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**Popular Culture and Politics:
Exploring the Agenda-Setting Capability of Major Motion Pictures**

by
Stuart Soroka, B.A.H.
A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Political Science

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Ottawa, Ontario
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**POPULAR CULTURE AND POLITICS: EXPLORING THE AGENDA-SETTING
CAPABILITY OF MAJOR MOTION PICTURES**

submitted by

Stuart Soroka, B.A. Hons.

in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree of Master of Arts

Chair, Department of Political Science

Thesis Supervisor

Carleton University
December 20, 1994

Abstract

This study represents the synthesis of two bodies of work: (1) mass media effects studies, and (2) popular culture investigations. These two lines of inquiry are closely connected -- the former is, in fact, a part of the latter. The relationship between the two is, however, seldom identified, and the two bodies of research have largely followed separate paths.

Mass media studies have concentrated on finding the effects of news on public opinion. Proof of a direct impact on political attitudes has been tenuous, but evidence of Lippmann-esque agenda-setting abilities has been more easily established. Popular culture analysis has concentrated on finding evidence of a direct relationship between entertainment and political attitudes, and results have largely been disappointing.

This study, therefore, searches for proof of the entertainment-politics connection through agenda-setting analysis. The impact of a variety of major motion pictures on the media agenda is observed, and the results provide reasonable evidence of their agenda-setting abilities.

Acknowledgements

There are a number of people to whom I owe many thanks for their help in the preparation of this paper. First and foremost, I would like to thank my advisor Dr. Conrad Winn for his advice throughout this project. His analysis of my work was invaluable, and my success here is due in no small part to his guidance. I would also like to acknowledge Ely Alboim and Dr. Ian Lee for their helpful criticism. The quantitative portion of this paper is a result of advice from Dr. Stan Winer, Dr. Scott Bennett, Dr. Lewis Soroka, and especially Dr. Tom Peters.

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Introduction

Culture is the name for what people are interested in, their thoughts, their models, the books they read and the speeches they hear, their table-talk, gossip, controversies, historical sense and scientific training, the values they appreciate, the quality of life they admire. All communities have a culture. It is the climate of their civilization.¹

-Walter Lippmann

While Lippmann's talent as an author may set him apart, he is far from alone in his belief in the importance of culture. This study will survey numerous works in which culture, or popular culture, is hailed as a guiding force behind society. Some will even say it is what a society is made of. Even the most conservative interpreters of the word will admit that it affects, and perhaps controls, the way people think. Hall has stated that culture is traditionally seen by theorists as "a schema or pattern for living."² That is the core social science conception of the term. The aristocratic and arts and letter conception is more limited, often much more so. The 1951 Massey Report's definition is typical of the latter view, except insofar as Massey encompasses science as well as arts:

Culture is that part of education which enriches the mind and refines the taste. It is the development of the intelligence through the arts, letters, and sciences.³

¹ Walter Lippmann, *A Preface to Politics*, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1933), 306.

² Bradford J. Hall, "Theories of Culture and Communication," in *Communication Theory* 2, no. 1 (February 1992): 54.

³ Canada, Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letter, and Sciences, *Report 1949-1951*, (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1951), 7.

Even this much more reserved Massey definition suggests that it is not a far stretch to suggest that culture affects politics. They are, in fact, very closely related. Lippmann's above definition does, after all, include "the values they appreciate, the quality of life they admire." James Combs would agree -- in *Polpop 2* he analyzes popular culture as it applies to politics. He states that "...politics occurs in the context of our popular experience, and in that sense is not immune from the flow of popular discourse."⁴ For Combs, among other authors, there is a direct connection between the way people think and the way in which they structure and manage their environment.

It is also not outlandish to admit that the mass media constitute a significant part of modern North American culture. Leaving theory for later in the study, it will suffice to state for now that several theorists believe that, just as a society is defined by culture, our culture is defined by the mass media. McLuhan's "the medium is the message" theories provide the backbone of this understanding, and works by theorists such as Postman attest to the mass media's importance to modern culture. Postman wrote, for instance, the following on television in America:

Television has become, so to speak, the background radiation of the social and intellectual universe, the all-but-imperceptible residue of the electronic big bang of a century past, so familiar and so thoroughly integrated with American culture that we no longer hear its faint hissing in the background or see the flickering gray light.⁵

⁴ James Combs, *Polpop 2: Politics and Popular Culture in America*. (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Press, 1991), 2.

⁵ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 79.

These above speculations -- the importance of culture, the link between culture and politics, and the bond between culture and the mass media -- are summed up in the following phrase by Robert Denton:

Today, as perhaps never before in our nation's history, there is a strong relationship between politics and popular forms of communication.⁶

Assuming this is so, then study of the associations between "politics and popular forms of communication" is certainly warranted. Indeed, various aspects of the relationship have already been investigated. This study will survey several bodies of literature examining the impact of different forms of communication and on politics. Television has certainly been the media of choice in recent analyses, but this study will look at newspapers as well before concentrating specifically on motion pictures as elements of modern culture with political implications.

In terms of content, news rather than entertainment has dominated the bulk of political communications research. Whether this concentration is warranted is largely the topic of this study. The attention here will go to entertainment, not only because it has been under-researched in the past, but because it has been and continues to be an important feature of our culture. Palmer, for instance, has written on the connections between motion pictures and social history⁷, and Gerbner has commented on the power and importance of entertainment:

Television now informs most people in the United States -- many of its viewers simply do not read -- and much of its information comes from what is called entertainment. As in ancient times of great rituals, festivals, and circuses, the information-poor are again royally

⁶ Robert E. Denton, Jr., "Series Forward," in Stephen Prince, *Visions of Empire: Political Imagery in Contemporary American Film*. (New York: Praeger, 1992), xv.

⁷ William J. Palmer, *The Films of the Eighties: A Social History*. (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993), 1-15.

entertained by the organic symbolic patterns informing those who do not seek information.⁸

Gerbner's statement points to an idea, which is fundamental to the present study -- the notion that entertainment, just like news, has the power to inform and affect.

Through a survey of literature and research on both mass media news and entertainment influences, this study examines why empirical proof of a relationship between popular culture entertainment and public opinion has been difficult to find thus far. Accordingly, the study begins with a look in Chapter II at past research on mass media news programs, the quantitative failures and successes of this research, and how theorists found a way to demonstrate the news-public opinion connection. Unlike scholars of news and politics, entertainment researchers have not succeeded in producing significant empirical evidence of a connection between entertainment and public political opinion or behavior. Chapter III begins with definitions of popular culture, and looks at what slight successes entertainment theorists have had in empirically proving the affiliation which so many seem to believe exists. Chapter IV is the beginning of a synthesis of the bodies of literature (news studies and theories of popular culture), and the integration of the two culminates in a series of quantitative experiments in Chapter V. Chapter V, therefore, is an attempt to begin to demonstrate the seemingly unproveable (or at least the very difficult to empirically prove) belief in the political implications of entertainment.

⁸ George Gerbner, as quoted in "Abstractions," in *Et Cetera* 34, no. 2 (June 1977): 191.

The Power of the Mass Media

The power of the mass media is derived from the fact that people require information. In order to run a business, in order to take part in elections, in order to go out to a show -- people require information; it is a necessity for political, economic, and social participation in the modern world. And the mass media is the main source of information for many people. Friends can be a source of information, as can various books and simple personal experience, but a large portion of the modern citizen's information is derived from the mass media. This is certainly true for information pertaining to the world outside a citizen's family and workplace, and may also partly be true for that information which is closely related to a citizen's life. Martin wrote, for instance, that

Each of us has a need to relate to his environment, and if a given issue satisfies that need or stimulates it, we would turn to the mass media (or to our friends who are primed by the mass media) for orientation.¹

Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur echo Martin's belief in their description of what they call a "dependency model" of mass media effects. They wrote the following:

. . . dependency on media information resources is a ubiquitous condition in modern society. One finds this condition in many settings, ranging from the need to find the best buys at the supermarket to more general or pervasive needs such as obtaining the kinds of information that will

¹ L. John Martin, "Recent Theory on Mass Media Potential in Political Campaigns," in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political Science* 427 (Sept. 1976): 132.

help to maintain a sense of connectedness and familiarity with the social world outside one's neighborhood.²

The radio, newspapers, and television -- in varying quantities -- account for a large measure of citizens' information, and as a direct result the mass media hold an incredible amount of power in today's society. The mass media hold a great deal of power because they control our most important asset: information. The mass media has the power to inform, and as a result it has a limited power to influence. This is the main theme of the following pages. The following survey of literature and analyses demonstrates the powers of the mass media, and helps us to understand the first basic tenet which the present research is based upon: peoples' political opinions are affected by the mass media.

The following chapter is a summary of inquiries and studies of explicitly political news reporting and programming in the various mass media, with the purpose of providing a background for further investigations into entertainment programming in various media. A large number of studies have been performed on television news programs and their effects on political systems (most often American); this chapter will offer a sampling of these works mixed with a thorough survey of prominent writings signaling the important role the mass media has played and continues to play in our society.

The Mass Media's Power to Inform

Quantitative Evidence of the Power to Inform

Citizens receive most of their information from the mass media. Mass media technologies and processes allow for continuously faster, more efficient means of

² S.J. Ball-Rokcach and Melvin DeFleur. "A Dependency Model of Mass Media Effects." in *InterMedia: Interpersonal Communication in a Media World*, Gary Grunpert and Robert Cathcart, eds., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 157.

transferring information; the mass media is the only source capable of providing the monstrous amount of easily-accessible information that people demand. That there is some connection between increased access to information and increased demand for information is no secret -- the mass media does not only satisfy an increasing demand, it helps to create it³. These dynamics, however, are not fundamental to the present study. The most important feature of the mass media in this case is simple: it is merely that the mass media has an incredible power to inform.

The power to inform is especially significant in the case of an event removed from the direct observation of ordinary people, e.g. foreign affairs. In the particular case of foreign policy, Bernard Cohen's classic study highlights the public's special dependence on the media:

...generally the external world, the world of foreign policy, reaches us -
- or those of us who are interested and attentive -- via the media of
mass communication... For most of the foreign policy audience, the
really effective map of the world -- that is to say, their operational map
of the world -- is drawn by the reporter and the editor, not by the
cartographer.⁴

The sheer time people spend in front of the television is an indicator -- albeit, an indirect one -- of the extensive power that the television has to inform. 'It is logical to suggest, for instance, that the more time people spend in front of the television, the greater chance the television's content has to affect them. A 1992 study by Statistics Canada showed that the average Canadian watched 23 hours of television per week -- virtually one in every seven hours.

³ This kind of relationship between the amount of information the public demands and the mass media's capabilities have been discussed in Daniel Boorstin, *The Image*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1961).

⁴ Bernard C. Cohen, *The Press and Foreign Policy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 13.

Graph 2A⁵

How Canadians Spend Their Week

⁵ Information taken from Canada, Statistics Canada, Education, Culture and Tourism Division, *Television Viewing 1992: Culture Statistics*, (Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, March 1994), 8.

The preceding chart, based on this 1992 study, demonstrates the immense part television plays in the average Canadian's weekly schedule. The pie chart assumes that a person sleeps 8 hours each night, and works 8 hours for five days a week. If this is so, then only 72 hours remain, and almost one third of this time is spent watching television. And if time for transportation and eating, and occasionally longer working hours are included in the equation, then far more than one third of our free time is spent watching television -- perhaps one half. This does not even take into account any further time spent listening to the radio or reading a newspaper. It has been noted that the average student -- upon finishing high school -- has been in school for 13 000 hours, and has watched television for 19 000 hours⁶. This monstrous amount of time certainly suggests that the mass media has the potential to inform.

Further Evidence of the Power to Inform

Studies on political socialization provide further insight into the power of television to inform, because they address the question of whether the information relayed by the mass media is actually being received. These studies -- usually dealing with children and young adults -- have concentrated on several sources of political information: parents, friends, school, and television. While parents may well hold more sway over their children than the television, theorists have nonetheless pointed out the important role the television holds in political education⁷. The American analysts Atkin and Gantz, for instance, have noted that a variety of analysts have found

⁶ Maria Bohuslawsky, "Media Guru Laments Boob-Tube Generation," in *The Ottawa Citizen*, May 30 1994, A1-2.

⁷ See, for instance, Jack Lyle and Heidi Hoffman, "Children's Use of Television and Other Media," in *Television and Social Behavior: Television in Day-to-Day Life*, E. Rubenstein, G. Comstock, and J. Murray, eds. (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972), 129-256; Jack McLeod, Charles Atkin and Steven Chaffee, "Adolescent, Parents, and Television Use," in *Television and Social Behavior: Television and Adolescent Aggressiveness*, G. Comstock and E. Rubenstein, eds. (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972), 173-313.

a connection between television viewing and political knowledge⁸. These authors' own study consisting of interviews of and questionnaires by elementary school students and some of their mothers demonstrated "that more than half of the children occasionally or frequently view news programming, and that exposure contributes to political knowledge, interest, and information seeking."⁹

Roberts et al. made similar suggestions about the mass media and political socialization in their 1977 study of sixth and tenth graders in California¹⁰. This study demonstrated that television played a part in the political education of students, alongside the influences of family and school. There have also been more recent examples of this line of analysis: Chaffee et al. found strong correlations between political knowledge amongst immigrants to the U.S. and media use in 1990, and Garramore and Atkin found similar results for Grade 7 to 10 students in 1986¹¹. These authors, among others, consistently found that media use was one of the best predictors of political knowledge¹² -- a testament to television's ability to relay information to its viewers.

⁸ Charles K. Atkin and Walter Gantz, "Television News and Political Socialization," in *Public Opinion Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (1978): 183-198.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹⁰ Donald F. Roberts, Suzanne Pingree and Robert P. Hawkins, "Do the Mass Media Play a Role in Political Socialization?," in *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology* 11, no. 2: 37-43.

¹¹ Steven H. Chaffee, Clifford I. Nass and Seung Mock Yang, "The Bridging Role of Television in Immigrant Political Socialization," in *Human Communication Research* 17, no. 2 (December 1990): 266-288; Gina M. Garramore and Charles K. Atkin, "Mass Communication and Political Socialization: Specifying the Effects," in *Public Opinion Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 76-86.

¹² See also Charles Atkin and Gina Garramore, "The Role of Foreign News Coverage in Adolescent Political Socialization," in *Communications* 10, no. 1-3 (1984): 43-61; Margaret M. Conway, Mikel L. Wyckoff, Eleanor Feldbaum and David Aheir, "The News Media in Children's Political Socialization," in *Public Opinion Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 164-178; Paul J. Deutchmann and Wayne A. Danielson, "Diffusion of Knowledge of the Major News Story," in *Journalism Quarterly* 27 (Summer 1960): 345-55; Alan M. Rubin, "Television in Children's Political Socialization," in *Journal of Broadcasting* 20, no. 1 (Winter 1976): 51-60.

The mass media has access to technologies that allow for extremely efficient information gathering and dissemination. It also has a more than substantial and moderately receptive audience. These are virtually indisputable facts. Whether information successfully makes its way from the mass media into the minds of the viewers, however, is another question, and one which is answered positively by a variety of political socialization studies. The preceding socialization studies have shown that we are affected by what we see -- the mass media, and television in particular, succeeds to some degree in informing its audience

In 1970, Chaffee et al. wrote

Our data point to the inference that mass communication plays a role in political socialization insofar as political knowledge is concerned, but its influence does not extend to overt behavior such as campaigning activity.¹³

This comment points to an important feature of political socialization studies -- while they have proven that the mass media do transfer political information, they have had difficulty proving that the mass media can actually change people's beliefs and behavior. This difference between the power to inform and the power to influence is the subject of the following section.

