and disappearing in the individual bliss of their own lives.
Watching their favorite movies, reading their Facebook newsfeed comprised of their
approved friends, spending time with family, shopping online, ordering delivered food,
listening to their music, the American Citizenry simply continue on with their routine.

It seems that unless a citizen takes the initiative to become informed, read a
variety of sources and learn the bias caveats of each news source, one could go happily
on without ever needing to engage in their community or in politics. Citizens have the
modern luxury of avoiding politics or the community they live in without it affecting
their daily lives. It would seem that we can live individually within our own way of life
and independence without interaction with one another, with no sense of duty or
obligation holding us back from the free enjoyment of such seclusion. There is much at
risk with such a lifestyle. Not only is there a great loss of perspective that could
contribute to the realm of political debate, but how can we be so comfortable in giving up
what is the characteristic of a democracy: citizen engagement? Without sufficient citizen
engagement it seems that a system cannot rightly call any part of itself a democracy.

As the American modern society develops and begins to realize itself amidst
technological advances and the increased expectation of human potential, it seems ironic
that with our growing capacity level, we are also experiencing an increased in apathy. The implementation of standards in Media, and by extension in Government, is an incredible goal to be desired and an effective protector of the democratic process. However, the implementation of standards is meaningless if the Citizenry does not also believe in their importance.

   In a way, the belief in the value of standards is just as important as the belief in the value of the democratic process. Such models are useless if they are not believed in and valued. Without the support of the Citizenry they are simply models, they are theories without the ability to be fully realized. They are no better than pipe dreams and unobtainable ideals. It is not necessarily that the Citizenry seems to disapprove or reject such models as much as it is their inability to use the models for lack of education and understanding as well as, quite simply, their passivity.

   The passive citizen is simply a manifestation of the modern passive individual. The passive individual is a product of the emergence of modern life, its characteristics manifest itself as isolationist on an individual level. This modern individual lives in a digital world that has been personal-preference created for that individual. The ads that we look at online have been tailored to us based on our search history, our phone screens, newsfeeds, and information stream have all been constructed based on what we want to see, and what we do not. A modern individual isolationist values this kind of personally tailored digital medium. They value the expedited manner in which they receive only the information that they want to know about, and block the information that they do not want. Such a modern isolationist is not interested in the diverse activity of politics,
education, community involvement, or really much of anything outside of their personally constructed digitized world.

How then is the individual of modern life compatible with the engaged citizen required for the American political system to function? Is the side-effect of modern life the emergence of a passive individual who simply does not care beyond their individual universe? Has modern technology really been able to afford such luxury? And at what cost does that unbridled liberty come? Can these seemingly incompatible systems of modern life and the American political system work to benefit each other? Or will they be the death of one another? The French observer of American life in the early-nineteenth century, Alexis de Tocqueville, prophetically warned that the downfall of democracy lies in the individual’s ability to retreat into themselves and their own circle of friends. He wrote that “each citizen [that] isolates himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraws into the circle of family of friends. . .gladly leaves the greater society to look after itself.”¹³

The opportunity that the American Citizenry has in valuing standards that support the Media that keep Government accountability and facilitate the American democratic process is as novel and rare a concept in the history of political institutions as that of liberty and freedom. Media can hold Government accountable as a service to the Citizenry. Civic education can enable the Citizenry to participate in Government and hold the Media accountable for their reporting. It is a mutually reinforced communication triangle that when functioning protects the liberty and democratic process that we as American Citizens value and utilize. However, such liberty and democracy are not
processes that one can pick up any time they feel properly motivated and then abandon.

Much like the valuation of standards, without the consistent input of fuel that runs the communication lines between Government, the Media, and the Citizenry, they will disappear. Humans, as the Citizenry is comprised of, have been identified as creatures of habit. Once fallen out of certain habits, such as participation in the democratic process, what will then sustain it?

