MOVEMENTS AND THE MEDIA


By: Brittany Bresha

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for a Degree in Writing

Professional Writing: Journalism
May 7, 2013
Thesis Advisor: Professor Karen Vastola
Abstract

This thesis, Movements and the Media, is a journalistic account of the ways in which the news media has influenced the destinies of cultural movement throughout American History. The impact of news headlines and the information shared by major networks, on shaping public opinion has played a large role in both the legitimization and discretization of the most recognized revolutionary activities in America, including the anti-war and counter culture movements of the 20th century and recent Occupy Wall Street movement of 2011. This piece begins with a comprehensive look into the history of how the news media took shape in America and moves chronologically, discovering how the news media has in the past, and continues to, shape the lives we live and perceptions we form daily.
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ARE WE WHO WE ARE?

The media is all around us. Owned and operated by a continuously concentrated group of corporations, it is a super- power that has grown and evolved to become the most prominent factor determining the culture of our society, the opinions we take and the perceptions we form. It is increasingly one of the most influential forces of our society. The Media can be defined as a medium of cultivation, conveyance or expression, which reaches us in many shapes and sizes seemingly without limit. Mass Media has come to include not only the decrepitated and authoritative radio voices of our great grandparent’s time, or the bunny-ear antennae-d televisions sets of our grandparents. It has mobilized and has become transfixed in our lives in the form of television and movies, online newspapers and online magazines, billboards and t-shirts, social networks and hand held devices. Its rapid and methodical transformation has been of great significance in the past and now again in the present. Specifically the news media presents to the public what is important and relevant, dictating facts and telling stories that weave intricate webs of truth, lies and ambiguity, to the tune of agendas, far too distant for us to fully confront. However, it is the reaction of the American public to the messages shown by the news media and told by our leaders, political and journalistic, throughout history, that has dictated the destinies of three of the most influential counter-culture revolutions of our time, the anti-war and counter culture movements and Occupy Wall Street, and ultimately the cultural morals of our country.
“The media is the most powerful entity on earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent and that is power, because they control the minds of the masses.” Malcolm X


The role of the news media is either a catalyst for change or an impediment on revolutionary behavior. By examining in depth the more recent revolutionary periods, we find that both were born of similar social and political atmospheres, and were also publicized at varying levels by the news media. Different forms of information sharing and movement networking were made possible by ever evolving advances in communication and technology. These innovations also changed the shape of revolution, adding new elements and techniques to the movements and influencing the way that all parties; reporters, participants and leaders, communicated with each other.
The anti-war and civil rights movements as well as the momentous and widespread youth rebellion of the 1960s and ‘70s, were inspired by, reported and at the same time dismantled by the media’s ethereal grasp. The Occupy Wall Street movement which surfaced in 2011, met a similar fate when news media sources strategically manipulated the public opinion once again. The movements of the 20\textsuperscript{th} and 21\textsuperscript{st} centuries differ immensely in the sense that media has only grown since the 1960s and ‘70s and is influenced even more by advertisers and commercial investors today. This was an alliance the revolutionaries of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century were beginning to realize as consumer-based capitalism was becoming integrated into the American culture.

“I think a revolution of kids which says we don’t care about your concepts of cleanliness is a revolutionary generation,” says one outspoken protester on the PBS documentary series “Making Sense of the Sixties,” directed by David Hoffman. The protestor was speaking on the literal assault of toothpaste and underarm deodorant advertisements among many others, which had begun plaguing the newspapers, radio and television, and the urgency with which society would obey them.

As the voices of anti-consumerist activism have faded from the black and white printed pages, so has this sentiment. Today we are ignorant to the influence these ads have over every aspect of our lives, including the role models we admire and mimic, the food we eat and even our self-perception, hindering, in every sense, our ability for free thought. The consumer market is being exploited and advertised to, to alarming measures each day.

In a 1979 recording of a Monday Conference by the ABC Radio National Network, the very man who theorized the effect of the media on the human unconscious, Marshal McLuhan, in fact dismissed the notion of a dangerous commercial presence in the television we watch and content
we are exposed to. He stated that the advertising messages cater only to the viewer “more than anything else,” making them non-threatening and actually a useful tool to the average consumer. However, the methods of advertisers and agenda setters have become so subliminal and invasive that these days, it is hard to avoid the purposefully selected headlines and images that are strategically placed to target and sway our personal perceptions, not only of news events, but places, products and people. This type of opportunity for manipulative mind-control is something into which he did offer detailed insight. “When you trigger the vast media that we use, you are manipulating entire populations.” Herbert Marshal McLuhan is the man who coined the infamous saying, “The Medium is the Message,” He had come to the conclusion that the type of media application or the medium (the means by which the message reaches us,) actually has a more powerful influence over our perception then does the message or the content itself or, similar to looking through a fish bowl or magnifying glass, has the ability to mold or distort the perceptions we will form of that what we are being shown. His lectures venture into the fascinating speeds at which we make conscious and subconscious decisions each second we are receiving information.

Television,(which had an enormous influence over public perception during the Vietnam War and basically changed wartime and politics forever,) he says, is an entirely enveloping and sensory experience which forces us to unconsciously process images at electrical speeds, changing almost every aspect of our human existence. “TV is subjective,” he says, “totally involving.” This would become even more apparent as technologies evolved ever further becoming even more psychologically targeting. McLuhan states, “The hidden aspects of the media are the things that should be taught…when they are invisible, they have an absolute power over the user.”
All of the elements contributing to an overly-saturating media presence in our daily lives, force us to think about how the messages affect us daily and how they have helped to shape the culture of America, over time, historically and in the present. So, when it comes to whether the messages we are exposed to accurately reflect our cultures, values and beliefs, or dictates them, we may use the example of the chicken and the egg; which came first? In the case of the news media one could safely say, in the least religious sense possible, that “god” made both the chicken and the egg. The media is defined as an “expression,” but an expression of what and by whom? Are those expressions accurately representing the truth, or does the news media follow the political and personal agendas of their creators and even of their constituencies?