The Mass Media's Power to Influence

A History of Research on the Power to Influence

Theorists, analysts and laymen alike believe that the mass media do much more than merely pass along information. In her history of the mass media in Canada, Vipond explores the multi-faceted role of the mass media in Canada's evolution

¹³ Steven H. Chaffee, L. Scott Ward and Leonard P. Tipton, "Mass Communication and Political Socialization," in *Journalism Quarterly* 49 (Winter 1970): 658.

According to Vipond, the mass media were integral in Canada's transformation to a modern society. She wrote that

... the mass media played a mediating role as one of the principal institutions by which individuals were taught to cope with the transition from traditional to modern, and to find a comfortable compromise between them. They helped people make sense of their lives in a rapidly changing world.¹⁴

Clearly, Vipond envisions an important role for the mass media -- as a catalyst in the development of modern society in Canada. More importantly, Vipond's analysis demonstrates the complex nature of mass media communications. In her historical overview, the author gives a persuasive argument for the mass media's ability not only to relay information, but to help the recipients interpret and deal with the information they receive.

The mass media not only has the power to inform, but also the power to influence. By controlling the methods of information-gathering and by choosing amongst the wide variety of presentation possibilities, the mass media can influence what information people receive, as well as how they see it and think about it.

Taras, Iyengar, and Martin have each traced the history of studies on mass media influences, and their analyses are very similar¹⁵. According to the three, the "magic bullet theory" research prompted by fascist propaganda in the 30s and 40s demonstrated a belief that the mass media could directly change people's opinions. Attempts to prove this quantitatively, however, were not conclusive, as is

¹⁴ Mary Vipond, *The Mass Media in Canada*, 2d ed., (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1992), 10.

¹⁵ David Taras, *The Newsmakers: The Media's Influence on Canadian Politics*, (Scarborough: Nelson Canada, 1990), 27-30; Shanto Iyengar, Mark D. Peters and Donald R. Kinder, "Experimental Demonstrations of the 'Not-So-Minimal' Consequences of Television News Programs," in *Mass Communication Review Yearbook 4*, (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1983): 77- 87; Martin, 125-133.

demonstrated by a number of oft-cited examples of "minimal effects" research such as works by Hovland, Lazarsfeld, and -- more recently -- Sears and Chaffee¹⁶. Klapper's 1960 *Effects of Mass Communication* stands as the foremost synthesis of minimal effects research. In it, the analysis of numerous media effects studies leads Klapper to conclude that

Mass communications ordinarily does not serve as a necessary and sufficient cause of audience effects, but rather functions among and through a nexus of mediating factors and influences.¹⁷

The number of recent studies which continue to demonstrate that the mass media's effects on the public are minimal have led Carrie and Ehrenberg to state that "...what matters to us is the very lack of evidence that television viewing has had large or dramatic effects on the vast majority of viewers most of the time."¹⁸ Lukesch's 1992 study on children and adolescents in Germany, for example, found little correlation between heavy viewing of information-oriented television and increased durable knowledge.¹⁹ Lukesch attributed his results to the notion that television simply does not create a favorable learning situation -- the fast-paced, momentary

¹⁶ C.I. Hovland, "Reconciling Conflicting Results Derived from Experimental and Survey Studies of Attitude Change," in *American Psychologist* 14 (1959): 8-17; P. Berelson Lazarsfeld and H. Gaudet, *The People's Choice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944); D.O. Sears and S.H. Chaffee, "Uses and Effects of the 1976 Debates: An Overview of Empirical Studies" in *The Great Debates, 1976: Ford vs. Carter*, S. Kraus, ed., (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979); See also Richard E. Dawson and Kenneth Prewitt, *Political Socialization*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1969).

¹⁷ Joseph T. Klapper, *The Effects of Mass Communication*, (Glencoe, Illinois: the Free Press, 1960), 8.

¹⁸ Douglas G Carrie and A.S.C. Ehrenberg, "Is Television All That Important?" in *Intermedia* 20, no. 4-5 (Aug-Sept 1992): 19.

¹⁹ Helmut Lukesch, "TV Learning: Incidental or Systematic Process," in *Communications* 17, no. 2 (1992): 205-213.

nature of television programming is such that the presented information is rarely assimilated.

Lukesch's results are not uncommon, according to McQuire's 1986 survey of literature²⁰. This analysis looks at past research on intended and unintended mass media effects, from commercial advertising effects on purchasing to political campaigning impacts on voting to program violence effects on viewer aggression. Literally hundreds of authors are surveyed, and the words "tenuous" and "trivial" prevail. McQuire concludes that

We have reviewed and evaluated the evidence regarding the dozen types of media effects that received most mention and most study... For each of the dozen areas of purported effects we concluded that the demonstrated impacts are surprisingly slight. Even in the areas with the most impressive results, including frequent statistically significant effects in methodologically adequate studies, the size of the impacts are so small as to raise questions about their practical significance and cost effectiveness.²¹

'Information-seeking theorists' agree in part with 'minimal effects' theorists such as Lukesch, but they do see some role for the mass media in contributing to public opinion²². These analysts agree that the mass media is not particularly effective at changing people's opinions on issues, and they buttress this argument with the notion that people will take from the mass media whatever information they want to take, and interpret it so that it supports their own ideas. These theorists believe that

The mass media tend to inform rather than to change attitudes. The conclusions drawn from the information derived from the media may

²⁰ William J. McQuire. "The Myth of Massive Media Impact: Savagings and Salvagings." in *Political Communication and Behavior*, George Comstock, ed.. (Boston: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 175-259.

²¹ Ibid., 233.

²² The term 'information seeking theorists' is used by Martin.

direct attitudes one way of another, and it is only when nothing is competing from one's own past experience that media experience becomes real and their values are adopted as one's own.²³

In this manner, information-seeking theorists see the mass media as contributing information to the public opinion-making process, but not directly affecting public opinion itself.

Weimann and Winn's study of the Zundel trial in Canada quantitatively supports this complex line of thinking. In their analysis of the media event surrounding the trial of a Toronto-based, neo-nazi publisher, the authors found that

... media exposure increased understanding of the Holocaust among those Canadians who were not hostile at the outset while failing to reduce the size of the prejudiced minority.²⁴

Weimann and Winn demonstrate the fundamental idea behind "information-seeking" theories: the mass media do not necessarily change opinions -- they can only offer information that is then subject to the previous beliefs and values of the viewers. This theory is directly related to another idea echoed by several modern theorists; namely, that the mass media is most effective at changing the opinions of citizens who previously had no opinion on the matter whatsoever. Tuchman, for instance, stated the following in his 1978 study of news-making:

By seeking to disseminate information that people want, need, and should know, news organizations both circulate and shape knowledge... the news media have the power to shape news consumers' opinions on topics about which they are ignorant.²⁵

²³ Martin, 130.

²⁴ Gabriel Weimann and Conrad Winn, *Hate on Trial: The Zundel Affair*. (Oakville: Mosaic Press, 1986), 107.

²⁵ Gaye Tuchman, *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality*. (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 2.

Blumler and McQuail's quantitative results demonstrate Tuchman's proposition. In their analysis of the 1964 British election campaign, these authors found a relationship between viewers with weak to moderate motivation to follow the campaign and viewers whose opinions were influenced by pro-Liberal television broadcasts. They wrote that

The implication is that viewers who were in the audience less out of political interest and more because of attachment to their television sets were most open to influence in their attitudes toward a party about which at the outset they probably had little knowledge and few well-formed opinions.²⁶

A Change in Inquiry: Agenda-Setting

Notwithstanding McQuire's condemnation of media effects theorists, a steady stream of research attempting to hypothesize and prove the seemingly-impossible continues to exist. Recently, in fact, there has been a growing number of articles that suggest that the mass media has more than a minimal effect on the public, and that it does more than give opinions only to those who have none. In their survey of communications literature, Roberts and Bachen signal the end of 'minimal effects' theories:

By the end of the 50s the field was limping along under the burden of the 'law of minimal effect' -- the generalization that the dominant influence of the mass media was reinforcement of the status quo, an effect viewed by many as having little import... The past decade, however, has witnessed a revival of the view that the mass media exert powerful influences on the way people perceive, think about, and ultimately act in their world.²⁷

²⁶ as described in Jay G. Blumler and Michael Gurevitch. "The Political Effects of Mass Communication." *Culture, Society, and the Media*. Michael Gurevitch, ed.. (London: Methuen, 1982), 251.

²⁷ Donald F. Roberts and Christine M. Bachen. "Mass Communication Effects." *In Annual Review of Psychology* 32 (1981): 307-8.

According to Martin and Iyengar, this change in the answers analysts were receiving was directly related to a change in the questions they were asking²⁸. This more successful line of analysis ceased to question whether the mass media changed how people felt about issues, and began to ask if the mass media changed what issues people thought about. Roberts and Bachen agree: "The earlier focus on persuasion and attitude change has given way to belief that the media exert important influences on the consciousness and world view of the audience."²⁹ This 'agenda-setting' research is rooted in Lippmann's influential 1922 *Public Opinion*, in which he suggests that the press has an ability to control what issues the public considers important³⁰. This line of thought has subsequently been taken up by a large number of theorists since the 1970s.

The agenda-setting phenomenon has been described, for instance, by Roshco and Taras. Roshco noted that, "Popular responses as to what constitute the nation's pressing problems reflect the issues featured in the press."³¹ Taras wrote that

The most salient fact [about the power of journalists] is that journalists, as a group, can prevent some aspects of a politician's or a government's message from reaching the public. They can do this by not covering events such as speeches or news conferences that are important to politicians, or covering them in such a way that political appeals are filtered, blunted, or discredited.³²

²⁸ Martin; Iyengar et al., "Experimental Demonstrations."

²⁹ Roberts and Bachen, 308.

³⁰ Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion*. (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1961. Reprint of 1922).

³¹ Bernard Roshco, *Newsmaking*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975). 98.

³² Taras, 41.

According to Taras, the mass media holds control over what becomes news and, therefore, what becomes important to the public. This fact is certainly well-known by a wide variety of political parties and interest groups who attempt to send a message to the public. The actions of environmental groups are just one example of interest groups' awareness of the power of the mass media to shape public debate. Many environmental groups -- Greenpeace being the most obvious example -- have gone out of their way to attract the media so that their issue can be put on the public agenda. Demonstrations are held for one reason only: to get media attention, and therefore to get on the agenda. Parlour and Schatzow have stated that getting media attention was a fundamental step for the environmental movement. They wrote that

... the media did succeed in legitimizing the environment as a major political issue and forced the political system at all levels in Canada to adapt both structurally and behaviorally to concern registered by the media.³³

Parlour and Schatzow's statement shows the recognized ability of the mass media to control the public agenda.

Iyengar et al. have also studied the agenda-setting hypothesis, which they stated "...demands that viewers adjust their beliefs about the importance of problems in response to the amount of coverage problems receive in the media."³⁴ Their look at Connecticut residents' opinions before and after exposure to news programs concentrating on pollution or defense demonstrated television's agenda-setting ability. Furthermore, Iyengar et al. stated that television also has a priming function -- issues that citizens believe are important are then used, for instance, when citizens judge

³³ J.W. Parlour and S. Schatzow. "The Mass Media and Public Concern for Environmental Problems in Canada, 1960-1972," in *International Journal of Environmental Studies* 13: 15.

³⁴ Iyengar et al.. "Experimental Demonstrations." 80.

presidential performance. In a preceding similar quantitative study, Iyengar and Kinder stated that

We found that people who were shown network broadcasts edited to draw attention to a particular problem assigned greater importance to that problem -- greater importance than they themselves did before the experiment began, and greater importance than did people assigned to control conditions that emphasized different problems.³⁵

The authors then concluded that, "Political persuasion is difficult to achieve, but agenda-setting and priming are apparently pervasive."³⁶

Television's agenda-setting function has also been demonstrated by Leff et al. in their experimental study of Chicago citizens' answers to questions about police violence³⁷. Before a television documentary on the subject, police violence was not a major issue for many Chicago viewers. Following the shows, however, Leff et al. found a marked difference in citizens' responses. The analysts attributed this change to the documentary, and thereby demonstrated that television news programming does have a moderate power to change public opinion -- at least in regard to what the public deems important.

Conclusions on Media Powers

It is relatively obvious from the above examples that the mass media's power to influence is far from agreed-upon. It should be noted, for instance, that Comstock performed a survey similar to that of McQuire in which his conclusions were exactly

³⁵ Shanto Iyengar and Donald R. Kinder, *News That Matters*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 116.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 117.

³⁷ Donna R. Leff, David L. Protess and Stephen C. Brooks, "Crusading Journalism: Changing Public Attitudes and Policy-Making Agendas," in *Public Opinion Quarterly* 50 (Fall 1986): 300-15.

the opposite -- that television had significant documented effects on viewers in many regards³⁸. Furthermore, also in contrast to McQuire's statements, Taras wrote the following in *The Newsmakers*:

Given the weight of scholarly evidence about media effects, it would be foolish to deny that the media play a role in shaping the public agenda and have, as a consequence, an effect on political outcomes.³⁹

This statement, however, is not necessarily in disagreement with McQuire's beliefs -- the theorists are looking at two different phenomena. McQuire's survey demonstrated that analysts searching for a direct relationship (such as Lukesch) find it difficult to get adequate results. Taras' statement, however, is in reference to the agenda-setting studies -- studies which have consistently been more successful than their behavioral/ psychological counterparts in media effects studies. Blumer and Gurevitch's 1982 analysis of past research dealing with the political effects of mass communications also looks at agenda-setting studies. Accordingly, these authors state that most research since the 1970s has proven that, while the mass media is not all-powerful, the mass media does have a limited power to influence.⁴⁰

In 1977, McQuail wrote on the powers of the mass media. The following paragraph stands as a good summary of the kinds of powers to influence which many modern theorists maintain are held by the mass media.

First, the media can attract and direct attention to problems, solutions of people in ways which can favor those with power and correlatively divert attention from rival individuals of groups. Second, the mass media can confer status and confirm legitimacy. Third, in some circumstances, the media can be a channel for persuasion and

³⁸ George Comstock. "Television and its Viewers," in *Mass Communication Review Yearbook 1*, (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1980): 491-507.

³⁹ Taras, 33.

⁴⁰ Blumer and Gurevitch.

mobilization. Fourth, the mass media can help to bring certain kinds of public into being and maintain them. Fifth, the media are a vehicle for offering psychic rewards and gratifications. They can divert and amuse and they can flatter.⁴¹

The above quote clearly demonstrates McQuail's strong beliefs on the powers of the mass media, and comprehensibly illustrates the kinds of powers which the mass media has over the information which citizens receive. It is important to note that "persuasion" follows "in some circumstances", and that the remaining powers deal more with controlling the issue and speaker agendas than with swaying people's beliefs and predispositions. McQuail has noted, after all, that the mass media's powers are not all-encompassing. Along with Blumler, he wrote that "... television itself is such a dramatic medium that many observers have been tempted to exaggerate its effects and to discount the staunch firmness of popular resistance to persuasive campaigns."⁴²

The mass media is far from controlling how people feel about issues. Furthermore, the mass media's power to influence is neither as strong nor as obvious as its power to inform. While people get a great deal of information from the mass media, after all, the degree to which the presentation of this information can actually change people's opinions is moderate. The greatest source of the mass media's strength in this regard lies in its agenda-setting abilities, rather than in its potential for persuasive programming or reporting. Any power to directly influence public opinion through persuasion is most evident when the issue discussed is one about which the audience has no prior opinion, and the power to persuade is moderate even in this case. Nonetheless, the mass media's power to influence through agenda-setting is a

⁴¹ Dennis McQuail, "The Influence and Effects of the Mass Media," in *Mass Communication and Society*, James Curran, Michael Gurevitch and Janet Woolcott, eds., (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), 90-91.