Modern life, although exemplifying Tocqueville’s concerns about individualism and democracy, may not be entirely at fault. After all, “life is not lived in a single dimension.”^{14} Possibly the decline of political participation in the democratic process may be as simple as a miscalculation. On the optimistic side, “perhaps the younger generation today is no less engaged than their predecessors, but engaged in new ways.”^{15} Maybe the involvement on social media and the development of new technological advances will transform society in a way that will be compatible with the American federated democratic republic. Possibly the system can be adapted to preserve the overall concept of democracy while supplementing new forums for debate. Perhaps the democratic process can be salvaged. However, from the pessimistic side, will it be too late?
PART III

AMERICAN AMNESIA
CHAPTER 6

A MILLENNIA OF DIALOGUE

Humans create models and processes of their own reality. The creation of political and governmental models are the product of human innovation, experience, and theory. Nietzsche considered humans entirely unique in the way that they create their own reality. Nietzsche pointed out that in order to sustain a reality in which one creates, you have to actively believe in and participate in that reality. Without participation or an active belief in a model or reality, that reality decays.

Accordingly, if an individual is not participating or involved in a political system, then it is not their reality. Their reality, and the world that they engage in, and participate in, is their current reality. Such participation and realities can change, as one’s involvement shifts. However, it begs the question, at this very moment how much of the Citizenry is invested in the reality of the American federated democratic republic? The sustainability of a political system rests on the struggle for that system to be believed in and realized.

The philosophical discussion of the creation of our own reality or the construction of our civil society is a dialogue that has spanned thousands of years. The construction of a political system is an extremely ominous undertaking. Without a model to follow or restrictions that exist beyond our own imposition of them, there is little straight-forward guidance to consider. What we do have, however, is a collection of historical attempts, political theories, and discussions that provide a lengthy checklist of considerations that should be taken into account.
The American Founding Fathers were greatly influenced by the considerations of Classical political theory, which “provided [them] with mixed government theory.”

Classical political theory that arguably spans from the writings of Plato’s *Socratic Dialogues*. These dialogues are essentially reality-based hypothetical discussion between characters that cover a variety of issues. The considerations that rests at the core of some of Plato’s most known dialogues are extremely telling in the understanding of our own American political system.

*The Republic & The Symposium: The Importance of Asking the Question*

The *Republic* and the *Symposium* are two of Plato’s most famous Socratic dialogues. Both dialogues revolve around the discussion of the definition of concepts, that of love and of justice. Justice and love are concepts that are commonly used but rarely understood, where the general understanding is of justice and of love as something “good”; but the realization beyond what the meaning of “good” is, or the practical application of “good,” is as ambiguous as the general concepts the dialogues are attempting to define.

Concepts, like justice and love, are just as illusive and intangible in today’s modern society as they were in classical antiquity. The value in these dialogues is not in their attempting to define a concept that many understand but few are able to articulate, but in the realization that occurs in the asking of the question. Knowing what one does not know is just as important as knowing what one does know. The impact of these dialogues points out the value of asking the question. Asking the question of “what is” a concept that was previously thought to be understood can be revealing. But what happens
when you arrive at an answer? How do you pick one possible answer over another? How do you preserve the overall meaning of an answer while describing it to others?

**The Cratylus: Recognizing Unobtainable & Fleeting Answers**

One of the central questions in Plato’s dialogue the *Cratylus*, is: Is there an inherent relationship between a thing and the name we apply to it? The *Cratylus* looks at the development of language and the meaning behind commonly used words. The discussion hinges on the idea that the meaning applied to words fluidly changes with the shifting of context and passage of time. Therefore, even if you were able to arrive at an enlightened answer behind the meaning or definition of any one thing, that understanding or knowledge, changes faster than one can adapt their knowledge of it.

Plato noted that “the very nature of knowledge changes, [and] at the time when the change occurs there will be no knowledge, and if the transition is always going on, there will always be no knowledge. . . there will be no one to know and nothing to be known.”² Plato’s character, Socrates, remarks near the conclusion of this dialogue that he “found myself more puzzled than [he] was before.”³

The importance of seeking knowledge is not in acquiring or possessing it, but in the process of asking the question. In the end the dialogue participators have no greater grasp on the meaning of justice or love than when they started. They all have a greater understanding of the various perspectives and meanings surrounding these concepts. That kind of fleeting knowledge does have value. It is the importance of asking the question and the practice of developing an understanding of the problem and the possible solutions without having the real ability to find the true answer, as the true answer is as
unobtainable as making a day last longer. Time passes, context changes, and knowledge changes. True answers to questions may be unobtainable in any lifetime. It is the understanding of the question, one’s own lack of knowledge, and the recognition of other perspectives that make the discussion valuable.