**SOCIAL MEDIA- AN ALTERNATIVE TO NEWS?**

Modern forms of Social Media and a growing number of online publications and online components for news organizations, allows the popularity of a story to be measured and therefore it is the reader who ultimately dictates what is put to print; however it is not always what is necessarily important for them to know. Sadly, these days, a journalist will be hired not only based on their abilities as an investigator, reporter or writer, but also based on the number of names on their Facebook friend list.

“They are not producing anything,” claims Greg Palast, a noted investigative journalist and reporter for the BBC Network, “they are not reporters, they are repeaters,” he states in a 2011 interview with Media Roots TV.
While this is not true for all publications, the majority of the reporters of today relay the news as it is spelled out for them by Press Releases and News Conferences, without truly investigating a matter, and this is what we as a society respect, respond to and consider acceptable.

OWS, an ultimately failed revolution, was able to inspire thousands of people and in the process expose a slew of societal issues that were ultimately ignored by mainstream media. Their fight may not have only been against the 1% and the media that serves them, but also with the complacency of an erroneously obedient society, made so by a regulated and dictated culture. Anyone familiar with Youtube had the choice to watch the brutal police force that was used against hundreds of peaceful protestors daily by simply doing the investigating themselves, a process of just a few simple mouse clicks. In many cases they did. Citizen journalists armed with phones and video cameras caught the action and shared it on the Web; however when it came to our trusted anchor men and the popular networks and newspapers which control the information received by the masses, all they got were heads talking about agenda.

“The story of the 1% is not told because the NY Times is the one percent it is owned by Carlos Salinas after all, the richest man in the world,” says Palast in that same 2011 interview. Greg Palast’s investigative work can be found on front pages throughout Europe and other parts of the world but the United States.

So, for the OWS movement and the Zuccatti park protesters, the frame had already been laid. Not the frame of a revolution, but the frame of failure and discretization. So we ask, does the news media ignore certain aspects of societal issues and emphasize others in order to frame public opinions?
HISTORY OF THE NEWS MEDIA IN AMERICA

The news media has not always been an enemy but rather a vehicle. A delicate balance, as well as a broadly confusing and inconclusive line, lies between our ability as citizen journalists to use the resources provided by new technology and new media to spread truthful and meaningful messages, and all of the ways in which the news media uses and deceives us.

In America, the earliest newspapers, dating as far back as the 1700s, fought through periods of agenda control and harsh punishment for the reporters who sought to investigate and publicize potentially rousing stories of scandal and corruption. Thankfully, during times of ultimate social discontent (which we have seen repeated throughout history,) political intellectuals and common activists were able to realize the potential power of the news media to voice their grievances. They found ways in which they could utilize it for the good, as a platform to inform and provoke the masses. Even through the haze of tax misrepresentation, economic downturn, unjustified wars and political distrust - over and over again- the voices of the people have emerged.

For the people of the early American colonies under British rule, pamphletting was the main form of sharing news and information; however, it quickly evolved into the earliest forms of newspapers, publications and magazines similar to that what we are familiar with today. The notices, highly political in nature, were published an ocean’s distance away from the powers they were criticizing, allowing them to be only minimally censured. They contained blatant calls to action pertaining to the protection of the unalienable rights of the people, the notion of liberalism, and promoted a new sense of social and political identity, leading directly to the first American Revolution. This atmosphere of social unrest and governmental distrust has
historically led to up rise. From the European evolutions to those here in America, history has repeated itself, in the 20th century and yet again in 2011 with the OWS movement. Initially radical thought must begin and perpetuate somewhere, in many cases but not all, this catalyst is the news media.

In his book, “The Power of the Press,” Thomas C. Leonard describes the influence of a series of letters submitted to the paper in the 1760s, written by a political vigilante of sorts who called himself “The Farmer.” The editorials were entitled “Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania.” Posing as a humble field worker in Pennsylvania, what in today’s terms would be considered the rural norm or middle class, the farmer did little more than employ his own professional and political opinion from facts he had gathered, as a means to interest and entice the public on the topic of the imposition of unconsented taxes- a large issue for colonized Americans. His announcement, which appeared in 19 of the 23 existing publications of the time, said this:

“Unless the most watchful attention be exerted, a new servitude may be slipped upon us, under the sanction of useful and respectable terms.” Oh, how true it is.

“The press was showing people how to think, not just what to think,” says Leonard. Revolutionary leaders had finally found a leg to stand on within the newspaper publications and, with the power of the free press, they were able to inspire change to the tune of a revolution.

The unfettered editorial continued claiming its purpose for centuries in the realm of education and certain enlightenment. However, the ability of the public to express themselves on the back pages of the press was not a practice favored by everyone. Some criticized the very mission of such editorials. One ranting reporter from the Florida Times Union wrote an article which was later shared by the Hartford Courant on May 12, 1922, entitled “Canned Editorials.” I feel
compelled to share his entire sentiment, because it is patriotic to a fault, however I will paraphrase. He goes on to state that editorials contain “germs” of communism, anarchism and socialism. That the content of editorials are “designed to upset and trouble the readers who perhaps are disappointed in something and ready to seize upon a new thought along the line of their feelings…. The canned editorial is not much help and often dangerous.” While this rambunctious writer tries to prove his point, he also admits to the power of the people to evoke “new thought” in others, just as “The Farmer” did with his letters. It is interesting that the conservative opinion pointed a “red finger” at revolutionary thinkers of the time, playing off of the very fear which circulated throughout America from WW1 to the start of the Vietnam War and throughout the Cold War. In more recent days, the 21st century fear of terrorism has been built upon the same tactic of widespread anxiety. It rallies for revenge and has allowed, based on manipulated American support, for wars to have been initiated in Iraq and Afghanistan. One large difference between the revolutions of old and today, and a challenge faced by the OWS movement leaders, is that revolutionary opinions and unedited editorials have since been abolished from the main stream news media.