⁴² Jay G. Blumler and Denis McQuail, *Television in Politics: Its Uses and Influence*, (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1968), 261.

significant one. Many modern theorists believe that the mass media is an important and consequential factor in creating the public agenda, and, therefore, in indirectly creating or altering public opinion.

The preceding chapter has touched on a wide variety of ideas expressed in mass media news programming research. Firstly, the mass media's potential power to inform was described, and backed up by past political socialization research that demonstrated that the audience does receive the information the mass media sends. Secondly, it was shown that as a result of its power to inform, the mass media also has the capacity to influence. This ability to directly influence, however, has been difficult to prove empirically. While one cannot state that the mass media controls public opinion, however, there has been some moderate proof that it does exercise some limited control over how people think about issues. That the mass media also plays a significant part in influencing the public agenda (agenda-setting) is easier to prove, and has been empirically demonstrated by several theorists.

From Mass Media to Popular Culture

Above analysis has revealed the moderate powers to influence of mass media news programming, especially in the case of television news programming. There is, however, a body of literature influenced by Marshall McLuhan describing why the nature of television is not conducive to conveying news⁴³. In *The Newsmakers*, for instance, Taras asserts that television is governed by an "audience imperative" -- that television stations compete for larger audiences to attain larger advertising revenues.

⁴³ McLuhan defined the relationship between the method of communication and the material being communicated with his assertion that "the medium is the message." The works by Taras and Postman that follow are two examples of modern communication analyses influenced by McLuhan, and others include: Mary Anne Comber and Robert S. Mayne, *The Newsmongers: How the Media Distort the Political News*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986); Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, (New York: Methuen, 1982).

The main purpose of television news programs is to attract the maximum number of viewers, and the end result is news programming that primarily seeks to entertain. The consequence of this imperative is that television journalists seek a certain kind of story.

Taras states that

... the television news frame is predisposed towards covering certain kinds of stories and not others. Stories that do not involve conflict among political leaders or high drama or have interesting visuals are likely to be outside the news frame.⁴⁴

Taras believes that television news "recontextualizes" events. He believes that it searches out certain kinds of stories and presents them in a way that is peculiar to television -- not just because there are visuals, but because television seeks to change news into entertainment.

No one author has more thoroughly described this phenomenon than Neil Postman. According to Postman, we have moved from the "Age of Exposition" to the "Age of Show Business" -- from an era in which intelligent discourse was shaped by typography, to one in which this discourse is distorted by television⁴⁵. Postman believes that the nature of television does not allow it to convey the same kind of concise, sequential ideas and concepts that typography does. Rather, television programming is made up of short snippets of information which must be, above all else, entertaining -- often at the expense of thought-provoking and intelligible.

Postman's beliefs -- beyond their importance in communications theory -- serve to connect the topic of this chapter with that of the next. Postman charges that television news is primarily entertainment. Perhaps, therefore, it is important also to

⁴⁴ Taras, 111.

⁴⁵ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1985); See also Neil Postman, *How to Watch Television News*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1992).

study the influence of programming that is strictly entertainment (as opposed to what Postman might call news that is reduced to entertainment). Taking into account the powers of the mass media, what are the political implications of the programming that is most suitable to the modern era's premiere mass medium?

In order to answer this question, further analysis of agenda-setting will be set aside until Chapter IV. We must first investigate popular culture -- the essence of entertainment programming. An understanding of popular culture is essential in order to study how entertainment programming relates to society, as well as how it relates to politics. The following chapter will provide this background.

III

The Power of Popular Culture

Just as print, radio, and television news programming can mold public political opinion, so too can print, radio and television entertainment. Unlike news, entertainment can be implicitly rather than explicitly political, but it may very well play just as significant a role as does news in the formation or mutation of popular political opinion. The fact that television viewers in Canada watch far more entertainment programming than news programming is testament to the potential importance of entertainment along with news. This fact is displayed in the following pie chart (Graph 3A), based on 1992 research by Statistics Canada. Note that news programming accounts for 24% of viewing time, while drama and comedy programs amount to 44%.

*Graph 3A¹***Percentage Distribution of Television Viewing Time**

¹ information taken from Canada. Statistics Canada, Education, Culture and Tourism Division, *Television Viewing 1992: Culture Statistics*, 21.

Facts such as those displayed in the Graph 3A are what lead Curran and Sparks to make the following remark about studies of the British press:

The lack of attention given to press entertainment partly stems from the view that it is inherently trivial and unimportant. This view is based on the elitist assumption that most of what people read most of the time does not warrant critical study.²

Curran and Sparks' comments are a little jaundiced, but they demonstrate a point: entertainment programming, if only because of its sheer quantity compared to news programming, warrants some kind of similar analysis.

The above statistics point to the quantitative importance of entertainment programming. The qualitative importance of this phenomenon stems both from the previous chapter's theme -- that mass media news can affect public opinion -- and from the idea that popular culture is an important force in itself, and one which is closely intertwined with politics. This chapter will attempt to demonstrate the latter of these proposals. Popular culture is an important communicator of popular opinion, and this chapter will demonstrate its importance to political studies.

Defining Popular Culture and the Popular Culture/ Mass Media Relationship

There has been, in the past thirty years, an extraordinary number of studies from social scientists of all persuasions on "popular culture". It is certainly close to impossible to describe the many different aspects of these studies, and give an all-encompassing portrait of this modern phenomenon. Without delving too far into the heap of popular culture literature, however, it is possible -- and necessary -- to outline the basic ideas that lie behind the spectacle that is so central to the present study, and

² James Curran and Colin Sparks. "Press and Popular Culture," in *Media, Culture and Society* 13 (1991): 215.

to describe the ways in which this phenomenon relates both to political science and the previous chapter's central theme: the mass media.

Duncan's simple textbook definition of popular culture is as follows:

... a system of beliefs, an ideology, or popular mythology, that conveys the desires, fears, and aspirations of the culture.³

Mukerji and Schudson have gone a little further than Duncan, and suggest that,

... popular culture refers to the beliefs and practices, and the objects through which they are organized, that are widely shared among a population. This includes folk beliefs, practices and objects rooted in local traditions, and mass beliefs, practices and objects generated in political and commercial centers.⁴

The following sections will seek to analyze these two definitions in search for one that is more comprehensive and appropriate for the present study. This investigation will lead to four facts about popular culture: (1) its popularity, (2) its uses, (3) the mass media's role in popular culture, and (4) the elements of popular culture.

(1) Popular Culture's Popularity

Both Duncan and Mukerji and Schudson state that popular culture is -- above all else -- a popular set of beliefs. The ideas and beliefs that make up popular culture are those that are held in common by the culture (in Duncan's terminology) or the population (according to Mukerji and Schudson). Popular culture is not a class-based phenomenon, nor is it exclusive to any other group. Elites, workers, rich, poor, women and men alike contribute to and are affected to some degree by the beliefs that make up popular culture.

³ Barry Duncan, *Mass Media and Popular Culture*, (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), 18.

⁴ Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson, "Rethinking Popular Culture" in *Rethinking Popular Culture*, Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson, eds., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 3.

Michael Real's description of what he terms "mass-mediated culture" is useful in distinguishing this 'popular' aspect of popular culture. Real's discussion centers on what kind of art/ communications are actually involved in popular culture. He distinguishes between elite art, folk art, popular art, and mass culture⁵. Popular art, according to Real, has grown between the high culture that makes up elite art and traditional/ folk art. Popular art appeals to a far wider audience -- it combines what critics consider art with the established habits and customs of folk tradition. Inside the realm of popular art there is mass culture. The following diagram of Ray Browne's "cultural lense" is an illustration of what Real outlines.

⁵ Michael R. Real. *Mass-Mediated Culture*, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1977). 6-9.

*Figure 3.1*⁶
The Cultural Lense

⁶ This diagram is adapted from Real. 9.

Real's description of mass culture, although it is directed towards art, is useful in identifying the popular nature of the thoughts and beliefs that make up popular culture. The above diagram illustrates how and where popular culture fits in to the bigger picture: it is at the center of a society; it is composed of the ideas that are common to everyone in that society. (Some anthropologists would suggest, in fact, that popular culture is the defining characteristic of a society.) The most fundamental aspect of popular culture is that it is popular.

(2) The Uses of Popular Culture

The word 'beliefs' is used by both Duncan and Mukerji and Schudson in their definitions of popular culture. Gabriel Bar-Haim has written on popular culture from a political theory standpoint, and his analysis comparing popular culture with ideology is useful in analyzing the function of 'beliefs' in popular culture⁷. Unlike the previous authors, Bar-Haim distinguishes between ideology -- a system of long term ideas and beliefs that drive and motivate a society -- and popular culture. Bar-Haim states that while ideologies involve an enduring set of judgments, popular culture involves a wide variety of reactions and responses to ideology. Popular culture is more varied in its scope and less consistent in its convictions than ideology. In Bar-Haim's words,

That is, popular culture does not have an interrelated set of definite ideas, utopian vision that would legitimate moral and social action, nor does it demand commitments or mobilize motivations. By and large this modern, urban and secular type of culture, is a reaction to ideological forces that inherently develop and maintain social routines, casting into public forms the concerns and anxieties sensed by people whose lives are affected.⁸

⁷ Gabriel Bar-Haim. "Ideology Effects and the Nature of Popular Culture," in *Communications* 15, no. 1-2 (1990): 149-162.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 150-1.

According to Bar-Haim, the constant beliefs and ideas that drive a society are part of its ideology, and popular culture provides a commentary, and sometimes a critique, of a society's ideology. It is, as both Duncan and Mukerji and Schudson point out, central to all citizens, but Bar-Haim would be more circumspect with the use of the word 'beliefs' than the previous theorists. 'Beliefs', for Bar-Haim, are what make up ideology, and popular culture is what citizens use in their attempts to learn about and learn to deal with their ideology. Harold Innis would agree. He wrote that

Culture is concerned with the capacity of the individual to appraise problems in terms of space and time and with enabling him to take the proper steps at the right time.⁹

For Innis and Bar-Haim, popular culture's primary use is as a means by which individuals interpret the world around them.

This idea that popular culture is used by people to understand and interpret their environment has been echoed by Narvaez and Laba, who stated that it is precisely this aspect of popular culture which makes it so central and fundamental to a society. According to Narvaez and Laba, popular culture helps people interpret what goes on around them -- it is an easy way to make some sense of their surroundings. Hawkins and Pingree have explored this to some degree in their review of experiments on television's influence on people's view of social reality¹⁰. The authors review a variety of experiments on television's effects on people's beliefs about such things as violence, fear of crime, and sexism, and conclude that there is moderate evidence suggesting that television plays some part in people's construction of social reality. This is directly related to Narvaez and Labas' hypothesis, because it demonstrates popular culture as it is used to understand the outside world. Other experiments exploring this

⁹ Harold Innis, *The Bias of Communication*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951), 85.

¹⁰ Robert P. Hawkins and Suzanne Pingree, "Television's Influence on Social Reality," in *Mass Communication Review Yearbook 4*, (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1983): 53-76.

idea include Canadian studies of Inuit and aboriginal communities before and after the introduction of cable television, as well as Lizabeth Cohen's analysis of Chicago workers in the 1920s¹¹. Cohen traces the way in which workers reacted to "mass consumption" (particularly big screen movies and television), and demonstrates how popular culture can affect workers' consciousness and the way in which they see themselves and those around them. Both Cohen's study and Hawkins and Pingree's analytical review give some empirical proof of the use of popular culture, namely that popular culture offers

...a means of rendering experience intelligible and graspable through recognizable forms that are both pleasing aesthetically and relevant in a social interactional sense.¹²

This is what makes popular culture such an important phenomenon in the study of politics -- the fact that it can affect, and sometimes dictate, the way in which people view the world around them. This idea has been echoed by Combs in his look at the growth of popular culture. He wrote

As popular culture becomes more pervasive and powerful, we are more attentive to the conventions of a popular aesthetic, the ways in which we evaluate our immediate experience, and relate it to other realms, such as politics.¹³

Combs' statement points to the fundamental use of popular culture: as an aid in deciphering our surroundings.

¹¹ see Nelson Graburn, "Television and the Canadian Inuit," in *Inuit Studies* 6, no. 1 (1982): 7-18; Lizabeth Cohen, "Encountering Mass Culture at the Grassroots: The Experience of Chicago Workers in the 1920s," in *American Quarterly* 41 (March 1989): 6-33.

¹² Peter Narvaez and Martin Laba, "Introduction: The Folklore-Popular Culture Continuum," in *Media Sense*, Peter Narvaez and Martin Laba, eds., (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1986), 2.

¹³ James Combs, *Polpop 2: Politics and Popular Culture in America Today*, (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1991), 12.

Joshua Meyrowitz has also analyzed the uses of popular culture. In *No Sense of Place*, Meyrowitz describes Innis, McLuhan and others as "medium theorists" -- theorists who look not so much at the content, but at the nature of the communication of various media¹⁴. He describes these theorists as those who see media as "cultural environments", and he notes that while their analysis offers little concrete theory, they do forward an interesting and important perspective from which to view the media/culture relationship. Nonetheless, Meyrowitz feels that this kind of analysis ignores any consideration of "everyday social behavior", and so he combines medium theory with situationist theory. Situationalism, according to Meyrowitz, is the notion that people learn how to interact by learning how they should act in different situations. There is a wide variety of situational definitions -- they govern virtually all the regular situations we may find ourselves in --, and these definitions develop and are held in common by all those in a specific community. Having learned these situational definitions as we mature, we then use these acquired definitions to decide how to act and what to do in any given circumstance. They make, in effect, a substantial part of our culture. Meyrowitz describes these situational definitions as follows:

Each defined action has specific rules and roles. A funeral demands behaviors different from those at a wedding, a party has rules different from those of a classroom...

When people enter any given interaction, therefore, the first thing they need to know is 'what is going on here?' They need to know the 'definition of the situation.' The definition of the situation is a simple concept that is used to describe the complex dynamics of encounters and the rules that govern them.¹⁵

Meyrowitz's book is an attempt to integrate situational definitions and medium theory in order to describe how media can affect culture. His analysis leads to the ways in

¹⁴ Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 16-23.

¹⁵ Ibid., 24.

which different media affect our situational definitions. His most remarkable conclusion is that the modern electronic media have challenged our situational definitions by altering our concept of 'place' -- social roles can no longer be defined by where we are. Television has broken down "... the distinctions between here and there, live and mediated, and personal and public,"¹⁶ and has as a result changed our situational definitions and, therefore, changed our culture.

Meyrowitz's analysis of media and culture is important to the present study because it helps to further explain the uses of popular culture. His description of situationalism is an interesting addition to the understanding that popular culture's primary use is to assist us in understanding and reacting to our environment.

(3) The Mass Media's Role in Popular Culture

Popular culture can be, in effect, an individual's roadmap of the world around them. The preceding analysis of culture definitions by Duncan and Mukerji and Schudson showed a general agreement between theorists that culture is something that people use to interpret their environment. With the uses of popular culture established, where do the mass media fit in?

Mukerji and Schudson's definition is a good starting point for this line of analysis -- along with beliefs, these authors state that culture includes, "the objects through which they (the ideas, etc.) are organized". Mukerji and Schudson do not mean that popular culture is made up of magazines, television sets, and movie theaters, but rather that the processes and communications that these media allow make them integral to the study of popular culture. McLuhan would say, in fact, that there is no difference between the study of modern popular culture and the study of mass media communications, and Postman would inevitably agree. By way of illustration, Postman wrote that

¹⁶ Ibid., 308.

... the introduction into a culture of a technique such as writing or a clock is not merely an extension of man's power to bind time but a transformation of his way of thinking -- and, of course, of the content of his culture.¹⁷

Popular culture is not comprised exclusively of the mass media, but these media are consequential because they are the means by which popular culture can exist and be expressed. While popular culture is fundamentally rooted in ideas and beliefs, these are expressed through and therefore affected by the mass media.