**Plato’s Allegory of The Cave**

*The Cave* is an allegory in Plato’s *Republic* where men chained to a cave wall only have a perception of life and reality based on shadows that they see on the walls of the cave. They know nothing else. One day one of the men escapes the cave and goes into the outside world and experiences that world. The man returns to the cave to tell the others about what is outside of the cave. Expecting them to desire to leave the cave, the man is surprised when the others mock and do not believe his story.

There are many lessons to be derived from *The Cave*, one of which is the man’s inability to convince the others of what his enlightening experience had been. This situation is as much a point about the importance of going on an intellectual journey oneself as it is about the importance of education in that journey.

Plato introduces *The Cave* by saying that the purpose of the story is “to show the effect of education and the lack of it on our nature.” Education is an experience and a journey where understanding cannot be obtained without the struggle of that journey. Have we as members of a modern society, where answers are easily searchable on the internet, lost the value of this intellectual journey? Are we in fact capable of dedicating the work it takes to break free of our ignorance and go on that intellectual journey? As we move farther and farther away from valuing the journey of asking questions and the
lifelong journey for answers, it only becomes more difficult to share with others. The difference between the outside world and the shadows on the wall only become greater.

**The Pursuit**

This analysis and overview of what is arguably the earliest basis of the discussion of political theory, is to simply illustrate that Plato did not know the answers, and neither do we. We do not have any hope or expectation of knowing the answer. The development of understanding reaches no further than that of the individual who contextualized the question. It is, however, the pursuit of such knowledge that our reality of the American political system values.

It is enshrined even in the American Constitution, which is constructed “in order to form a more perfect union”\(^5\) and to protect “the pursuit of happiness.”\(^6\) It neither boasts a perfect union nor guarantees the Citizenry’s happiness. Happiness, freedom, justice, and love are not concepts that you can ever truly find and keep, or understand. They are living concepts that take participation and belief. It is the pursuit of such things and the fact that we will not give up on these values that define our society.

This journey in the pursuit of knowledge varies in form among individuals. Plato’s Socrates found his inspiration among society, explaining in the *Phaedrus*: “I’m a lover of learning, and trees and open country [will not] teach me anything, whereas men in the town do.”\(^7\) Compare him to an individual such as transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau, who found inspiration from being in nature, writing: “I went into the woods. . .[to] learn what it had to teach.”\(^8\) It is not purely being in the woods or being in society
that achieves the appreciation for these considerations which are understood in the pursuit of knowledge, but it is the personal, individual journey that leads to understanding.
CHAPTER 7

FORGETTING OURSELVES

The Price of Living in Civil Society

Man is by nature a political animal.  

- Aristotle

Humans are not able to live by themselves and realize their full potential. The way that humans are capable of living with one another is through “political” institutions constructed in a civil society. Without the construction of civil society, humans are practically unable to live with one another. Even nomadic cultures, like the Bedouins, have a type of societal structure. The price of living in such a necessary civil society is that we have to live with each other. We must live among one another, work beside one another, and concede a certain level of respect to one another. One of the great benefits of American liberty is that, to a point, one can live by one’s own belief. Enjoying the freedom to live in a manner in which one sees fit is a great expression of individualism in liberty.