Examples from both our past and present prove that the media plays a huge role in the creation of revolutionary environments, of legitimizing those revolutions and also discrediting them to the point of ultimate failure. While the American Revolution changed the moral fabric of our country and the Counter Culture and Anti-War Revolutions defined an era, the Occupy Wall Street movement, while both momentous and impactful, was met by such heavy media resistance that it hardly stood a chance.
VIETNAM AND THE PRESS

The 1960s and ‘70s were monumental decades in the history of America. The Vietnam War had been initiated in 1955 by Dwight Eisenhower under the guise of a security measure, the threat being communism. The Vietnam occupancy was a strategy of containment, meant to suppress the spread of communism by the Northern Vietnamese army and guerilla forces into Southern Vietnam. Communism had been a fear prescribed to the American people since World War II as the Soviet Union, also known as the Red Army, gained power throughout Europe. This push for communist fear and an agenda reeking of American dependency on its government for protection from such threats, in- coincidentally, coincided with a time when American’s were also beginning to examine social security, labor laws and forming workers unions. In the 1940s through to the 50’s, the government had taken measure to strictly enforce anti-communism throughout America, resulting in the existence of several internment camps around the country where hundreds of thousands of people of Japanese descent that may have been considered a threat or “communist terrorists” would be held. The government had been using the tool of the media to perpetuate fear within the American community for centuries and so after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and the centers were established, the need for such radical detainment centers was never investigated. Communist accusations ran rampant amongst Americans.

One headline published by the New York Times on January 19th 1926 reads, “Declares Communism Strong at Ohio State,” the subtitle reads “‘Dr. Clarence Maris says: Youth movement there is controlled by Moscow.’”
The article goes on to explain the most obvious and threatening behaviors of communist extremists:

“Dr. Maris described the youth movement as teaching “worship of the human body and resistance to parental restraint” writes the un-named reporter.

Was this all it took to be considered a communist? At the very least this headline gives us a glimpse into the manipulating nature of news headlines. The content of this article accurately represents the sentiments of the 1920s, an intense fear of disorder or “radical reality,” (which could be defined as anything from homosexuality to interracial marriage to atheism,) and the sentiments of America up until the Vietnam War, the blinding fear of Communism. National news- media of the time barely questioned the legitimacy of these internment camps and practically flaunted the number of detainees that flowed into the US from camps all around the world. Yet 60 years later in the 1980s, public apologies were being published and compensation for the abused, detained and exiled came into question.

So when the Vietnam War hit headlines and family homes, terms such as “communist threat” and “counter-communist action,” were not unfamiliar to the American people; they were already deeply embedded within their lexicon.

“Above all,” begins the opinion of one man in his publicized editorial to the New York Times on September 5, 1955, “we are conscious of the grave danger of communist dictatorship which weighs heavily upon the destiny of Vietnam.”

Towards the beginning of the war, this was a sentiment shared by many. Women with beehive hairdos and in curlers smoking long, skinny cigarettes held eloquently between long skinny fingers, debated our involvement from local salons and living rooms, always arriving at the war
against communist threat (sound familiar i.e. War on Terrorism, or as Nixon later referred to it, coincidentally after the “peace” movement had begun and it’s political advocate RFK murdered, “The War for World Peace.”) Newly-wed, young men and recent college graduates watched each month as their birthdays were practically pulled from a bingo bowl and pinned to a corkboard by a room of straitlaced men, those whom many were beginning to question and resent.

The push forward into Vietnam under Eisenhower was slow but steady until the widely supported presidential candidate, Lyndon B Johnson, signed into office after the assassination of Kennedy in 1964, soon- there- after ordered heavy bombing in Northern Vietnam. At this time, support for the war was dwindling as wives, mothers and children were being forced to send the unfortunate draftees off to Asia and as further and heavier action took place, discontent grew, questions circulating. In 1965 the Anti-War Movement was born, but not before America watched in shock and horror at their loved ones struggling, crusted in mud and sweat and utterly exasperated, maneuver through the tall grass, weapons in hand, of unfamiliar, far-away fields. The war was being televised from the front lines. War reporters were given cameras and permission, press passes and assault weapons and told to capture all news-worthy events. The journalists, with valor and dignity, travelled into the arms of danger and sent back graphic images of the tremendous suffering faced daily by the soldiers as well as the Vietnamese people. American wars have always been reported, but with certain hindrances of either political censorship or simple embellishments on the parts of the writers. However, as stated by Scott M. Cutlip in his review printed in the Wisconsin Magazine of History, of the book “Reporting the Wars,” a comprehensive account of the history of war reporting written by Joseph J. Matthews;

“The instrument of change was the war correspondent.”
In this case he was speaking of the Mexican-American war of the 1800’s which was passionately yet less accurately reported. The war reporters of old would certainly not be the last to brave American battlefields, however censured and however free.