Laba has described this complex relationship between popular culture and the mass media. Laba notes that we must be careful not to perceive popular culture merely as an outcome of the mass media technologies. He wrote, for instance, that,

... it can be approached not as a product of technology per se, but of the various human interactions, expressive resources and patterns of communication that support and are framed by involvement in the popular culture process.¹⁸

Laba's description drives home the fact that popular culture is essentially comprised of beliefs -- as has been explored in the preceding section. He also states, however, that popular culture includes the communications through which these beliefs are expressed. The mass media's importance to popular culture lies in the notion that it is these media which take culture and make it popular culture. It could be said, therefore, that the mass media is not only important *to* popular culture, but is also a fundamental element *of* popular culture.

In the first section of this analysis, Real used the term "mass-mediated culture" in his popular culture analysis. This certainly seems logical -- judging from Laba's description the two phenomena are virtually synonymous. According to Real, any

¹⁷ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves*, 13.

¹⁸ Martin Laba, "Popular Culture and Folklore: The Social Dimension," in *Media Sense*, 16.

culture -- be it elite, folk, or mass -- becomes popular culture when it is transmitted by the mass media¹⁹. In this way, he distinguishes between any past cultures and the present popular culture, and he demonstrates that the mass media is a fundamental element in popular culture.

So too do Narvaez and Laba, who look at popular culture from a folklorist's perspective. The following comments point once again to this McLuhanesque aspect of popular culture:

...Popular culture refers, in a restrictive interpretation, to cultural events which are transmitted by technological media and communicated in mass societal contexts.²⁰

Narvaez and Laba note that, while the two hold several similarities, there is a significant difference between old folk beliefs and traditions and modern popular culture. Unlike the folk setting, in popular culture there is a spatial and societal distance between the performer and the audience -- because of the mass media. The mass media do not comprise popular culture, but they are an integral part of it -- for Narvaez and Laba they are what distinguishes popular culture from older folk cultures.

(4) The Elements of Popular Culture

James Combs has expressed an idea of culture that is similar to Meyrowitz's situationalism. Culture, in Combs' terminology, is rooted in stories -- "...our story, other's stories, traditions of stories, kinds of stories, canons of stories, metastories (stories about stories)."²¹ According to Combs, cultures are communicated through, and sometimes learned from, different kinds of stories. This theorist believes that our aesthetic sensibility transforms our lives into stories, and that we subsequently use

¹⁹ Real, 14.

²⁰ Narvaez and Laba, 1.

²¹ Combs. *Polpop* 2, 4.

these stories to help us make sense of what is going on around us. This can be the case for many different types of stories, from fairy tales to soap operas to horror flicks.

Combs' idea is echoed in David Chaney's study of fictions in mass entertainment. Chaney stated, for instance, that

.. fiction is not seen as the opposite of factual but as cultural phenomena in which men symbolically express some limited understanding of their life in a particular socio-cultural milieu.²²

Janet Woolacott has made similar remarks in regard to television situation comedies. She stated the following:

it is clearly the case that some fictions are not simply popular but also play a particular part in relation to the ordering of other ideologies. Such fictions have a place in the public arena above and beyond their immediate textual base.²³

These comments by Chaney and Woolacott illustrate Combs' belief that culture is made of stories. This notion, coupled with the preceding analysis of the role of the mass media in popular culture leads to the following proposition: popular culture is to a great extent composed of the wide variety of stories told in various guises through the mass media.

What, however, are the guises that these stories take in the mass media? The answer to this question is more simple than it seems. In Combs' study of American popular culture (*Polpop 2*), he looks at television dramas and comedies, popular sports programming, religious programming, and feature films. All of these elements of popular culture represent to varying degrees the phenomena which Combs considers part of American culture. Real's study (*Mass-Mediated Culture*) includes a similar

²² David Chaney. "Fictions in Mass Entertainment," in *Mass Communication and Society*, 440.

²³ Janet Woolacott. "Fictions and Ideologies: The Case of the Situation Comedy," in *Popular Culture and Social Relations*, Tony Bennett, Colin Mercer and Janet Woolacott, eds., (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1986), 217.

grouping of popular culture forms. His book includes chapters, for instance, on Disney, the Super Bowl, and Billy Graham.

It is also important to note, however, that both Combs' and Real's popular culture analyses also include sections on political campaigning and reporting. This is important because it points to the fact that the mass media news programming studies summarized in Chapter II are not outside popular culture. The subject of this chapter is not completely independent from that of the last; it is, in fact, an aggrandization of the news programming studies. Just as definitions have shown that the mass media is an integral part of popular culture, they also demonstrate that news is one element of this phenomenon. Both Combs' and Real's analyses point to the fact that mass media reporting and canvassing allow for a similar kind of story-telling, a similar kind of manipulation by the medium, that exists in entertainment programming. Medium theorists would certainly agree with this idea -- their contention would be that, because messages are manipulated by the medium through which they are disseminated, television news stories exhibit the same kind of communicative qualities that define popular culture. Postman, as has already been explained, argues that there is no difference between television entertainment and television news. Television as a medium, according to Postman, is geared towards entertainment, and everything expressed through television is therefore turned into a primarily entertainment-oriented program in the process.²⁴ Popular culture, therefore, includes mass media news programming along with the many stories told for entertainment on television, in motion pictures, and in other mass media.

Defining Popular Culture

In conclusion, and with the purpose of summarizing the above review of literature, it is possible to offer a definition of popular culture as it is used in this study:

²⁴ Neil Postman, *How to Watch*.

Popular culture is comprised of explanations of and commentaries on the beliefs, outlooks, and concepts that are common to a society. These can be expressed through fictions, or through the presentation of non-fictions. Popular culture is affected by the communications through which these beliefs, outlook, and concepts are articulated, and a consideration of it must therefore also include a reflection on the media that are used in popular culture -- namely, the mass media, whose nature and capabilities are what allows the culture to become 'popular'. Popular culture is a product of the society and its means of communications, and it consequently becomes a structure which people use to interpret their surroundings.

Popular Culture's Power to Influence

George Lipsitz wrote that

The significance of popular culture extends beyond the microsocial level. For example, studies by Alexander Saxton, Nathan Irvin Higgins, and Michael Rogin have provided powerful demonstration of the connections between broad-based political coalitions in the Jacksonian and Wilsonian eras and the racist imagery circulated in minstrel shows and in the motion picture *The Birth of a Nation*.²⁵

Having defined popular culture, it should come as no surprise that popular culture has the power to influence. A variety of authors in the previous section have noted, after all, that people use popular culture to interpret their surroundings, and the foregoing survey of television news programming studies has already illustrated one aspect of popular culture's power to influence. Curran and Sparks have noted in their analysis of the British press the importance of considering entertainment along with news reports in regard to politics. They wrote

²⁵ George Lipsitz, "The Politics and Pedagogy of Popular Culture in Contemporary Textbooks," in *The Journal of American History* 78, no. 4 (March 1992): 1396.

Another reason why press entertainment has been ignored is because most researchers have been interested only in the political role of the press, and have assumed that its entertainment features are politically irrelevant. We argue that, on the contrary, press entertainment has an important ideological dimension which it makes no sense to ignore even within the conventional terms of reference of political analysis of the press.²⁶

In 1980, Volgy and Schwartz stated the following:

Most of the social-science literature on television's influence with regard to viewer's political orientation and attitudes has focused on television news and its potential impact on the viewing audience. There is virtually no empirical analysis that attempts to identify the potential impact of television entertainment programming on socio-political attitudes.²⁷

The Significance of Popular Culture

In relation to the amount of quantitative research that has been done on television news, Volgy and Schwartz's comments on the dearth of entertainment analysis are understandable. The importance of entertainment programming to political attitudes, however, has not completely escaped the eyes of communications analysts. Dorfman and Mattelart's well-known Marxist analysis of Donald Duck cartoons stands as one example of the growing body of literature that makes the connection between entertainment and political attitudes. According to Dorfman and Mattelart, Disney cartoons demonstrate and promote American imperialism in Latin America. Their analysis is based around the following hypothesis:

It is the manner in which the U.S. dreams and redeems itself, and then imposes that dream upon others for its own salvation, which poses the

²⁶ Curran and Sparks, 216.

²⁷ Thomas J. Volgy and John E. Schwartz, "TV Entertainment Programming and Sociopolitical Attitudes," in *Journalism Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (Spring 1980): 150.

danger for the dependent countries. It forces us Latin Americans to see ourselves as they see us.²⁸

It follows, for Dorfman and Mattelart, that Latin Americans are taught to see themselves in certain ways by Disney cartoons²⁹.

Chesbro and Glenn's analysis of soap operas is another example of this body of literature³⁰. In this article, Chesbro and Glenn state that soap operas help to form the symbolic reality of the American public, and the authors suspect that they are having a negative affect on the ways American housewives see their lives. Alan Clarke's article stands as another example -- he looks at the changing television police series as it relates to changing social attitudes.³¹

This observed connection between entertainment and politics is not a recent phenomenon. Herbert Blumer's substantial 1933 study of the impact of movies on high school and university students stands as an early effort to find evidence of the connection between popular culture and personal opinions. After examining almost one thousand "movie biographies" written by students about how they feel about movies and the ideas expressed in them, Blumer draws conclusions about the perceived immense power of movies. He states, for instance, that

One can see rather clearly the role of motion pictures in forming conceptions of the world in their stereotyped treatment of different

²⁸ Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart, *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic*, (New York: International General, 1971), 95.

²⁹ There are others who have used this line of Marxist communications theory to analyse Disney texts. The motion pictures *Good Morning Vietnam* and *Pretty Woman*, for instance, led to similar discussions in Henry A. Giroux, "Beyond the Politics of Innocence: Memory and Pedagogy in the Wonderful World of Disney," in *Socialist Review* 23, no. 2 (1993): 79-107.

³⁰ James W. Chesbro and John D. Glenn, "The Soap Opera as a Communication System," in *InterMedia: Interpersonal Communication in a Media World*, Gary Gumpert and Robert Cathcart, eds., (New York: Oxford University Press), 250-61.

³¹ Alan Clarke, "This is Not the Boy Scouts: Television Police Series and Definitions of Law and Order," in *Popular Culture and Social Relations*, 219-32.

people, different occupations, and different forms of life. In depicting villains, heroes, gangsters, nationalities, life of the rich, war, and other subjects, motion pictures may determine how people visualize these things.³²

Blumer's conclusions must be taken with a grain of salt -- he wrote them in the age of 'magic-bullet' hypodermic theories of astounding media influence. Nonetheless, the above comments are not without merit, and they certainly warrant further exploration.

A group of authors concerned with the political persuasions of film-makers, television producers, and actors have also acknowledged the importance of entertainment programming to political attitudes. According to these theorists, the political ideologies of those connected to the Hollywood film industry necessarily affects the films they create, and consequently can affect people's political opinions. James Donald, for example, has described what he calls the "Hollywood effect"³³. Prindle and Endersby take up his argument in a 1993 article in which they study the political views of Hollywood opinion leaders. According to these authors, viewers can be affected politically by the entertainment shows created in Hollywood, and therefore a political bias in Hollywood could have implications on people's political views. Using a Times-Mirror poll along with their own, the authors conclude that

...on a variety of measures Hollywood opinion leaders are either as economically liberal as or more liberal than the general population.

...This study demonstrated that the people who create American screen entertainment operate in an environment that is permeated by liberal social, economic, and political attitudes."³⁴

³² Herbert Blumer, *Movies and Conduct*. (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1970), 144.

³³ James Donald, "The Hollywood Effect," in *Theory, Culture and Society* 6 (1989): 691-699

³⁴ David F. Prindle and James W. Endersby, "Hollywood Liberalism," in *Social Science Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (March 1993): 143, 149.

According to Prindle and Endersby, Hollywood products could therefore be partly responsible for some increasingly liberal-minded members of the television-watching, movie-going American public

Medved's *Hollywood vs. America* stands as another example of this line of analysis³⁵, although this author certainly goes much further than Prindle and Endersby. In his condemnation of Hollywood, Medved maintains that America is fed up with the people who are responsible for creating its popular culture -- Hollywood has become more than just liberal, it has become value-less and offensive. According to Medved, America can no longer tolerate the bulk of Hollywood entertainment that attacks religion and family: "...tens of millions of Americans now see the entertainment industry as an all-powerful enemy, an alien force that assaults our most cherished values and corrupts our children."³⁶ Just like Prindle and Endersby, Medved deems entertainment programming to have an important bearing on political attitudes.

Popular Culture Research

Contrary to Volgy and Schwartz's assertion that there has been no quantitative analysis of television entertainment programming, there have in fact been a number of articles in the last twenty years that deal quantitatively with the entertainment-politics connection -- both generally and specifically. Several general studies have looked at the overall effects of various kinds of television programming, while specific studies have looked at the impact of one program in particular. One example of the former is Berman and Stookey's 1980 empirical look at how television viewing affected adolescents' support for government. The authors found varying relationships, depending on the type of program. They stated that

³⁵ Michael Medved, *Hollywood vs. America: Popular Culture and the War on Traditional Values*. (New York: HarperCollins Books, 1992).

³⁶ Ibid., 4.

Public affairs and police shows fall into the no impact group. Adult entertainment, news shows, and cartoons are negatively related to support. Juvenile entertainment programs, on the other hand, are positively related.³⁷

It is interesting to note that this analysis would suggest that cartoons make Americans dislike their government, while Dorfman and Mattelart believed the cartoons helped to perpetuate American dominance in Latin America. It is also important, however, that the authors found news and entertainment to have similar negative effects on support for government.

Other examples of this genre of quantitative research include Centrewall's comparative study of exposure to television as a cause of violence³⁸. The idea that television viewing makes children more aggressive is certainly one that is widespread³⁹, and Centrewall found some evidence for this by correlating television viewing and homicide rates in the US, Canada, and South Africa in the 50s and 60s. According to the author, as television became widespread in Canada and the US, homicide rates rose in these countries, while it remained constant in South Africa where television was not prevalent. Volgy and Schwartz's study in which they looked at American viewers of prime time television is another example. These analysts found evidence that increased viewing could lead to more affection for the medical profession, acceptance of traditional sex roles, and decreased anxiety about racial problems⁴⁰.

³⁷ David R. Berman and John Stookey, "Adolescents, Television and Support for Government," in *Public Opinion Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (Fall 1980): 327.

³⁸ Brandon S. Centrewall, "Exposure to Television as a Cause of Violence," in *Public Communication and Behavior*, vol. 2, George Comstock, ed., (New York: Academic Press, Inc., 1986), 1-58.

³⁹ For further discussions see Anne R. Somers, "Violence, Television and the Health of American Youth," in *New England Journal of Medicine* 294, no. 15 (8 April 1976): 811-17; George Comstock, "The Impact of Television on American Institutions," in *Journal of Communications* 28, no. 2 (Spring 1978): 12-28.

⁴⁰ Volgy and Schwartz, 150-155

There have been, in fact, enough American studies attempting to connect entertainment with political attitudes and behavior that there have been several summaries and syntheses of the available information. Susan Hearold, for example, has analyzed what she believes are the 1043 effects of television that have been explored since the 1950s⁴¹. Hearold does not deal specifically with entertainment programming, but rather deals with television viewing in general, with a concentration on American psychological experiments. She considers studies that deal with both prosocial (i.e.: altruism) and antisocial (i.e.: aggression) behavior as it is affected by exposure to various television programs, and finds consistent moderate evidence that viewers are affected both positively and negatively by what they see on television. In her conclusions, Hearold makes the following observation:

Antisocial treatments, except for behavioral demonstration, were not created to teach aggression but to entertain and attract large audiences; prosocial treatments, including ordinary programs as well as behavioral demonstration, have had prosocial instruction as a goal.⁴²

The implications of this finding are important -- they confirm hypotheses such as Centrewall's that state that entertainment programming (and popular culture in general) often creates aggression in its viewers.