The extent to which we are able to enjoy life in the manner we value is only possibly by the tradeoff that we must live with and work with others who may live life in a manner in which we disapprove. This requires a level of politeness and mutual respect required by all. For civil society to function in its protection of liberty, we do not need to all agree or support one another in personal endeavors. We must only respect each other and do no harm. Otherwise, if we all thought the same way or had the same opinions, there would be no need for the American federated democratic republic.
The Citizenry needs each other in order to protect and utilize the full extent of its liberty. For something that hits so close to home, it is a great wonder why there has been an overall decline in the community association and in general consumption of information. How can something so important and central to how we each individually live our everyday lives be met with such apathy by the Citizenry? Are we so comfortable in our own modern personally-constructed lives that we have become incapable of protecting our civil society? Is the only “effect of liberty to individuals, that they may do what they please”?\(^2\)

In individually using our liberty to “do what [we] please,” we make ourselves vulnerable to the fluctuation of human passions.\(^3\) Human passions have long been warned against. Passions that can induce a type of “rage and frenzy [which can] pull down more in half an hour, than prudence, deliberation, and foresight have buildup in a hundred years.”\(^4\) Even in the *Federalist Papers*, the Founders noted that “views, passions and prejudices [are] little favorable to the discovery of the truth.”\(^5\) “Passion never fails to wrest the scepter from reason.”\(^6\) Passion is an extreme emotion which tempts individuals to abandon the benefit of a temperate civil society. A moderate civil society permits the exercise of liberty. In our comfortable isolation of liberty, how will we protect ourselves from threatening our own civil society by permitting ourselves to entertain such extreme passions?

*What the Citizenry is Risking*

The gift of liberty and of civil society is an inheritance. It is much like the critical Edmond Burke, who looked with disdain on the French Revolution and remarked of the
revolutionists that “not one drop of their blood have they shed in the cause of the country they have ruined.” Burke felt that the grievance of the French Revolution was with merit but their method of overthrow of power was not. He saw the French as having rejected their entire history only to entrust the power of the construction of a new political system and order of civil society on highly corruptible and inexperienced leaders.

The building of a civil society and the pursuit of finding the best political system spans generations. Does the Citizenry have the right to so carelessly and quickly squander the several-hundred years of the construction of the American political system for the sake of their own individual comfort? Similar to Burke’s view of the French Revolution, if that is the trend of the Citizenry, they will not be able to achieve the ease that they are after. Living in an illusion of solitary individuality can blind a citizen to the truly diverse and expansive amount of opinions that exist in modern-day America.

It is understandable that there is temptation of succumbing to such self-indulgence in individualism, thinking that one’s view is the most popular and best to the point where one is unwilling to submit themselves to constructive political debate and discussion of other opinions. It is understandable because it has been some time since the American Citizenry has had personal experience with opposing tyranny. How can anyone possibly fear something they have not personally experienced? The answer to that is education. However, in absence of such education, the generational change and devaluing of liberty by a citizenry who does not remember living under tyranny, is no new occurrence. Nor do such conditions end well for liberty.
In Polybius’ *Histories*, he describes a theoretical cycle or “*anacyclosis*.”

*Anacyclosis* is a continuous cycle, where political institutions evolve between three good versions and three deviant versions of a monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. The cycle begins with a state of nothing, an era of chaos following a type of mob rule. As the cycle begins turning, it transitions the power of governing to a good monarch, which becomes subject to tyranny and develops into a deviant one. The cycle continues devolving all the way to the extremity of mob rule, chaos, and cycling back again to a monarchy.

Polybius’ cycle is advanced through the similar cycling through of generations, taking multiple generations to make just one complete cycle. The reason behind the lengthy process is the loss of experience and knowledge of those who subscribed to the previous form of government that is necessary to lose in order to move onto the next form. He highlights the people’s limited attention, self-interest, and discontent that moves a political system from its good form to its tyrannical or deviant form.

When the cycle arrives at its final form of government, democracy, before starting over, the causes that Polybius cites for the downfall of democracy is eerily similar to what modern-day American is experiencing. Polybius cites the cause of downfall of democracy which results in mob rule as the inability of successive generations that grow up in a democracy to understand the value of equality and liberty of speech. Having themselves been “accustomed to so great an extent [of] equality and liberty of speech, they no longer value” it. The new leaders of a democracy, unable to be reminded by generations long gone of the dangers of tyranny, know nothing other than their enjoyment of liberty and are much more likely to gamble with it over petty things, like comfort.
With equality and liberty taken for granted, the people begin to lust after distinction, attempting to achieve an elevated status through “bribery and maltreating the people in every possible way.” This individual “greed” Polybius theorizes will spiral back to a chaotic “rule of force and violence.”