“Vietnam, from the first day, was the most openly covered war in American history,” says War Reporter Joe Galloway who risked his life to capture the events of the first offensive initiative of the war, assault of Zone D. Galloway goes on to recount step by step and image by image, his experiences in the war zone, where death was a commonality, not only for the overseas reporters but on the television sets of Americans. 63 journalists were killed on the battlefields of Vietnam. More than 200 reporters and media support personal were killed during the more recent Iraq war between 2003 and 2011, a record number. Many were victims of targeted attacks. (Interesting Vietnam War facts)

It was the first televised war in world history. Television has, ever since, changed and molded the course of wars and political campaigns over and over again. Obviously, based on the stronghold of the anti-communist campaign in America and initial support for the war, the news media and televisions programs which, according to Gerd Horton author of The Mediatization of War, took precedence over both radio and newspapers as a means to receive news, would show only programs and express opinions heavily saturated in biases favorable of the war. Terms such as “gook,” which was given to the Vietnamese and coined by American soldiers, similarly to how the term “towel head” or “terrorist” would be assigned in more recent times to basically anyone of Middle Eastern descent, served to provide a separation between the “us” and the “them,” clearly defining the enemy, painting patriotism on the tips of our tongues.
On the other hand, in 1966, the overseas media was singing to a different tune. The war had already been branded by German media as a “hopeless war” (Horton.)While the youth was already up in arms and in full rebellion against the war, it wasn’t until 1968 that Americans, and middle- Americans at large, were exposed to this sentiment by a man that had come to be valued and trusted as an honest purveyor of news. Walter Cronkite, a long time broadcast journalist and anchorman for the CBS news, was later widely recognized for exposing his personal opinion on the war in Vietnam. It included a call to hastily, yet with pride, end the stagnant war. After visiting Asia and viewing the aftermath of an event called the Tet Offensive, Cronkite returned to the States with a newly enlightened and developed perception, which he announced at the end of his publicly-aired Vietnam Special. ‘Specials,’ were common programs that exposed important issues through a process of well- thought- out investigative reporting.

Cronkite stated:

“It is increasingly clear to this reporter that the only rational way out of there will be to negotiate, not as victors, but as an honorable people who lived up to their pledge to defend democracy and did the best they could.” (Cronkite)

By 1969, only a small percentage of Americans (less then half,) still supported the war. By that time, President Nixon was evolving his message to meet the moral demands of the majority of Americans by strategically referring Vietnam as “The war for world peace.” He claimed a personal mission to withdraw troops and institute “peace with honor,” yet another phrase “coined” by the news media. However, the American people could call his bluff by simply turning on their television sets. It was obvious to them that the war was continuing and people were still dying; the images became more trustworthy then the word of their leaders. Marshal
Mcluhan later attributed this effect to the power of the television media by stating that “parties and politics become really very unimportant and the image takes on a tremendous new importance.” (Mcluhan) It was these very images, the liberal media coverage, social and political unrest, as well as the lingering and insatiable desire to break free of the traditional American way of life, which gave birth to the Anti-War and Counter-Culture, youth movements.

THE 60s

“From the multitude of tongues comes the ultimate truth”

“Do you wish this country at this time needs something that it hasn’t got?”

“Yes….. Love.”

(WGBH 1967-1968- “The love Revolution.”)

The mid- 1960s and 70s were the most active generations for social change that modern America has ever seen. The Civil Rights Movement, Women’s Rights Revolution, Anti-war and Counter Culture Movements as well as the Gay Rights Movement consecutively flowed through one another, each feeding into and inspiring the next. The peace movement of the early 60s, a harmless culture “sitting- in” and picketing for love, later became the radical, Anti-War Movement, which the media quickly portrayed as anarchist. Young men and women were not only simply encouraging spirituality and duality, but opposing the draft and fighting for their lives. The stakes were raised. The way in which people communicated with each other during the rise of these movements was imperative to their success and for a brief moment in history,
the premature media force, still so honest and naïve in its juvenescence, provided a vehicle for many facets of the movements. A combination of the news media, television and radio programming helped to elevate certain revolutionary figure heads such as Malcolm X and Abby Hoffman until, however extreme their message, they became common, household names.

A notable increase in the education level of a wide variety of youths allows us to form an interesting connection between the 20\textsuperscript{th} century revolutions and those of the past and throughout history. It is through literary works and within classrooms that ideas are nurtured and multiplied and revolutionary mentalities are developed. The protests started on school campuses, the breeding grounds for social organization. The students as well as professors arranged “teach-ins,” a direct action inspired by the “sit-ins” of the Civil Rights Movement. Numerous civic groups including the \textit{Youth International Party, RAM}, among many others, popped up, arranging protests through pamphlets and a vast network of activists. Often times the writing was actually on the wall. Gorilla revolutionaries could spread the word and their ideas through graffiti art and flyers. However, in many cases, the media was their main source. In the beginning they wanted the coverage; it was their exposure. It was what drew outsiders in. Images of groups of determined youths, makeshift signs and the emblematic meeting of cold rifle barrels to flower stems, saturated newspapers.
“Their impact was extraordinary,” says Public Opinion Analyst, Madelyn Hochstein on the documentary *Making Sense of the Sixties*. “What happened… well they got an awful lot of media attention; they were very visible on the streets.”

In reality the news media exaggerated the amount of general involvement in the movements, while actually a relatively small percentage of America was participating. However, to watch it, one would assume that it was huge and everyone was doing it. The images inspired them to take to the streets. Thanks to the news media’s coverage, the movement gained momentum through man power. At the time, with little awareness of their own power, the honest and everywhere news media, enthralled by what had been organically developing within the confines of the American society, was regularly covering the protests and seeking opinions from movement leaders.

The powerful Civil Rights Movement, at its height, was also widely publicized and its respected spokespeople such as Martin Luther King and Malcolm X were constantly shouting their messages across the airwaves. “Whites” in the Northeast and the Midwest suddenly saw with their own eyes as powerful streams of water were shot from fire hoses, toppling, saturating and
brutally injuring those who they had only known for so long as “Negros” or “Blacks. They began to realize that, in reality, these people were education seeking students, Americans, humans and that they- their brothers, fathers, sons- were men who were also being drafted alongside their white sons, to a place that everyone could agree- no one wanted to go.