British researchers Cumberbatch and Howitt have performed a similar review of the literature, but their conclusions and emphasis are virtually opposite to Hearold's. They state at the outset that

Despite regular interest in effects, the pattern of findings across a broad range of issues has been disappointing. Evidence for direct influence is

⁴¹ Susan Hearold. "1043 Effects of Television on Social Behavior." in *Public Communication and Behavior*, vol. 1, 66-135.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 108.

generally weak with many trivial results reported which are themselves controversial.⁴³

Cumberbatch and Howitt's research finds strong evidence that supports hypotheses about violence only -- their analysis of literature on the effects of pornography on people's values, for example, leads to no serious empirical discoveries.

Hearold and Cumberbatch and Howitt deal with a large number of experiments that deal with popular culture in general -- usually a wide variety of television programming. There have also been a variety of more specific studies, on the other hand, which select a particular presentation (popular culture phenomenon) that has the potential to change people's attitudes, and then attempt to gauge this change. These studies concentrate on the micro- rather than the macro-effects of popular culture, and therefore are perhaps better fitted to make conclusions about the short term political implications of many entertainment-oriented expressions of popular culture -- on television, in the movies, in art, etc.

There were, for example, several studies done on the television series "All in the Family" and the effects of the bigotry that the central character Archie represented. Theorists believed that the content of the show could both reinforce racist attitudes, or show people the absurdity of these beliefs. Empirical results, however, were indecisive -- there were authors that proved both hypotheses⁴⁴.

There have also been several more recent studies exploring the effects of the American television mini-series "Roots" and its sequel, "Roots: The Next Generation". Hur and Robinson's study of the first drama in 1977 noted that the eight-part series had the largest audience in television history, and that by addressing the history of

⁴³ Guy Cumberbatch and Dennis Howitt. *A Measure of Uncertainty: The Effects of the Mass Media*, Broadcasting Standards Council Research Monograph Series: 1, (London: John Libbey, 1989), 1.

⁴⁴ see John C. Brigham and Linda W. Giesbrecht, "All in the Family: Racial Attitudes," in *Journal of Communications* 26 (Autumn 1976): 69-74; Stuart H. Surlin and Eugene D. Tate, "All In the Family: Is Archie Funny?" in *Journal of Communications* 26 (Autumn 1976): 61-68.

black slaves in America, the show could have affected citizen's views about racial prejudice and about blacks specifically. The authors, however, were unsuccessful in their attempt to show some correlation between whites who viewed the show and whites whose attitudes changed about slavery. Their results for "Roots"' effects were, not surprisingly, very similar to the afore-mentioned results of Weimann and Winn in regard to the effects of news programming. Hur and Robinson wrote

Inspection of our data shows that about a third of white viewers of "Roots" remained unconvinced after the program that what blacks went through during slavery was any worse than what white immigrants to this country endured and that less than 40% of non-viewers shared this view. This suggests that the possible effects of "Roots" on the perceptions of the hardships of slavery were mainly felt by those whites already sympathetic to the program's content.⁴⁵

Unlike Hur and Robinson's post-test study, Ball-Rokeach et al. were prepared for both pre-test and post-test studies when "Roots: The Next Generation" aired two years later. One would expect, therefore, that their test would be more accurate -- and hopefully more successful -- at tracing and gauging any changes in opinion that resulted from the program. Instead, their superior experimental methods only led to results that were unequivocally negative: "...Roots II had no impact."⁴⁶ Again, the authors attributed this fact to "selectivity" -- the fact that the viewers who chose to watch the show were those that already believed in the racial egalitarianism that the show promoted.

A study by Brown and Cody of an Indian soap opera designed to promote women's status yielded only slightly better results, despite their eagerness to prove

⁴⁵ Kenneth K. Hur and John P. Robinson. "The Social Impact of Roots." in *Mass Communication Review Yearbook* 4, 514.

⁴⁶ Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach, Joel W. Grube, and Milton Rokeach. "Roots: The Next Generation -- Who Watched and With What Effect?," in *Public Opinion Quarterly* 45 (1981), 66.

otherwise⁴⁷. Brown and Cody did not find proof that the Indian program "Hum Log" affected people's beliefs about women's status. This was partly due, according to the authors, to viewer's predispositions, and partly due to the fact that the strong female characters on the show were not consistently rewarded for their behavior. The authors did find, however, that educational and entertaining programs can lead people to become more involved with television role models, and to become more dependent on television for knowledge and information. These are interesting conclusions, and they have considerable implications for studies on television dependency (see Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur's study in Chapter II). The impacts of television entertainment programs on people's political beliefs, however, remained unproven.

Sigelman and Sigelman have been slightly more successful at demonstrating the link between popular culture and politics. In their comparison of interviews before and after the motion picture *The Candidate*, they found that the Robert Redford film about a young politician's climb up the political ladder made people slightly more cynical about politics⁴⁸. They also found the film lead people to cite "image" more often as an important factor in political campaigns. While the correlations they found were only moderate, Sigelman and Sigelman's study stands as one of the few successful specific studies searching to confirm the popular culture-politics association.

In 1992, Wilson et al. performed an experiment with a television movie about date rape that lead to similarly moderate findings. Upon analyzing interviews of people who either were or were not exposed to the film, the authors conclude that there were limited effects. There were no changes, however, in the number of people

⁴⁷ William J. Brown and Michael J. Cody. "Effects of a Prosocial Television Soap Opera in Promoting Women's Status," in *Human Communication Research* 18, no. 1 (September 1991): 117.

⁴⁸ Lee Sigelman and Carol K. Sigelman. "The Politics of Popular Culture: Campaign Cynicism and 'The Candidate'," in *Sociology and Social Research* 58, no. 3 (April 1974): 272-277.

who blamed women for being raped. Furthermore, people's opinions on the matter were -- predictably -- more consistently related to their age, their sex, and whether they knew a victim of rape than they were to whether the person had viewed the show. Older men continued to endorse traditional rape myths, and women who knew someone who had been raped were more conscious of the problem and more sympathetic to the victims. Conclusions about changing opinions, therefore, were no different than the 'selectivity' conclusions in the "Roots" studies. Wilson et al. did find, however, a significant difference in the number of people who perceived date rape as a serious problem, regardless of their particular views on the matter. This finding, according to the authors, "... is analogous to a mass media agenda-setting effect"⁴⁹, as described by Lippmann and Iyengar in Chapter II. Wilson et al. conclude that, while effects of prosocial programs are mediated by peoples' preset beliefs and opinions, the potential exists for a program to raise consciousness about an issue and therefore have an effect on public opinion.

Summaries and Speculations

Once again, and not surprisingly, research on media effects is undecided. Volgy and Schwartz likely underestimated the volume and range of studies that have dealt with entertainment and political attitudes. The confirmation of a link between the two, however, has been modest at best. Despite a widespread qualitative feeling that popular culture must have an effect on people, quantitative research does not seem to agree. The wide variety of studies surveyed in the preceding section attests to this ambiguity in entertainment-political opinion empirical research. Admittedly, this does not necessarily mean that there is no impact -- authors have stated that the

⁴⁹ Barbara J. Wilson, Daniel Linz, Edward Donnerstein and Horst Stipp. "The Impact of Social Issue Television Programming on Attitudes Toward Rape." in *Human Communication Research* 19, no. 2 (December 1992): 201.

process of influence may be far more complex than was initially anticipated. The days of the magic bullet theories have long since ended. Authors are now for the most part willing to admit that there are a number of filters any message must pass through as it is received, and that during this process the message can be altered (see Figure 3:2).

*Figure 3:2***Changes in The Magic Bullet Theory**

The case of "All in the Family" is a classic example of the scenario depicted in Figure 3.2. While Carrol O'Connor believed that his character would demonstrate the ignorance and misguidedness of racist attitudes, empirical research showed that some members of the audience were merely appreciating and sympathizing with Archie Bunker⁵⁰. By the time O'Connor's message was received, it had been mutated.

At the same time, selectivity is an impediment to popular culture's power to influence. As was found in the case of "Roots", those who watched the program, and were therefore in a position to be influenced, were also the ones who already believed in the ideas that "Roots" was explaining. In order for a television show or a movie to affect public sentiment, it must first acquire access to the portion of the population that is in need of influence.

This is not such an easy task. It is also, however, not an impossible one. It has certainly been the case that several movies, television shows, and live performances have generated enough publicity that their subject matter is difficult for anyone to escape. Take, for example, the recent release of *JFK* in the U.S. *JFK* brought to the forefront the topic of Kennedy's assassination, not to mention the kind of government and business conspiracy theories that Noam Chomsky has barked about for years, and the many interviews, reviews, and spin-offs that the movie created ensured that the movie's topic permeated to some degree virtually every element of the American popular culture. The same could be said for *Jurassic Park* and the following dinosaur craze, and -- an earlier example -- *Star Wars* and the science fiction/ special effects trend. Is it possible that these films became so popular that they effected even those that did not see them?

This potential for movies to temporarily affect public thought is closely related to the findings of Wilson et al.'s "She Said No" study of rape attitudes. In it, Wilson et

⁵⁰ Surlin and Tate.

al. state that while the show did not change opinions, it did raise consciousness about the existence of date rape as a problem. This apparent agenda-setting ability should come as no surprise -- it was, after all, the only affect successfully empirically demonstrated by the television news studies surveyed in Chapter II. With this agenda-setting idea in mind, the next chapter will further examine to what extent popular culture can affect public political opinion.

Taking The Next Step: Movies and Agenda-Setting

Chapter II's look at news programming research examined how difficult it has been for academics to prove what almost everyone seems to take for granted -- that news reports and programs affect people's opinions. Despite the large numbers of empirical studies attempting to demonstrate this phenomenon, little rudimentary proof of a direct connection between news and public opinion has been offered. Since the unsubstantive magic bullet theories of the 40s and 50s, a majority of quantitative studies have led to results that show minimal correlations at best.

More successful studies in the recent past have dealt not so much with the direct connections between news and public opinion, but have rather concentrated on the effects of news on the public agenda.

Why are scholars so fascinated by agenda-setting? The main reason for interest by mass communication scholars is because agenda-setting research appeared to offer an alternative approach to the scholarly search for direct media effects, which had seldom been found in early mass communication research.¹

These studies, as Iyengar and Martin have noted, are descendants from Lippman's 1992 theory of agenda-setting². Chapter II included a survey of several articles which stand as examples of research into the agenda-setting abilities of television news.

¹ Rogers, Everett M. and James W. Dearing, "Agenda-Setting Research: Where Has it Been, Where is it Going?" in *Communication Yearbook 11*, James A. Anderson, ed., (London: Sage Publications, 1988), 560.

² Martin; Iyengar et al., "Experimental Demonstrations".

Several of those studies showed that television news programs have some control over what subjects are important to the public -- Leff et al., for instance, documented a shift in public opinion about the importance of police violence after the airing of a relevant television documentary. The conclusions in Chapter II, therefore, stated that while no solid proof has been found of a direct relationship between news and public opinion, there have been experiments that point to the ability of news to affect the public agenda.

Chapter III included a survey of articles which offered an analysis of popular culture, and -- more specifically -- entertainment programming. Just as the news analysts have done, entertainment analysts have attempted to show that entertainment programming can change people's opinions. Studies such as those by Brigham and Giesbrecht and Ball-Rocheach et al., however, were seldom more successful than were the news analysts at quantitatively proving some kind of connection. Just like the connection between news and public opinion, proof of a direct connection between entertainment and public opinion remains elusive.

Unlike news research, however, entertainment/ popular culture research has not changed its line of analysis in hopes of better results. The bulk of popular culture research, in fact, has continued to apply similar quantitative studies to different situations in the hope of proving a direct link. Not surprisingly, the results have been remarkably similar -- poor. Authors continue to find that their studies yield proof that is tenuous at best, and so connections between entertainment and public political opinion remain widely acknowledged yet virtually unproveable.

This revelation should come as no surprise. News analysts, after all, were not successful using the line of analysis that has left entertainment analysts discouraged. In order for news analysts to show some connection, they had to change their experiments to search for indirect connections through agenda-setting. Perhaps, then, entertainment analysts should do the same.

This is what the upcoming study will attempt to do. This study attempts to approach entertainment in the same way that theorists have successfully shown the powers of news as an agenda-setter. The purpose of this study is not to find any direct link between entertainment and popular opinion at all -- it is rather to empirically demonstrate what Wilson et al. observed in their study of *Roots*: "a mass media agenda-setting effect"³. This chapter will provide the theoretical analysis required to prepare for the quantitative analysis that follows. It will further develop upon the two fundamental ingredients in Chapter V's experiment: 1) the agenda-setting phenomenon, and 2) movies as agenda-setting elements of popular culture.

Defining Agenda-Setting

For the real environment is altogether too big, too complex, and too fleeting for direct acquaintance. We are not equipped to deal with so much subtlety, so much variety, so many permutations and combinations. And although we have to act in that environment, we have to reconstruct it on a simpler model before we can manage with it.⁴

The idea of 'agenda-setting' as a phenomenon began with the above quotation and others in Lippmann's *Public Opinion* in 1922. According to Lippmann, the media -- acting as our connection to the world around us -- is given the power to affect what we think about. Years later, the Chapel Hill study in 1972 by McCombs and Shaw marked the beginning of a steady flow of studies -- both theoretical and quantitative -- on the ideas surrounding agenda-setting⁵. According to McCombs,

³ Wilson et al., 201.

⁴ Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 16.

⁵ McCombs, Maxwell and Donald Shaw. "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media," in *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36 (1972): 176-185.

The original Chapel Hill study tested the basic agenda-setting hypothesis that the pattern of news coverage influences public perception of what are the important issues of the day ⁶

Shaw and Martin have summed up agenda-setting as follows: "The press does not tell us what to believe, but does suggest what we collectively may agree to discuss and perhaps act on."⁷ This concept has already been touched on in Chapter II, and it stands as the fundamental idea behind agenda-setting. The following section -- building upon the review of literature in Chapter II -- contains further proof of agenda-setting, as well as analysis of the agenda-setting process.

Quantitative Proof

Unlike studies searching for direct relationships between news and public opinion, quantitative studies attempting to prove some kind of indirect effect through agenda-setting have been relatively successful. The studies surveyed in Chapter II are just a few examples of this body literature. This is not say that agenda-setting studies are decisive -- Protess et al.'s study of rape articles and public opinion in the Chicago area showed that the reports "had little impact, as measured, on attitudes of the public or policy makers."⁸ Protess et al., however, based their assessment of public opinion on pre- and post-test interviews with 187 randomly-selected Chicago residents. While there have been studies using personal interviews that have demonstrated moderate agenda-setting abilities of the press⁹, studies that have used opinion polls to gauge public opinion have more consistently been successful.

⁶ McCombs, Maxwell E., "Explorers and Surveyors: Expanding Strategies for Agenda-Setting Research," in *Journalism Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (Winter 1992): 815.

⁷ Shaw, Donald L. and Shannon E. Martin, "The Function of Mass Media Agenda Setting," in *Journalism Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (Winter 1992): 903.

⁸ David L. Protess, Donna R. Leff, Stephen C. Brooks and Margaret T. Gordon, "Uncovering Rape: The Watchdog Press and the Limits of Agenda-Setting," in *Public Opinion Quarterly* 49: 35.