The American federated democratic republican government, a new experiment in political history, is subject to the same downfall of tyranny as any other political institution. As Polybius notes, this downfall and the shifting of the cycle is caused by the development of tyranny. Tyranny makes its way back into a political system by the changing of generations, who are too comfortable to care to remember or educate themselves about their past history and struggles against tyranny.

The American government’s unique characteristics of checks and balances, like that of liberty and freedom of speech, will only be as successful in protecting the system against tyranny as the Citizenry’s value of those characteristics. These safeguards will not protect the system against tyranny if the Citizenry does not work for its protection as well. In this, the Citizenry is risking not only their inheritance of the reality of civil society that we live in, but liberty itself.

**The Missing Link: Us**

The American federated democratic republic is “nothing but a dead letter, until life and validity were breathed into it, by the voice of the people.” The words of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and any other law of the land are words worth no more than the paper they are printed on if they are not believed by the Citizenry. “Something that is done rightly is only just if it is done voluntary.”
Unless the Citizenry individually believes in the system then it will decay. The Citizenry is the missing link. We as a citizen body are uninformed, apathetic, disengaged, and subject to the emotional extreme frustration of our passions whenever we leave our comfortable isolations of individuality and have to deal with anyone who has an opposing view.

The triangle of communication between the Government, the Citizenry, and the Media is significantly intertwined. The Citizenry’s role in the triangle has previously been discussed as participation lines linking the Citizenry to the Government and the Citizenry to the Media. Also previously discussed, the degradation of these lines include the decline in political participation and the number of smaller news outlets.

The decline in the number of media outlets, the information deficit, and the social capital deficit, have rendered the Citizenry mere consumers and rarely contributors to a system that is dependent on the engagement of the Citizenry. It has already been established that the Citizenry has a responsibility and a duty to have an active role in the Media and the in Government, not only to keep both in check but to fuel their roles in the democratic process. However, the role of the Citizenry goes beyond simple funnels of fuel to the institutions of the Media and Government.

The Media is a protected institution of Government and a tool of the Citizenry in the important process of debate, discovering facts, and idea maturation. However, it is by no means independent of the Citizenry. Indeed, modern conglomeration and the application of a business model to every aspect of modern life has created massive barriers to entry. This must not stop the Citizenry from discussion. This must not stop the
Citizenry from seeking the facts. If the Citizenry is comfortable conceding the important journey of political discussion solely to others, it will destroy the communication lines forever. Such lines once lost and forfeited to others are not easily won back. Especially at its core, the role of Media in Government is the embodiment of the role of the Citizenry.

The role of the Media in Government and the proper function of the institution of Government, is our role. We, as a collective political body, comprise the Government in the form of representatives that see to its daily operation. Furthermore, we, as a collective Citizenry, are the Media. The role of Media in Government is our role. We are the Media. The participation and debate that takes place on the forum that Media provides is our role. The information that we have the opportunity to obtain through Media is information supplied by members of the Citizenry to enable all members to participate in the debate and the process of idea maturation.

The American Government system is a system based on continual change and adaptation, a continual struggle to “form a more perfect union,” and to pursue the ideal. Our system is designed to change, mold, and adapt to the changing of times. It was meant to be a base system eternal with fluid details. After all, certainly the Founding Fathers did not expect even the country at the time of Ratification in 1788 to function solely off of a four-sheet document.

This process of changing and molding cannot occur without the Citizenry. It is the Citizenry! If only the Citizenry valued putting forth the effort to fuel the democratic process to make such constructive change possible. The apathy and temptation of individual comfort that is currently experienced leaves little hope left of a jump-start in
the valuation of liberty. Will we be able to put aside our human passions and preference for convenience and be able to fix the already lacking constructive conversation? Or will the Citizenry be rendered the missing link?