“I think that we in the Midwest had been sheltered from what was happening in the South, from what was happening in the black community, and when television came on the horizon we weren’t sheltered anymore, and we saw what human beings were doing to each other and it was really very shocking, very hurtful,” expresses Wanda Knight of Earlham, Iowa to the producers of *Making Sense of the Sixties*, her husband Roy who sits tenderly beside her, agrees.

The Civil Rights Movement, which in many ways inspired the Counter-Culture and Anti-War Movements by introducing the guerilla tactics of assembly, dissemination of messages and calls to action, was not always given the same attention as the other widespread movements of the day.

One significant tragedy of the era came during a two day protest on the all-black Mississippi campus of Jackson State University on May 15, 1970. Two students were shot and killed as 150 rounds were sent recklessly towards a women’s dormitory, in what is known today as the Jackson State Killings. Police claimed the heedless firing was a response to sniper fire directed towards them, a questionable account at best, and families were denied the right to collect damages. No consequences were dealt to the authorities who perpetrated the killings. Earlier that same month on May 4, 1970, four white- students were killed during a protest on an Ohio Campus; the families were encouraged to sue for compensation for their losses. The NY times reported both events; however they gave the Jackson State shooting considerably less attention,
with much less visual presence in the papers. An unnamed author in an article titled *The South: Death in two Cities*, printed by Time Magazine May 25, 1970, recounts that

“Blacks were quick to note that these deaths failed to draw headlines or rouse the nation’s conscience on the scale of the Kent State killings.”

The very famous picture of the widely recognized event in Ohio, The Kent State Shooting, is still identifiable by this image today and serves to remind us of a significant turning point in the American Cultural Revolution.

There is not one image that would come to significantly represent the tragedy at Jackson State.
The killings at Jackson State and Kent State demonstrated the real and harsh police brutality that was being felt by all protesters and that would surface again in 2011 with the emergence of Occupy Wall Street. The majority of police did not acknowledge that what they were doing violated human rights or hindered American freedoms; they were only acting upon what they had been formerly trained to do: control crowds, and take orders.

Events of the late 1960s signified turning points for all prominent movements of the time. On April 4 1968, well known and respected Civil Rights leader, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was shot and killed. His death came after his political and moral emergence from the Civil-Rights Movement into the Anti-War Movement and issues of class struggle. He had begun to focus his speeches and his calls to action in the direction of class equality and the country’s unwanted, overseas involvement. The loss devastated the nation. That same year, in the midst of an
electoral campaign where liberal candidate Robert F. Kennedy had taken a strong lead, in a tragic turn of fate disturbingly reminiscent of that of his brother’s, Kennedy was “assassinated,” shot and killed. His death allowed for the easy election and inauguration of Nixon into office.

The end of the war was also nearing and however long overdue, it would not arrive smoothly. The My Lai Massacre, the systematic murder of hundreds (347-504,) of innocent Vietnamese civilians including women, children and babies, was an event of the Vietnam War which opened eyes and outraged the world. Joint efforts on the part of both war reporters and Vietnam Veterans exposed a horrendous massacre, demonstrating a level of reporting that would never be possible again.

Dr. John Briggs, distinguished author and professor emeritus of Journalism for Western Connecticut State University in Connecticut, speaks on the honesty and independence of the war reporters and journalists of the ‘60s, distinctions of the trade which have long since been silently obliterated, but have allowed for stories like the My Lai massacre to make headlines.

“Correspondents went out on their own to look at the war and reported observations that were damaging to the US policy planners,” states Briggs. “In the Gulf War and subsequent wars, reporters were constricted… and had limited and controlled access to the battlefield.”
The massacre took place in 68’, however, the story did not surface until it was broken by an independent journalist named Seymour Hersh in November 1969. The testimony of veteran Paul Meadlo, later publicized by CBS, is one that takes precedence in this case. Later, the graphic photos of the massacre were splayed across the media outlets. The New York Times printed Paul Meadlo’s testimony on November 25, 1969, however, not without disclaimers. They call his testimony an account of his “alleged,” role in the massacre. Headlines to follow included similar examples of cautious language, and they later printed a story titled, “Captain Denies Seeing Massacre,” in which Captain Ernest L. Medina, accused of bearing witness to the murders stated:

“I think that the news media has been very biased and unfair, not only to myself but to any other solider in uniform…now they are making accusations… and the press… the news media is not recording the other side of it.”

Meadlo’s testimony went something like this:

“And so we started shooting them…we just pushed them all off and started using automatics on them.”

Official Army photographer Ron Haeberle who was responsible for capturing the disturbing pictures of the massacre which were circulated, was quoted on the PBS webpage dedicated to the photographic evidence of the massacre saying:

“A small child came out…like he was kneeling to find his mother and some GI just finished him.”

The shocking and overwhelmingly abundant information was received with horror. News media took to producing the more dramatic stories which enticed and attracted audiences. Reporters
began focusing on the soldier’s mistakes, leaving out details of the immense pressures they were under and the constant exposure to death and murder. The average age of the Vietnam Soldier was 22 (Interesting Vietnam War Facts.) American Citizens who once respected and felt passionately about American soldiers looked now at returning troops with a skeptical eye often times throwing stones or shouting slurs.


“People who opposed the war seemed to blame the veterans for their part in it, people who supported the war seemed to blame the veterans for loosing it.” He quotes one veteran stating that he felt that all veterans were being seen as “baby killers and drug addicts.”

The My Lai Massacre and subsequent media coverage served to completely alter widespread opinions and contributed to a new viewpoint on the war: sympathy for the Vietnamese. The massacre’s massive government and military-wide cover-up was also a preface to the widespread public distrust and rebellion that followed.
Between 1973 and 1975 the war was terminated, an end which would therefore change the dynamic of the movement of still-seeking youths who had abandoned all notions of traditionalism, and in many cases their families along with them, for concepts of change, and for a progressive movement away from collective identity and consumerism. This song from the ‘60s describes the way modern and traditional families functioned and were viewed by the ever-evolving youth mentality.