⁹ Some examples are: Wenmouth Williams, Jr. and David C. Larsen, "Agenda-Setting in an Off-Election Year," in *Journalism Quarterly* 54 (Winter 1977): 744-749; Philip Palmgreen and Peter

Funkhouser's 1973 study stands as an early example of this line of research -- he compared Gallop poll results to the contents of American news magazines in the 1960s in search of information on the media-public opinion relationship, and found that peaks in media coverage often preceded peaks in the public salience of an issue¹⁰. More recently, Shaw and Martin's 1993 experiment comparing answers on a media studies poll conducted in North Carolina and content analysis of the *Charlotte Observer* found sufficient evidence to conclude that increased readership led to increasing agreement with the media agenda¹¹. Wanta and Hu's analysis of fifteen years of Gallop polls and mass media coverage of international news demonstrated the agenda-setting abilities of the press and television, and Pritchard found evidence of agenda-setting through correlations between press coverage of Wisconsin criminal trials and prosecutors' decisions to plea-bargain¹².

Brosius and Kepplinger also found quantitative proof of agenda-setting in a similarly-structured study of German partisanship in 1986.¹³ According to their results, "The reporting in the TV newscasts thus not only caused changes in awareness

Clarke. "Agenda-Setting with Local and National Issues." in *Communication Research* 4, no. 4 (October 1977): 435-452.

¹⁰ Funkhouser, G. Ray. "The Issues of the Sixties: An Exploratory Study in the Dynamics of Public Opinion." In *Public Opinion Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (Spring 1973): 62-75.

¹¹ Shaw and Martin. 902-920.

¹² Wayne Wanta and Yo Wei Hu. "The Agenda-Setting Effects of International News Coverage." in *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 5, no. 3 (Fall 1993): 250-64; David Pritchard. "Homicide and Bargained Justice: The Agenda-Setting Effect of Crime News on Prosecutors." in *Public Opinion Quarterly* 50, no. 2 (Summer 1986): 143-59.

Further experiments demonstrating agenda-setting aspects of news include: David B. Hill. "Viewer Characteristics and Agenda-Setting by Television News." in *Public Opinion Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (Fall 1985): 340-50; James Winter and Chaim H. Eyal. "Agenda-Setting for the Civil Rights Issue." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (Fall 1981): 376-83; Ardyth Broadrick Sohn. "A Longitudinal Analysis of Local Non-Political Agenda-Setting Effects." in *Journalism Quarterly* 55, no. 2 (Summer 1978): 325-333.

¹³ Hans-Bernd Brosius and Hans Mathias Kepplinger. "Beyond Agenda-Setting: The Influence of Partisanship and Television Reporting on the Electorate's Voting Intentions." in *Journalism Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (Winter 1992): 893-901.

for problems, but also had consequences for the voting intentions."¹⁴ Brosius and Kepplinger stated that, because the media affected the public agenda, they could also affect the outcome of an elections by concentrating on issues that one candidate was better equipped to handle.

Iyengar, perhaps the greatest advocate of agenda-setting in recent years, has also found quantitative evidence to support Lippmann's suppositions. In 1973, Behr and Iyengar found evidence of public agenda-setting by the media in their survey of several public opinion polls along with CBS news stories on unemployment, energy, and inflation¹⁵. Results of Iyengar and Simon's 1993 experiment on Gulf Crisis reports and public opinion were similar. Their conclusions were as follows:

The evidence presented here indicates that television news coverage of the conflict in the Persian Gulf significantly affected Americans' political concerns and the criteria with which they evaluated George Bush...

It is now well established that television news has a significant impact on public opinion. The Gulf War was a mediated issue par excellence, and the results shown here, that American public opinion would follow the course of television news coverage, was predictable."¹⁶

This study, as well as the preceding ones, stands as an example of recent quantitative research that has demonstrated the agenda-setting effects of the media on public opinion.

Multidirectional Agenda-Setting

While there have been a wide variety of empirical studies showing agenda-setting effects, however, there is one difference between the above studies and the

¹⁴ Ibid., 900.

¹⁵ Behr, Roy L. and Shanto Iyengar. "Television News, Real-World Cues, and Changes in the Public Agenda." In *Public Opinion Quarterly* 49: 38-57.

¹⁶ Shanto Iyengar and Adam Simon. "News Coverage of the Gulf Crisis and Public Opinion," in *Communication Research* 20, no. 3 (June 1993): 381.

present one. This difference is linked not so much to the agenda-setting effects, but to the agenda-setting process. There are primarily two views of agenda-setting process - unidirectional and multidirectional. While many of the preceding studies look at the former of these views, the present study is concerned with the latter.

In his discussion of consumer issues, Mayer has analyzed the process of agenda-setting¹⁷. He distinguishes between the media, public, and policy agendas in his look at unidirectional and multidirectional views of agenda-setting. According to the unidirectional view, an issue is first raised on the media agenda, and then follows to the public agenda and finally the policy agenda. This is the view that was supported many of the preceding studies by Funkhouser, Brosius and Kepplinger, and Iyengar and Simon, among others.

Conversely, the multidirectional view of agenda-setting suggests that an issue is first raised on the public or policy agendas before it appears on the media agenda. Mayer concludes, based on his observations of media indexes, public opinion polls, and American government legislation from 1960 to 1987, that the case of consumer issues supports a multidirectional view -- consumer issues were most often first raised on the policy agenda. He states that,

Taken together, the available evidence from the 1960-1987 period suggests that consumer issues were first raised on the policy agenda, probably because of the personal concerns of presidents and congressmen. Later, after federal attention to consumer problems had become legitimized by early executive and legislative action, the unidirectional pattern took over.¹⁸

According to Mayer, therefore, there is agenda-setting by the media, but only after the media picks up on an issue from elsewhere. He suggests that consumer

¹⁷ Robert N. Mayer, "Gone Yesterday, Here Today: Consumer Issues in the Agenda-Setting Process," in *Journal of Social Issues* 47, no. 1 (1991): 21-39.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

issues were often raised first by policymakers, but he also gives note to "political entrepreneurs" -- as do Harrison and Hoberg in their analysis of toxic substance regulation in the US and Canada¹⁹. According to these authors, political entrepreneurs (pressure groups such as Greenpeace) play a fundamental role in forcing an issue onto the policy agenda. The authors' study of the cases of dioxin and radon, in fact, lead them to state that, "... the media may be more important as channels for entrepreneurs than as an independent force."²⁰ Harrison and Hoberg's analysis, therefore, supports Mayer's multidirectional view of agenda-setting.

Rogers and Dearing have traced the evolution of agenda-setting studies, and note that "... there is undoubtedly a two-way, mutually dependent relationship between the public agenda and the media agenda in the agenda-setting process,"²¹ suggesting that Harrison and Hoberg's multidirectional findings are not unusual. Smith's study of an American community's concern over public issues and newspaper coverage yielded further proof of multidirectional agenda-setting. She stated that

... the evidence suggests that media coverage of an issue causes an increase in the number of people concerned about an issue. At the same time, the amount of coverage media devote to an issue is influenced by the public. Translated into general systems terms, feedback loops should exist between media coverage and public concern about issues over time.²²

¹⁹ Kathryn Harrison and George Harrison. "Setting the Environmental Agenda in Canada and the United States: The Cases of Dioxin and Radon," in *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 1 (March 1991): 3-27.

²⁰ Ibid., 25.

²¹ Rogers and Dearing, 571.

²² Kim A. Smith, "Newspaper Coverage and Public Concern About Community Issues," in *Agenda Setting: Readings on Media, Public Opinion, and Policymaking*. David L. Protess and Maxwell McCombs, eds., (Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1991), 75.

According to Smith, some issues appear first on the public agenda before they appear on the media agenda.

This multidirectional view as proposed by theorists such as Smith and Harrison and Hoberg is integral to the present study, which is also based on the notion that the media agenda is affected by outside influences -- namely, motion pictures.

Models of the Agenda-Setting Process

In their survey of agenda-setting research, Rogers and Dearing suggest a diagram for agenda-setting. A similar version of this model is as follows:

Figure 4:²³

The Agenda-Setting Process (A)

²³ Diagram adapted from Rogers and Dearing.

Rogers and Dearing's model allows for a multidirectional view of agenda-setting -- it shows arrows returning from the public and policy agendas to the media agenda. It also accounts for the possibility that other influences -- including interest groups and "influential media" -- can affect the process. It is interesting to note that, according to this diagram, movies lie outside the "media agenda". This is important for two reasons. Firstly, it points to the fact that the media agenda, in most agenda-setting studies, refers to the news media agenda -- not the agenda of the mass media as a whole. Secondly, it illustrates the importance of the multidirectional view in the present agenda-setting study.

Several authors have gone beyond theoretical drawings in their study of the agenda-setting process. Zhu et al., for instance, developed "... a mathematical model that describes the dynamic process underlying the formation of, and the change in, the public's issue priority."²⁴ The traditional linear model of agenda-setting, Zhu et al. state, is not satisfactory -- issue salience does not rise evenly as media coverage increases. Instead, the analysts support the use of a non-linear model -- such as that espoused by Neuman²⁵. Neuman's analysis of data on 10 major issues from 1945 to 1980 led him to propose a logistic model of agenda-setting -- one which used an S-shaped line rather than the conventional linear model. He based this proposal on his analysis of various media indexes, Gallop Poll results, and a review of Downs' 1972 work on the dynamics of issue salience in America.

In this work, Downs discussed models of agenda-setting and, more specifically, what he terms the "issue-attention cycle"²⁶. According to Downs, typical issues follow

²⁴ Jina-Hua Zhu, James W. Watt, Leslie B Snyder, Jingtoan Yan, and Yansong Jiang, "Public Issue Priority Formation: Media Agenda-Setting and Social Interaction," in *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 1 (Winter 1993): 8.

²⁵ W.R. Neuman, "The Threshold of Public Attention," in *Public Opinion Quarterly* 54 (1990): 159-176.

²⁶ Anthony Downs, "Up and Down with Ecology: The Issue-Attention Cycle," reprinted in *Process and McCombs*, 27-33.

this cycle, which describes the dynamics around the rise and fall of public interest in a given problem.. Figure 4:2 depicts the kind of nonlinear model of agenda-setting that Neuman suggests, along with short descriptions of what Downs believes are the five stages of the "issue attention cycle".

Figure 4:227

²⁷ Diagram adapted from Zhu et al., 10-12; Downs, 28-29.

Note that how steep the curves are, Neuman states, depends on how much the issue at hand is perceived as a crisis issue. A disastrous plane crash, for instance, would lead to a sudden rise in salience for an issue such as air safety. The gradual recognition by scientists of trouble with the ozone layer, however, would not create the same kind of jump in issue salience. Neuman's model of agenda setting and Zhu et al.'s analysis are discussed further in Appendix B -- an exploration of possibilities for further quantitative agenda-setting research.

It is important to note that Figure 4:2 is based on theories dealing with issue salience for the public -- it is an analysis of the public agenda, while the present study will deal with the media agenda. Issue salience for the media, however, would likely follow a similar pattern. Whether the rise and fall in media interest would be sharper than for public interest is a valid question. So too is whether the rise in media interest would precede or follow the rise in public interest. This would probably depend on the issue -- as the preceding descriptions of multidirectional agenda-setting suggest. These questions notwithstanding, however, the importance of Figure 4:2 lies in its illustration of the general trend in agenda-setting effects.

Agenda-Setting Research

Rogers and Dearing's preceding diagram (Figure 4:1) is useful in illustrating the communications which take place in the agenda-setting process. These authors also suggest a three-by-three matrix to describe the different lines of agenda-setting analysis. The following Figure 4:3 is based on this suggestion:

Figure 4:3²⁸

Categories of Agenda-Setting Research

		Dependant variables		
		Media	Public	Policy
Independent variables	Media			
	Public			
	Policy			

²⁸ Diagram adapted from Rogers and Dearing. 582.

The three light gray boxes symbolize the areas which Rogers and Dearing state have been extensively researched. The media agenda to public agenda relationship, for example, is examined in several of the preceding articles including Iyengar and Simon's. The ways in which the policy agenda is affected by the media and public agendas is also well-analyzed -- Mayer's afore-mentioned study stands as one example.

The dark gray box in the agenda-setting research diagram represents the area of study that the upcoming study is primarily concerned with. Rogers and Dearing wrote that

An understanding of media agenda-setting is a necessary prerequisite to comprehending how the mass media agenda influences the public agenda.²⁹

The remainder of this chapter, therefore, is an attempt to understand several aspects of media agenda-setting -- more specifically, the potential capability of motion pictures (as elements of popular culture) to affect news and entertainment, and therefore affect the media agenda.

Setting the Media Agenda: Movies as Agenda-Setters

Setting the Agenda

The process of setting the media agenda as it applies to news has been documented. Reese and Danielian, for instance, have traced what they call "... this handwagon tendency among the media"³⁰. By following the issues and scandals surrounding cocaine use in 1985 and 1986, Reese and Danielian were able to demonstrate the process of media agenda-setting -- their conclusions were that print media first caught on to the cocaine stories, and that television then joined in. The end

²⁹ Ibid., 579.

³⁰ Stephen D. Reese and Lucig H. Danielian, "Intermedia Influence and the Drug Issue: Converging on Cocaine," reprinted in Prosser and McCombs, 238.

result, these authors contend, was that the entire mass media was giving priority to the same stories dealing with cocaine addiction.

Based on the preceding descriptions of popular culture in Chapter III, it follows that the media agenda could perhaps also be determined in a similar manner, but with an entertainment-based source leading the way instead of a news-based one. Just as major newspapers and network television news programs are most capable of setting the media agenda in the case of news, popular entertainment presentations are probably most capable of setting the media agenda. Television is certainly the most popular mass medium in North America, and there have accordingly been instances in which television programs may have affected the media agenda. Some of the shows studied in the preceding review of literature are possible examples, and the prime time show *Murphy Brown* stands as another. It caught headlines in 1993 with an episode attacking on the Vice President, who had previously condemned the show's lead character for wanting to become a single mother.

Popularity is certainly a prerequisite for media agenda-setting abilities -- there must be substantial interest in a presentation in order for the mass media to be interested in it. Major television mini-series (such as *Roots*), therefore, may be well-suited for media agenda-setting, as may movies. Major motion pictures are often seen by large audiences, and they often address political issues.

Movies' Agenda-Setting Potential

Statistically speaking, just as with television, movies receive a large enough audience to suggest that they may have media agenda-setting capabilities. While television and VCRs have certainly put a dent in movie attendance over the past 20 years, there were just over 71 million tickets purchased in Canadian movie theaters in 1991-92³¹. This reflects a substantial drop from almost 100 million in 1980³², but it is

³¹ Canada, Statistics Canada, Education, Culture and Tourism Division, *Film and Video: Culture Statistics*, (Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada), 36..

a substantial number of admissions nonetheless. A portion of this drop in sales can also be attributed to movie rentals, which, although they affect theater attendance, do not necessarily mean that fewer people are seeing the films.

Christensen has stated that there are several reasons why movies may be an especially powerful mass medium. She wrote that

Movies may be a particularly powerful medium of political socialization because of the way we see them. We go voluntarily, often for social reasons, with a positive, receptive attitude. We expect to be entertained, so our guard is down.³³

Christensen goes on to add that movies are unlike other mass media because we give them our complete, undivided attention. This kind of direct persuasive power is important, however it is not the issue here. We have already seen in the case of *Roots* that selectivity can severely hamper a film's ability to change people's attitudes -- even if a film is persuasive, it is often rarely seen by those who do not already agree with its premise. What we are presently concerned with, therefore, is not the power for movies to persuade viewers, but merely their ability to control the media agenda

Jowett and Linton's study of the ways in which movies can affect the public's values and beliefs is useful in this regard. According to these authors, movies occupy a central place in modern popular culture³⁴. The authors' description of movies and their role in the entertainment industry offers some good explanations for why movies may be successful media agenda-setters. Jowett and Linton state, for instance, that

³² Canada. Statistics Canada. *Canada Yearbook 1994*. (Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, 1994). 654

³³ Terry Christensen. *Reel Politics*. (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987). 5.