**Starting from Behind**

Realistically, one must ask, if we are so behind, how can we even catch up? In the face of deficits and habits, of comfort and passions, are we able to catch-up without taking drastic actions? At the basis of human capacity, we have “a limited willingness and ability to learn.” We naturally have limited attention spans. This is a human character trait flawed by many of the trappings of modern society. “Even when we pay attention to information, we often do so in ways that make effective learning unlikely” as “we are easily distracted” and “almost always prefer quick and simple explanations over more detailed and accurate ones.”

The Citizenry is only as good as the average of itself. If the majority of the Citizenry is uninformed then the Citizenry has effectively, and willingly, rendered itself at risk. The American institution of Government draws its power from the Citizenry and they are its lifeblood. Without involvement from the Citizenry, the institution itself will begin to decline in quality as the average individual that participates will also be in decline.

No political institution will ever be fully without corruption or participants who are working for the wrong reasons. However, with the decline of the average participant, the likelihood that such corrupt participants will be successful in their wrongdoings increases exponentially. Even the Founders in the *Federalist Papers*, who dreamed of
the “enlightened statesman” and his honorable work in the American political institution, knew that such citizens “would not always be at the helm.”

Considering the big picture, what else is there? If we do not value democracy and we take our liberty for granted, is it more efficient to hand over the power to a dictator now, while the Citizenry still has some memory of the value of the democratic process and a republic? Is it best we experience the turning of Polybius’ wheel now while the Citizenry still has some semblance of a voice? Otherwise citizens will further retreat into their own worlds, forgetting their voice, forgetting their community and their education. Citizens will no longer want to deal with political issues that they do not understand nor see as affecting their world. Such forgetfulness and complacency is exactly the type of conditions that foster the type of fear that entices people to give up their freedom that they have and no longer value to such a ruler as a dictator. Such an experience only leads to the type of tyranny that results in a type of revolution, hard-fought and bloody, where liberty and education can be valued once again.

_American Amnesia_

There will be no one to know and nothing to be known. - Plato

We, as the American Citizenry, have a historically unique opportunity to work with a constant political structure that is also adaptable to the changing of time. If we do not value or utilize this system, we will lose everything: freedom of expression, development of personal potential, education, and all of the other benefits experienced under a society that values liberty. The temptation of present convenience or isolation
into one’s own world, not only affects the democratic process by their absence but it affects the individual.

Plato in his *Phaedrus* tells the following story: “once upon a time [Muses] were men, men of an age before there were any Muses, and that when the latter came into the world, and music made its appearance, some of the people of those days were so thrilled with pleasure that they went on singing, and quite forgot to eat and drink until they actually died without noticing it.”18

How has it happened that the Media and the Government have been able to function without the proper participation by the Citizenry? Could this be why they often appear so disconnected or out of touch from them? An alternate way of asking this important question, is how did we as the Citizenry become so apathetic in the running of a system we are supposed to be integrally involved? Have we been too busy singing with the Muses of modern society to notice?

Justice and knowledge requires pursuit. The American federated democratic republic requires an engaged Citizenry. If the Citizenry is no longer pursuing and is no longer engaged, what will the changing of generations bring? Remedies to return the value of such pursuit and engagement, such as education, take time. Do we have this time?

If there was a way through increased quality of civic education, implementation of Media standards, and a newly emerged platform for community participation, could a spark of the value of accuracy, liberty, and participation return to the Citizenry? Will it be able to salvage our successive generations from forgetting the millennia of dialogue and
falling prey to tyranny? Will we value our political society that binds us together or will the dwindling few that remain who value education and political participation slowly fade into a forgotten history as they attempt to explain to Americans a democratic process that no longer exists?

It will be just as hopeless trying to convince future generations of the important role of the Citizenry as it would be to try and convince someone with amnesia of the same. Will we take the personal responsibility as members of the American Citizenry to participate and educate ourselves, or will the plague of American Amnesia slowly expand across the continent, losing our liberty and making the fight against tyranny impossible? Will we, by forgetting ourselves through self-inflicted amnesia, lose ourselves?
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