“And the people in the houses all went to the University where they were put into boxes and they came out looking all the same and as doctors and lawyers and business executives and they’re all made out of ticky-tacky and they all look just the same.”

-The lyrics of a satirical song titled Little Boxes by Malvina Reynolds, 1962.

The whole theory of communism, socialism and equality, what protestors had been fighting against diligently for ten years in Vietnam and continued in the form of the Cold War, was blossoming on American soil, in a peaceful yet powerful way; a way that would be construed by the media to the American people as dangerous. While what the majority now sought were equal rights, freedom of expression, and a communal life free of consumerism and societal constraints, the movement began to be portrayed as an organization of terrorists and burdensome troublemakers.

One man, who had rich and sturdy roots in the movements of the sixties and Anti-War Movement, emerged as a powerful leader in 1968 during the Democratic National Convention. The convention took place, as mentioned previously, in the same year that two highly recognized, political leaders had been assassinated. The convention was held to select a presidential candidate to replace Lyndon B. Johnson who had previously announced that he
would not be running for re-election. Outside of the convention, police riots broke out, and were later associated with a group of men which included Abbie Hoffman. From the beginning The Democratic Convention was framed by the news media in a way that caused widespread anticipation for violent outbreak. Some media outlets were reporting on a rumored assassination plot that was eventually discredited by an article put out by the New York Times on August 21, 1968 titled, “Guard is Called up to Protect Chicago During Convention,” a title which in itself reeks of fear harboring. Within the article, Abbie Hoffman is quoted as stating wittily that the defense mechanisms of his protesters and members of the Youth International Party included “Karate.” Hoffmann was as intelligent, formally educated and politically competent as he was satirical, though the media depicted him in a way that was threatening and unappealing to the powers that be and an already worried population. When Abbie proclaimed on the 5:00 news with middle finger pointed high, “they eat our babies for breakfast,” the population cried anarchy! Conspiracy! On several accounts he was arrested for these very allegations, the news of which beamed from headlines to the likes of “F.B.I Agents Seize the Leader of Yippies,” and “Yippie Leader Arrested for Flag Desecration,” pinning him ultimately as an anti-American, when in reality he risked his life and his freedom for the message of the “new” America.

Abbie was well versed in psychology and law and used them both to his advantage gaining notoriety and substantiality as well as to get him out of sticky situations. Abbie Hoffman could often times be seen in images with several microphones aimed in his direction. There was no doubt that the media had given him a voice.
It was no mistake either. Abbie Hoffman, in reality, may have been the worst thing that happened to the hippies. While he proved to be a brilliant organizer and philosophical thinker, he gave the news media and the authorities a public reason to criticize the movement’s message, and the powers- that- be clung to it like a life-vest. The news media recognized something they were intimately familiar with and had known for a long time, an old friend of sorts: fear. No one in their right mind could fear love, so they fed the public with anarchy, using Hoffman’s unpredictable behaviors as a way to fortify this sentiment. Abbie Hoffman passed away of a drug overdose in 1989 at the age of 52 after years of progressive and influential activism.

Several factors contributed to the end of the “hippie” movement. Similar to many of the notions which plagued public opinion of the Occupy Wall Street Movement, the image of excessively indulgent and lazy hippies overshadowed the struggles and hardships of communal living. Just as the occupants of the OWS tent communities were depicted as being chronically jobless and
uneducated, moochers really, so were the hippies. While some commune goers had begun receiving food stamps and assistance from other programs subsidized by tax payers, blue collar unions and the middle class at large, who had once idolized the movement’s ability to evoke change and who had once joined them to gain publicity for their own causes, now viewed them in a negative light.

As the war ended and the movements slowed, they began to disappear from headlines. Many participants used their active background to gain work in politics, some assimilated back into society, tired from their fight against the system, or moved onto new fights with more attainable ends. The battle for Gay Rights and equality continued and continues to this day. The spirit of the movement is alive in our history and in our culture, yet has remained in remission, tucked away in dusty record sleeves, and nostalgia. The movement, made up of peaceful and public gatherings in squares or music festivals, was slowly yet surely dismantled by law.

It took an economic crisis and yet another casualty-ridden war to light the fire again, to ignite the youth. All of the frustrations of a dissenting America culminated in what would become an international reawakening.
“...pack our tents and head to Wall Street with a vengeance September 17,” the call to action proposed by anti-consumerist, Canadian organization, Adbusters.

In September 2011, the Occupy Wall street Movement exploded into reality from the virtual cauldron within which it had been brewing. Over 1,000 people occupied Zuccotti Park in lower Manhattan. They brought their tents and established a community ready to sustain, complete with all of the necessary elements including a mess hall, Wi-Fi, yoga class and even their own publication. It was a talk tank, people of all ages came together and continued discussions about what they felt was going wrong with the country and the global society at large and what they wanted to see change. The discussion was not only political, but environmental and largely moral. After a 700 million-dollar-bank-bailout, thousands and thousands of homes forced into foreclosure, and an 8-year war in the Middle East with a trillion dollar price tag, the situation in America proved conducive to the emergence of a movement. At a time of massive layoffs and increasing poverty in the country, news outlets released pictures of laid off stock brokers carrying boxes out of their office building in an attempt to evoke sympathies and distract the public from the fact that top CEOs were still receiving millions in bonuses. However, the large majority of Americans could not ignore the new hardships they continued to face each day.
The buzz had circulated through social networks like Facebook and Twitter, and with recent revolutions like the one in Egypt to serve as a model, the world was aware of just how powerful the force of the people could actually be. While the movement used the Web to organize action, record progress, spread images and information and cross geographical boundaries, the key was the occupation. Not an online occupation, but a physical takeover of a public space. The streets were their medium. It was not until the movement developed and began to meet certain obstacles that the full potential of the technological abilities of the protesters were realized. The movement’s participants would not disregard the trials and errors of their predecessors and the effectiveness of grass roots organizing. The direct action protests and sit-ins that were used throughout the course of the youth, Anti-War, Civil Rights and Women’s Rights revolutions, have proven throughout history to gain the attention, and at times, the sympathies of the nation. Initially the news media ignored the OWS movement. If the protestors had not taken the streets, it may have been virtually invisible to anyone not looking or not directly affected.
MANIPULATED MESSAGES