³⁴ Garth Jowett and James M. Linton. *Movies as Mass Communication*. 2d ed.. (London: Sage Publishers, 1989).

This central position of the movies in mass-mediated cultural life means that they are both the source for and the anticipated destination of many other forms of mass culture.³⁵

Jowett and Linton go on to describe the strong links -- both economic and artistic -- that movies have with books, radio, television, video games, and merchandisers. These links are part of the reason that movies have an incredible potential to influence in modern society, and they certainly are testament to the media agenda-setting potential of major feature films. Christensen has echoed similar beliefs:

"Other media, especially television, may be more pervasive -- and invasive -- but movies are a formidable force for the gentle inculcation of ideas and for persuasion. They remain the most talked about and reviewed medium.³⁶

Combs has also been a proponent for the power and centrality of movies in modern society, and the connection between movies and politics. He has written, for instance, on the close connections between politics and the movies since their creation, and given heed to the belief that movies have " .. become a contributing source in the ongoing conduct of national social and political discourse "³⁷ In *American Political Movies*, Combs describes movies as though they are representations of the way a culture was at a given time. He asks

...can we infer anything from the movie about the climate of opinion at a particular time, the ethos of an historical period, and more directly here, the political temper of an age and place?³⁸

³⁵ Ibid., 19.

³⁶ Christensen, 5.

³⁷ James Combs, "Introduction," in *Movies and Politics: The Dynamic Relationship*, James Combs, ed., (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), 4.

³⁸ James Combs, *American Political Movies: An Annotated Filmography of Feature Films*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), v.

Combs' answer is as follows:

In the twentieth century, the movies have been a central aspect of the American popular experience. They have expanded and enriched the popular imagination while deriving much of what they depicted from that imagination. The relationship between us and the movies is truly transactional, an interplay of influence between movie makers and movie audiences... that takes subtle twists and turns in the relationship as time goes by.³⁹

In this answer, Combs goes further in his interpretation of the power of movies than Palmer, who believes that film, "...like any valid art form, mirrors the life of the society which creates it."⁴⁰ Jowett and Linton state that Palmer's is the most common line of analysis. They write that the

... mass media are capable of 'reflecting' society because they are forced by their commercial nature to provide a level of content which will guarantee the widest possible acceptance by the largest possible audience.⁴¹

The way in which Christensen and Combs address movies, however, is remarkably different. In her look at political movies, Christensen looks at movies in the political socialization process -- she dwells on movies' abilities to persuade and influence, to "...help shape the way we think and feel about politics and political participation."⁴² Combs also concentrates on motion pictures as forms of political communication -- he sees a two-way communication process, rather than the one-way reflecting process that Palmer suggests. Both Combs and Christensen would certainly agree with Ryan and Kellner, who state in *Camera Politica* that

³⁹ Ibid., vi.

⁴⁰ William J. Palmer, *The Films of the Seventies: A Social History*, (Metuchen, N.J. and London: The Scarecrow Press, 1987), 17.

⁴¹ Jowett and Linton, 83.

⁴² Christensen, 4.

Films transcode the discourses (the forms, figures, and representations) of social life into cinemative narratives. Rather than reflect a reality external to the film medium, films execute a transfer from one discursive field to another. As a result, films themselves become part of that broader cultural system of representations that construct social reality. That construction occurs in part through the internalization of representations.⁴³

This notion of films is one that is fundamental to the present task -- the following study is based on a notion that movies, as a part of popular culture, can affect the way people interpret the world around them. For Combs, Christensen, and Ryan and Kellner, movies are not merely reflectors, they can also affect and form public opinion. This potential is what the present study attempts to prove -- it is searching for a movie-politics relationship not unlike that which Sigelman and Sigelman explored in their study of *The Candidate* (as described in Chapter III)⁴⁴. The fundamental difference between these investigations, however, is that Sigelman and Sigelman searched for a direct impact on people's attitudes, while the following study will look at an indirect movie-politics relationship through examining agenda-setting.

The Next Step...

This chapter has provided the background required to make the next step towards demonstrating the political power of popular culture. The first section dealt with agenda-setting. This inquiry covered more valuable information on a topic which had previously only been mentioned in passing in Chapter II, and it lead to an exploration of the agenda-setting process and a description of multidirectional agenda-setting. This theory is central in the upcoming experiment -- a study into the effects of

⁴³ Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner, *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), 13.

⁴⁴ Sigelman and Sigelman. (as described in Chapter III, "Popular Culture Research")

an outside source ("influential media", according to the Rogers and Dearing diagram in Figure 4:1) on the media agenda..

Having explored agenda-setting, the second section of this chapter explained how and why motion pictures could become "influential media" and therefore set the media agenda. Their central place in popular culture gives them strong agenda-setting potential. Chapter V will present an experiment based on the theory presented in this chapter -- it will explore agenda-setting by motion pictures. It will, in effect, attempt to find quantitative proof of what Combs, Christensen, and Ryan and Kellner believe to be true: that motion pictures can affect the political attitudes of a society.

V Finding Proof of the Unproveable

In his study of American film in the 1980s, Palmer asks, "How do films function in their relationship to society?"¹ His first response is the following:

They expose. They place either past or ongoing issues, events or information into a national or worldwide spotlight. More importantly, films often bring events or issues which have lain dormant, been ignored or have been systematically suppressed, back into the spotlight of national or world consciousness.²

The following experiment is concerned with exactly the kind of motion picture that Palmer describes -- one which successfully brings an issue to the attention of the public at large, one which is responsible in part for the increased salience of an issue. The difficulties with demonstrating a direct link between popular culture phenomena and public opinion have already been explained, as has the potential for agenda-setting research to find some indirect proof of this link. This chapter, therefore, follows the advice of chapters past -- following is an experiment created with the purpose of demonstrating the media agenda-setting abilities of motion pictures.

This experiment was based on several agenda-setting experiments that dealt with citation indexes for media content analysis. Neuman's proposal for a logistic model of agenda-setting was, for example, partially based on the analysis of media citation indexes³, as was Funkhouser's agenda-setting research (both these papers are

¹ Palmer, *The Films of the Seventies*, 8.

² Ibid., 8.

³ Neuman, 159-176.

described in Chapter IV)⁴. Iyengar and Simon's study of agenda-setting and the Gulf Crisis also used citation indexes⁵. In their search for proof of public agenda-setting by television news programs, Iyengar and Simon used the Vanderbilt *Television News Index and Abstracts* to determine the media agenda⁶.

The use of citation indexes allows for a relatively simple and productive analysis of what the mass media were reporting on during a given time. Several of the studies surveyed in Chapter IV used these indexes, and compared them to public opinion at the time (through Gallop polls) in an effort to show the relationship between television news and public opinion. The present experiment, however, seeks to prove the power of motion pictures in setting the media, not the public agenda. The analysis, therefore, needs to go no further than these citation indexes. If the citation indexes consistently show increases in issue salience surrounding the release of a major motion picture dealing with that issue, then we have found some proof of media agenda-setting.

Accordingly, the following experiment is based on a variety of indexes of Canadian print media. The print media was chosen over television for practical rather than theoretical reasons -- there is no adequately thorough index of Canadian television news programs. In fact, CBC has no readily available index of what appears on their news programs. In an effort to study agenda-setting in Canada, therefore, the print media was chosen for analysis, with the hope that the contents of this media's reports are not completely different than the contents of television news programs.

⁴ Funkhouser. 62-75.

⁵ Iyengar and Simon. 365-383.

⁶ Several other studies that use citation indexes have been reviewed thus far, including those by the following: Mayer, Behr and Iyengar, Shaw and Martin, Palmgreen and Clarke, Wanta and Hu, Winter and Eyal.

This experiment's results, therefore, are assumed to apply not just to the print media, but to the Canadian mass media in general.

In 1990, Combs stated that

It may be ultimately impossible to conclusively demonstrate how the movies have affected thought and action, since any such impact might well have been long-term, diffuse, and even unconscious. Making inference from the movies to society, and from society to the movies, involves intellectual leaps of faith that only the most daring have attempted to jump.⁷

The following experiment is an attempt to avoid any leaps of faith, by (as Rogers and Dearing recommended) studying the movies-media relationship as a prerequisite to making assumptions about any movies-society connections. It is an attempt to demonstrate that major motion pictures have affected the Canadian print media agenda.

Finding Proof

Method

Following the structure of several previous studies into media agenda-setting, this study was conducted using data generated from citation indexes. The one study of films released previous to 1981 (Vietnam films) used two indexes: the *Canadian News Index*⁸ and the *Canadian Periodical Index*⁹. The combination of these two indexes provided a good survey of Canadian print media; the analysis includes all major Canadian periodicals, as well as seven major Canadian newspapers¹⁰. Any

⁷ Combs, *American Political Movies*, v.

⁸ *Canadian News Index*, (Toronto: Micromedia Ltd., monthly with annual culminations).

⁹ *Canadian Periodical Index*, (Ottawa: Canadian Library Association, monthly with annual culminations).

¹⁰ The seven newspapers covered in the CNI are as follows: *Globe and Mail*, *Toronto Star*, *Halifax Chronicle Herald*, *Winnipeg Free Press*, *Calgary Herald*, *Vancouver Sun*, *Montreal Gazette*.

information after 1981 is taken from C'BC'A -- a citation index on CD Rom¹¹. The use of this index was both more efficient (allowing for a greater number of studies to be done), and probably more reliable than the older printed indexes, as the number of articles was surveyed and counted by the computer, instead of painstakingly counted by hand. The C'BC'A covers a similar number of periodicals as the *Canadian Periodical Index*, and the same newspapers as the *Canadian News Index*, along with three more business-oriented newspapers¹². The data in different studies is not necessarily comparable, as the indexes used varied slightly.

Depending on the motion picture being studied, a suitable topic was chosen in the indexes, and the citations were counted. In the case of the computer-assisted studies, a variable or 'catchword' was entered into the computer, along with several limitations (such as no "Book Reviews", and the dates being studied). There were several cases in which more limitations had to be used due to the topic's ambiguity. All of the catchwords, limitations, and printed index headings used are listed in Appendix A. Approximately ten of the citations in each case were consulted directly following the printed index or CD Rom searches to ensure that my interpretations of the index contents was appropriate, and the C'NI or the *Canadian Index*¹³ (a recent printed index) were also consulted to verify that the trends identified on the C'BC'A were correct. The data that was generated for each study, therefore, is an accurate reflection of the trends in contents of major Canadian periodicals and newspapers.

In every case, there were several external factors that could affect the results, and steps were taken to minimize -- or at least identify -- these factors. Firstly, in the

¹¹ *Canadian Business and Current Affairs*. Toronto: Micromedia Ltd., 1994.

¹² These three business newspapers are as follows: *Financial Daily Post*, *Northern Miner*, *Financial Times*.

¹³ *Canadian Index*. (Toronto: Micromedia Limited. 1993).

searches, book reviews were not included in the analysis, in the hope that any book's release would not severely affect the results. Relevant book releases were noted, however, in case the number of relevant articles was affected by a book instead of by the film being observed. Movie reviews were not included either, as the *BCA* and the *Canadian News Index* only cite approximately four or five reviews for each film. Furthermore, there is no thorough index for movie reviews in Canada, and the number of reviews would therefore not be accurate. As a result, the number of citations listed as film-related articles in each case are articles that discuss the making of the film, an interview with the director, etc. -- something beyond a simple review in the film section of a newspaper or magazine. These articles were included separately in each case to help mark the release of the motion picture, and to demonstrate the importance of the film itself to the print media.

Following the collection of data, computer-generated graphs of each study were created to help with data analysis. These graphs (displayed in the upcoming explanations) help identify trends in the data, and were used when re-consulting the indexes and newspaper articles in order to identify any real-life occurrences that may have affected the experiment. In order to attribute media agenda-setting to the motion picture, after all, any real-life occurrences had to first be ruled out.

The importance and popularity of a motion picture could also have an affect on its agenda-setting abilities. Motion picture annuals and *Variety* -- the major American magazine aimed at the entertainment industry -- were used to ascertain the importance of various films, both in terms of attendance and critical acclaim.

In an attempt to empirically demonstrate movies' media agenda-setting abilities, a variety of feature films was selected for analysis. This selection was based partially on a survey of film analysis and history texts, although the emphasis was on a survey of movie magazines and annuals, specifically *Variety* and the *Motion Picture*

*Almanac*¹⁴. The resulting list of fifteen motion pictures is composed of a variety of the most popular films in the last fifteen years. If possible, an analysis of the top twenty films from each of the past fifteen years would be preferable, but due to the lengthy procedures involved both in retrieving and analyzing the data some choices had to be made. From the almost 300 top films available, therefore, fourteen were chosen that seemed to have the best media agenda-setting potential. The assessment of their potential was based on their apparent popularity, and on their subject. The films studied here do by no means represent a random sample -- they were carefully chosen in the hope that they would produce positive results in a search for media agenda-setting. There is one film included here which is an exception to these rules: *The Terry Fox Story*. This small budget Canadian film was selected in order to compare and contrast with the larger budget, American films.

More detailed reasons for studying each of the following motion pictures will be dealt with in the upcoming analyses. In the meantime, the movies surveyed and the subject they addressed, in the order they will appear, is as follows:

1. *The Accused* -- rape
2. *Out of Africa* -- feminism
3. *Platoon, Rambo, Apocalypse Now, Coming Home, The Deer Hunter* -- Vietnam
4. *Half Moon Street, Iron Eagle, Delta Force* -- terrorism
5. *The Terry Fox Story* -- cancer
6. *The Godfather III, Goodfellas* -- the Mafia
7. *Philadelphia* -- AIDS
8. *Jurassic Park* -- dinosaurs
9. *Schindler's List* -- the Holocaust

¹⁴ *Motion Picture Almanac 1994*, 65th ed., Barry Monush, ed.. (New York: Quigley Publications, 1994).

Some of the studies were more successful than others at demonstrating media agenda-setting. In fact, some analyses proved very little at all. Nonetheless, all the studies that were performed are included here both to properly reflect this experiment's level of success, and to allow for comparison and analysis.

Results, Analysis and Further Investigations

The Accused and Rape

The Accused is a film which certainly appeared to have some agenda-setting potential. Released in September 1988, Jodie Foster starred in the film and earned an Academy Award for her performance. Six weeks after its release, *The Accused* ranked sixth on the U.S.-Canada chart in *Variety*¹⁵. In his reviews of motion pictures in the 1980s, Palmer stated that *The Accused* was

One of the most controversial films of the decade, *The Accused* (1988), dissects one single feminist issue, rape, by examining its social acceptance and its effects upon the victims.¹⁶

The Accused is about a woman who gets raped, and the trial that results. It dealt directly both with the violent gang rape, and the pain and suffering Foster's character was forced to go through when she took the case to court. It would appear, therefore, that this film's popularity and its unambiguous political subject would allow for some media agenda-setting potential.

This, however, turned out to be very difficult to identify. The data collected is illustrated in Graph 5A -- the graph includes rape-related articles only, because *The Accused* did not generate any articles in Canadian periodicals that were listed as anything other than movie reviews in *BCA*. From February onward, the number of articles hovers between twenty-four and thirty-six -- the exception being the jump in

¹⁵ *Variety*, Nov. 30 1988, 9.

¹⁶ William J. Palmer, *The Films of the Eighties: A Social History*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993), 259.

September, the month in which *The Accused* was released. This would seem to demonstrate some kind of agenda-setting, but *The Accused* was, unfortunately, released during the same month in which there was a rape-related scandal about a Quebec evangelist. Whether the agenda was set by *The Accused* or the arrest of a Quebec rapist was impossible to ascertain, and *The Accused* -- despite its potential -- turned out to be an ill-fated example of agenda-setting.

Graph 5A¹⁷**Rape Articles in Canadian Periodicals**

Number of Articles

Rape Articles

¹⁷ Information from *CBCA*, 1988-1994.