“A politician is someone who gets in front of a mob and tries to call it a parade.” Yves Smith

The news media was much less effective in interpreting the OWS message than the messages of the ‘60s and ‘70s, particularly because OWS did not boast one unified message, a strategy which is often times received negatively or can be confusing. However, the spokespeople for the movement, those who were given the opportunity to articulate their own beliefs to the press, did convey the urgent pleas of the majority of American people: return the power through valid democratic processes, resurrect representation of people and not lobbyists, and bring corporate money launderers and corrupt financial institutions to justice. The signs they held high created scenes reminiscent of the movements of old, and while the messages were clear, they also varied.
As you can see the signs of the OWS protesters display an array of needs and wants, the anti-war and counter-movement had clear, explicit messages.

With the economic and political ambiance in torment, the American people were at a boiling point, from the extremely impoverished to a young and educated middle class, to struggling seniors and laid-off workers, the movement spoke on behalf of the entire 99%. Similarly to 20th century Anti-War Movement, people were seeking change, and yet the movement was deemed aimless; its constituents lazy anarchists or socialists, and their occupancy a public health risk. Not surprisingly, an OWS Google search of the ultra-conservative news network, Fox, resulted in headlines such as “Red Army’ behind Occupy Wallstreet,” and “Occupational Hazzard.” Most of their headlines followed similar suit. NY Times best seller author Ann Coulter, a political commentator often featured on Fox News network as an expert guest, has been quoted on several occasions referring to the movement participants as “liberal mobs…demonic loons, teenage runaways…adolescents looking for a cause.” Most interestingly in an interview between Coulter and Sean Hannity, each repeatedly relates the OWS movement to being democratic, calling them “the base of the democratic party.” They very quickly tried to reduce the movement to a recognizable label. This is something which the news media does often, especially when it comes
to issues that are political in nature. While almost anything can be categorized by a headline or by a very simple and shallow label, we have been conditioned to recognize these dysphemisms as the issue themselves, rather than the deeper conflicts which lay beneath them. That way when something occurs, people can be quickly persuaded to pick a side, or can feel as though they understand what really is going on, just by recognizing the label. By calling the OWS movement “democratic,” the news media was manipulating the opinion of all those who directly related to being either democratic or republication.

Dr. John Briggs has theorized the influence of labeling in modern news media, and in an interview he describes the phenomena of labeling in the news media.

“It's actually pretty easy to see the media abstracting and labeling in action once you catch on that that is a primary function of news reporting. A politician appears and presents some ideas. The politician is immediately labeled: right wing, radical, conservative, populist. More attention is paid to the labels than to the ideas. Sometimes the politician actively seeks a label, or tries to label his opponent, for example, as a "socialist" or "neoconservative." Both politicians and the media spew labels out in the direction of a phenomenon until something sticks. Once the label is affixed, an abstracting process has taken place, a simplification of the unknown into the known (the schema). It is sometimes quite secondary whether the label is even close to accurate. Media consultants for politicians call this "controlling the narrative" and "spin." We want the public to accept our label for what we're up to and reject the label our opponents are trying to put on us……The actual truth about what we're doing may have almost nothing to do with these labels, which are false impressions, false schematizations based on often dubious abstractions.”
This is an evolved form of framing, which we have seen developing throughout the entire history of the news media and has now taken precedence over the actual, factual news report. There is another act of misrepresentation which Ann Coulter commits in her interviews and that is by clinging to the literal meaning of the word “Wall Street,” ultimately taking the one coherent message which the movement claimed and pronounced through their name, and discrediting it by assigning it to a physical location, rather than focusing on the essence of the name which the movement had been trying to do. The movement had transcended any and every geographical stereotype when it went not only national, but international. It is safe to assume that OWS protesters in Spain, Italy and Germany were certainly not fighting against the actual street of lower Manhattan. Perhaps the largest point to which the media has held tight and a message that the protestors have worn proudly, is that there is no unified message. One protestor, Max Hodes, subconsciously confronts the issue of news media labeling in his response to CBS’ Jim Axelrod in a 2011 interview. When asked if he felt that the movement needed a unified message to be successful he replied: “No, you do not need a unified message,” he goes on to explain that one unified message would serve nothing but to “dumb down and divide the masses.” The idea of remaining individual while fighting together is one that echoes the sentiment of true democracy and an idea which probably paved the road to demise for the OWS movements, leaving them vulnerable to criticism and infiltration.

While the diversity of the movement was growing, people had been using their size and publicity to gain momentum for their own messages. The Democrats quickly claimed to support them while the unions and teachers marched proudly next to them. Was it taxes they wanted, accountability, transparency? However greatly they were influencing the dialogue around the world and inspiring new perspectives, without a message and more importantly, without a leader,
they could never infiltrate a highly politically developed system. Unlike the Counter-Culture Youth Movement of the late ‘60s and ‘70s who had chosen their leader, (even if he was a bad choice,) the OWS movement didn’t even have one, and that gave the news media the power to appoint the position to anyone they pleased, or anyone that fit their needs. So they took to the occupancies and targeted random movement goers, people unversed in political banter, with no means to articulate the solutions they sought. Someone on the 5 O’clock news wearing stereotype-specific clothing and ranting about the evils of capitalism, while probably valid in their thinking and also probably standing 5 feet from an information table run by movement organizers distributing pamphlets full of hard facts, will most certainly be construed the wrong way by the non-participating American public. It was these types of interviews that were being constantly broadcast, shedding a negative light on the movement.

The movement went on living with little interruption for quite some time, but as winter approached and the weather turned cold, the tent city scenes seemed to turn ever more gray and desolate. Police action, which had always been present, was becoming heavier and increasingly more reckless and violent. Police have been caught on video on several occasions remorselessly shooting thick, yellow streams of pepper spray into the faces of already detained and seated protesters. The shocking brutality that was caught on video and streamed was never formally addressed by politicians nor the president. Following the FBI’s release of a document condemning the OWS movements for engaging in “domestic terrorism,” news outlets began to publicize the same, calling the movement “terrorist,” a word which would allow politicians and law makers to actively and forcefully limit their ability to gather. The powers that be, after the movement had proven to not be slowing, began to resort to the propaganda they knew best- once again- messages of fear. John Parker of The International Action Center was interviewed for
English News Today in a video titled *US Labels OWS and Opposition Forces as Terrorist*. The video had only received 46 views on youtube.com in comparison with two Ann Coulter interview videos which, as of April 23, 2013, had received 26,454 and 47,181 views. When asked if he felt that the word “terrorist” was an accurate way to define the movements, Parker responded with: “The word terrorist has been used by the US Government the way the word communist used to be used. It is a way of trying to produce fear and to justify policies that really disregard the constitution and try to limit as much as possible, freedom of speech.” Shortly after delving into policies which bluntly evade constitutional rights that date back to the Clinton administration, he was cut off and told they were out of time.

After two months, on November 15, 2011 at midnight, the police conducted a raid on the tent city at Zuccotti Park, the central activity base of the OWS Movement. The media was ban from the action, yet citizens and participants armed with cell phones and video cameras caught the act on camera. The police created a silent boundary around a four block radius and began to dismantle tents. Protesters who refused to leave were arrested and pepper sprayed. The sweep proved to be nationwide; dismantling of the movement had begun. Without a physical space from which to make its presence known, the movement would regress back into cyber space and become once again ideas of discontent hopelessly circling the labyrinth-like channels of the World Wide Web.

It was a sunny fall day when I visited New York City’s Washington Square Park and bore witness to what remained of the movements once thriving collective energy. Small groups split up to discuss upcoming marches that would expose one environmental issue or another. The
groups still employed the techniques of the greater movement including the silent, jazz-finger clap and the relay and repeat that speakers often used to make their voices louder and the messages reach farther. While beautiful in their essence and inspiring in their conviction, the gatherings seemed a last hope for what the movement once was. It was nothing like walking through Zuccotti Park one crisp night in fall about a month after the group there had commenced. People paced the area with a sense of importance, the buzz was penetrating. It was like hearing the roar of voices and the feeling of invincibility I had felt while partaking in one of the many 6th Avenue anti-war marches of 2003. I imagine now the feeling I had then, at 14 years old, shoulder to shoulder with the other protesters, sun splashing down where allowed through fists held high in the air, and chanting; imaging I was to break free of the burdens of daily life, the ones that have been granted upon me by people who would never know my name or even of my existence, and existing then and there, full heartedly, within the movement. The feeling is to look to the person next to you and know that they want what you want and if you scream loud enough, march long enough and fight hard enough, that you may actually get it; Because of you, something might actually change. Finally arriving at Washington Square where the march came to a close, we formed a circle around the dried up fountain there, terracing ourselves on the steps, and dancing to the sounds of drums. With the city towering beyond us, feeding from its distinct, indestructible pulse, we moved to our own beat, the energy swirling above and below us, and armed police officers in formation surrounding us.

So when we ask, did the revolutions fail or did they succeed, I ask; how can we measure success? Is it something permanent and tangible, some kind of change? Or is it the introduction of an impossible idea to a society that will flow through the minds of free thinkers until it reaches the unmovable wall of censorship that is our news media? The movements of our history live
within the news stories, images and text books that can only partially capture the essence of what the youth had been trying to do; it took a movement itself to truly embody these notions again. Our history and even our present are told through distorted perspectives and the only way to see the truth now, is with our own eyes. Because of technology, we have that ability. The way America had been enlightened to the realities of the Vietnam War through the colorful images they saw on their television screens, after centuries of having only have read versions of the truth in black and white newspapers, is the way we have now come to know life on a daily basis. With a vast array of media technologies lingering at our fingertips, humanity now has the choice to see the truth, rather than just believe what they are told by the very people who have proven to be inaccurate, biased and untrustworthy. After feeling the bright energy of a movement, a march, an occupation and then to see those very people being utterly abused by the people appointed to protect them, is heart wrenching for me; but what does America feel? We dance our days around civil inhibitions, tuning into our favorite news programs, and claiming to fight for rights that we may never have, especially when the truth is so deeply hidden.

The news media in America, as we have observed, has proven to be as powerful as it is ultimately destructive, not only in times of social change, but in the formation of a culture. The tools we are given and have created for ourselves are only the first step in realizing this power. The impact of an individual voice or of many voices together, lay in the way in which we choose to use them or, of equal importance, the way they are represented. The protesters of this country have been brave, longing for the ideals set forth for them by their ancestors and that have been exemplified by the previous revolutions of the world. They were brave because they believed, for a short while, that someone might actually listen to their chanting.


Dr. John Briggs. Personal Interview. 11 April 2013.

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