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Out of Africa and Feminism

Out of Africa demonstrated the same kind of popularity that *The Accused* did - if not more so. Released in January 1986, *Out of Africa* became a top-grossing film in 1986¹⁸, included several major stars, and won seven Academy Awards. *Out of Africa*, however, is not as explicit about its subject matter as is *The Accused* -- it tells the story of a woman in South Africa, and traces her hard-earned acceptance in the male dominated society she finds there. It does not, however, deal outwardly with feminist ideologies or feminist groups, as *The Accused* did with the subject of rape.

Analysis on *Out of Africa*, however, is plagued with problems similar to those involved with *The Accused* -- it is difficult to distinguish the film's effects from other effects. In the case of feminism-related articles, the data was severely affected by the varying releases of a variety of feminist publications. On the month of their release, periodicals such as *Broadside* and *Canadian Women's Studies* created jumps in the data collected from citation indexes. Eight of the articles recorded in November, for instance, were in *Resources for Feminist Research*. Graph 5B, therefore, does not allow for any kind of agenda-setting analysis -- *Out of Africa* articles are less related to high points than are journal release dates.

Unlike the problems with *The Accused*, the variations in the data created by feminist journals in this case can be eliminated. This need not negate any agenda-setting conclusions -- it is plausible to suggest that these journals are written and read by a small elite group and therefore do not properly reflect the media agenda. Graph 5C is an illustration of the data, excluding any articles in feminist periodicals.

This graph shows that *Out of Africa* may have had a slight effect on the number of feminism-related articles in Canadian articles. There does seem to be a rise in the number of feminism articles in early 1986 -- the time when *Out of Africa* was

¹⁸ *Motion Picture Almanac 1994*, 44A-45A.

playing in theaters. At the same time, there is certainly no miraculous increase in feminism articles when the film is released, and the peak in articles does not occur until the late spring. There was no real-life event in May that may have precipitated the increase in articles, however, and so the suggestion that *Out of Africa* may have had some delayed effect is plausible -- although not probable. If a movie is to have an effect, it is more likely that the effect would be closer to the film's release -- when it was getting more publicity and larger audiences. Agenda-setting, therefore, is not apparent in the case of *Out of Africa*.

Graph 5B¹⁹

Out of Africa and Feminism Articles in Canadian Periodicals

Graph 5C²⁰

Out of Africa and Feminism Articles in Canadian Periodicals -- Feminist Periodicals Excluded

¹⁹ Information from CBCA, 1981-1987.

²⁰ Ibid.

Vietnam Films and Vietnam

Vietnam has been, without a doubt, one of the foremost themes in American movies for the last two decades. Both Christensen and Palmer have acknowledged the constant presence of Vietnam-related films over in past years. According to Palmer, Vietnam was not a salient issue for the years immediately following the American withdrawal in 1973. Palmer stated, however, that

The period of 1977-79 was the real turning point in Vietnam war consciousness-raising stimulated mainly by mass culture. In that period of about sixteen months, the films *Coming Home*, *The Deer Hunter*, and *Apocalypse Now* generated mass interest in the Vietnam War.²¹

The three motion pictures Palmer mentions were certainly popular enough to have some agenda-setting potential. Both *Apocalypse Now* and *The Deer Hunter* were among the top-grossing movies in 1979, according to Quigley Publications²². All three included famous actors and/ or directors, and all were critically acclaimed, each earning Academy Awards (*The Deer Hunter*: 5; *Coming Home*: 4, *Apocalypse Now*: 1). The films also explicitly tackle the Vietnam War -- *Coming Home* deals with Vietnam veterans' return to America, while "*The Deer Hunter* (1978) and *Apocalypse Now* (1979), come to grips with the Vietnam experience in both realistic and symbolic terms".²³

Graph 5D, however, does not show that any of these films had an effect. *Coming Home* was released in February 1978, *The Deer Hunter* in December 1978, and *Apocalypse Now* in August 1979, but there are no significant rises in citations on any of these dates. There is an apparent rise in issue salience surrounding the release

²¹ Palmer, *The Films of the Eighties*, 18.

²² *Motion Picture Almanac 1994*, 44A-45A.

²³ Palmer, *The Films of the Seventies*, 191.

of *The Deer Hunter*, but this is more likely attributable to news at the time about Vietnamese boat people and Chinese invasions of Vietnamese border towns.

Platoon and *Rambo II* were also surveyed in an attempt to see agenda-setting with the issue of Vietnam. Again, these movies included famous actors/ directors, and were very popular. Released in May 1985, *Rambo II* became one of the top-grossing films of 1985, and *Platoon* was a top-grossing film in 1987 and won three Academy Awards²⁴. This study was an especially interesting one because it involved a film which dealt seriously with the Vietnam issue (*Platoon*), and a film which used Vietnam as an excuse for some blatant flag-waving coupled with extreme violence (*Rambo II*).

The following Graph 5E, however, does not show that either *Platoon* or *Rambo* had any effect on the number of Vietnam articles in Canadian periodicals. There are two high points on the graph -- the first marks an anniversary of the end of the war, and the second is due in part to Chinh being named as the new leader of the Communist Party in Vietnam. While the fact that there were more *Rambo II*-related articles than there were *Platoon*-related articles may be interesting in another study, no agenda-setting was observed. The reasons for this will be discussed later in this chapter, along with the upcoming results on terrorism films.

²⁴ *Motion Picture Almanac 1994*, 44A-45A, 25A-41A.

*Graph 5I*²⁵

Vietnam Articles in Canadian Periodicals

*Graph 5K*²⁶

Platoon, Rambo and Vietnam Articles in Canadian Periodicals

²⁵ Information from *Canadian News Index* and *Canadian Periodical Index*, 1977-1979.

²⁶ Information from *BCA*, 1981-1987, 1988-1994.

Terrorism Films and Terrorism

According to Palmer, terrorism became the salient issue to Americans in the 1980s. He stated that

While the Vietnam War was still a powerful social issue in the eighties, it was not still being fought. Similarly, there were no major governmental scandals like Watergate until late in the decade. Yet two events, one at the beginning of the decade, the other near the end, became the eighties equivalents of Vietnam and Watergate.²⁷

Palmer is referring to the Iran Hostage Crisis of 1979-80 and the Iran-contra scandal of 1987-88, and he is certainly correct in believing that these events, along with many others, generated a large number of terrorism-related films in the 1980s.

In 1986 alone, there were three major motion pictures that dealt directly with terrorism: *Half Moon Street* (November 1986), *Iron Eagle* (January 1986), and *Delta Force* (February 1986). The study of these films is similar to the preceding study of Vietnam films, as it also includes a film which deals seriously with the topic (*Half Moon Street*), and then two which use the topic more as an excuse for gratuitous violence. While these movies included major movie stars (Louis Gossett, Jr., Chuck Norris, etc.), however, none were top-grossing pictures. Although *Half Moon Street* was critically acclaimed, neither it or the two shoot-'em-ups earned any Academy Awards. The lower popularity of these three films was not going to help in the search for agenda-setting.

Not surprisingly, therefore, this study was not successful. Graph 5F does show some rises in issue salience, but these rises do not coincide with the films' release dates. The rise in April 1986, for instance, is due in part to the bombing of a TWA plane and a Berlin discotheque.

²⁷ Palmer, *The Films of the Eighties*, 114.

Feature films with terrorist themes did not appear to impact on non-fiction agenda-setting in part, perhaps, because terrorism, like Vietnam, was already salient in journalist's minds.. Both the Vietnam and the terrorism studies in this case were motivated by surveys of American sociohistorical movie analyses -- primarily by Palmer and Christensen -- which identified significant trends in film topics over the past two decades. Perhaps the topics these studies identify, however, are too salient at the time to allow for a motion picture to affect media issue salience. A society that is very concerned with terrorism in the first place, for example, will in all probability not show a change when a film comes out.

The five Vietnam films and the three terrorism films studied here are perhaps closer to the kind of mirror-effect films that several theorists discuss. Christensen, for example, stated that

Political movies have debated the great issues of the day as the nation debated them, sometimes ahead of the public and sometimes lagging behind, sometimes dissenting and sometimes reinforcing.²⁸

It may be the case that the Vietnam and terrorism-related films debated the issues along with the public -- they were reflectors of their time. This relationship with society certainly would not allow for particularly successful agenda-setting studies for these films -- these media agenda-setting studies are grounded in a notion, after all, that the entertainment agenda is at least slightly different than the media agenda it could affect.

²⁸ Terry Christensen, *Reel Politics: American Political Movies from Birth of a Nation to Platoon*, (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 211.

Graph 51.²⁹

Terrorism Articles in Canadian Periodicals

²⁹ Information from C'BCA, 1981-1987.

The Terry Fox Story and Cancer

The Terry Fox Story was not a major motion picture -- it was certainly not in the same league as the movies that have been surveyed so far. It did deal with an issue of moderate salience -- cancer --, which would put it in a position to have some media agenda-setting power. More importantly, however, *The Terry Fox Story* was a Canadian film about a Canadian, and it was chosen for this reason. All the other films studied were American films, largely because these are the films which are most popular in Canada. This study will not attempt to fully address the intricate and involved subject of American vs. Canadian content in Canadian popular culture, although the subject is certainly apparent in this investigation. The following study on *The Terry Fox Story*, therefore, is the first inquisitive drop in what could become a bucket-full of American vs. Canadian popular culture agenda-setting abilities.

Interestingly enough, and despite its relatively small audience, the story of Terry Fox's attempted run across Canada to earn money for cancer research did yield moderate evidence of agenda-setting. Graph 5G demonstrates a rise in cancer-related articles in July that may be attributable to the release of *The Terry Fox Story*. A survey of these articles did not show any major cancer-related event other than the film that could account for this rise. There is, however, reason to be skeptical of this hypothesis. In April, for instance, there is a rise in articles about Terry Fox (the person) because Canada Post was releasing a stamp with him on it. This talk of Terry Fox, however, did not lead to a rise in cancer-related articles in April. The possibility exists, therefore, that Terry Fox and his story do not necessarily elicit cancer-related articles -- the connection between the two may not be as strong as initially expected. There is no reason to believe that *The Terry Fox Story* deals any more directly with cancer than does a Terry Fox stamp -- perhaps the rise in July is merely coincidence.

Even if this is the case, however, *The Terry Fox Story* may demonstrate agenda-setting on another level as well. Previous to the film's release, there are two

rises in articles about Terry Fox -- the first is due to the release of the stamp (March-April), and the second is because of the erection of a Terry Fox statue in Thunder Bay (June). For three months following the release of *The Terry Fox Story*, however, there is another rise in articles about Terry Fox -- for no apparent reason beyond the film itself. Although the film may not have single-handedly put cancer higher on the media agenda, it does seem to have temporarily placed Terry Fox on the agenda. The film's implications for Canadian vs. American culture aside, there is evidence here of media agenda-setting.

Graph 5G³⁰

The Terry Fox Story and Terry Fox and Cancer Articles in Canadian Periodicals

Number of Articles

Months — January '82 to December '82

The Terry Fox Story Articles

Cancer Articles

Terry Fox Articles

³⁰ Information from CBC.I. 1981-1987.

The Godfather III, Goodfellas, and the Mafia

The Godfather III, released in December 1990, included a number of important stars (Andy Garcia, Al Pacino), and gained particular notoriety because of the two Francis Ford Coppola Godfather films that preceded it almost twenty years before. It was also a top-grossing film in 1990³¹. *Goodfellas*, on the other hand, was released two months previous to the *Godfather III*, included several popular actors, and received one Academy Award. Both films generated a fair amount of articles in the Canadian press, in part because of the proximity of their release dates, and their very similar subjects -- the Italian Mafia in America.

Most North Americans are most likely familiar with the Mafia (not directly, of course). It has certainly been the subject of a large number of films -- some movie stars have spent their entire careers in the Mafia-portraying business. The Mafia is not, however, a predominant subject in the North American media, and probably less so in the Canadian media in particular. There is, therefore, a possibility for observing some kind of media agenda-setting.

Graph 5H does show that there is a consistent flow of Mafia-related articles during and following the release of *Godfather III* and *Goodfellas*. The peak in Mafia articles, unabated by any real-life occurrence, is also in October -- the release date for *Goodfellas*, and the beginning of *Godfather III* preview articles. This peak may indicate some small degree of agenda-setting.

The problem with this particular study lies in the relatively small data that the conclusions must be based on. The majority of months surveyed, for instance, indicate only one Mafia-related article. These small numbers do not lend authority to the conclusions -- one arbitrary Mafia article printed in a Canadian magazine as filler could easily sway the results. These small numbers suggest that while the Mafia is not a very

³¹ *The Motion Picture Almanac 1994*, 44A-45A.

salient issue, it is perhaps not salient enough. This may partially linked to the fact that the Mafia in America is, after all, a quinticentially American issue. It may be that there was not enough Canadian (or even American, for that matter) media interest in the Mafia, even with the popular Mafia-related films, to generate good media agenda-setting results.

Graph 5H³²

The Godfather III, Goodfellas, and Mafia Articles in Canadian Periodicals

Number of Articles

Godfather III Articles ■ Mafia Articles □
 Goodfellas Articles ▨

³² Information from CICA, 1988-1994.

Racism Films and Racism

Both *Mississippi Burning* and *Do the Right Thing* are films that deal explicitly with racism -- the former is based around the KKK in Mississippi, and the latter is a Spike Lee film about racial prejudice in New York City. Neither was a top-grossing film, although both received some press because they involved popular actors/directors, and dealt explicitly with racism. *Mississippi Burning* received one Academy Award. Despite the rather moderate popularity of these films, however, *Mississippi Burning* does seem to have had some effect on racism articles in Canadian periodicals. Graph 5I shows a marked increase in the number of citations in February 1989, immediately following the late January release of the film. *Do the Right Thing*, released in May 1989, does not seem to have had an effect.

The results of this study are complicated slightly by the fact that discussions surrounding an allegedly racist professor at the University of Western Ontario (Rushton) were also taking place in February 1989. The Rushton-related articles this month account for only four of the fifty-one recorded, but their existence does make a claim that racism-related articles were motivated by *Mississippi Burning* a little tenuous.

Results for the study of *Malcolm X* in 1992-3 show some agenda-setting results. In fact, the effects of this Spike Lee film are very similar to the results of the study on *The Terry Fox Story*. Both films are primarily biographies, and the subject matter that the present study is searching for (cancer/ racism) necessarily takes a back seat to the protagonist of the film. *Malcolm X* was significantly more popular than *The Terry Fox Story* -- it involved major stars including Denzel Washington, and it remained at the twelfth position in the U.S.-Canada charts in *Variety* six weeks after its release³³, while *The Terry Fox Story* never even appeared. (The Terry Fox Story was never released in theaters in the U.S. -- it was shown on HBO).

³³ *Variety*, Jan. 4 1993, 8.

Nonetheless, *Malcolm X* results were very similar to *The Terry Fox Story* results. Just like *The Terry Fox Story* and Terry Fox articles, *Malcolm X* had a more marked effect on Malcolm X-related articles than it did on strictly racism-related articles. Graph 5J shows a distinct increase in media interest in Malcolm X (the person) in October, as previews for the film began to increase. For years previous to the film's release, in fact, there were no Malcolm X articles in Canadian periodicals. In regard to Malcolm X articles, therefore, this film demonstrates some further proof of the media agenda-setting phenomenon.

The same cannot quite be said in relation to racism articles. While there is an increase in racism-related articles during and following the release of *Malcolm X*, conclusions are again complicated by the existence of outside real-life racism-related occurrences. In September, there were KKK trials in Winnipeg that received press coverage, and outbreaks of racism-related violence in Spain and Germany account for part of the peak in racism articles in November -- the same month as the release of *Malcolm X*.

Nonetheless, the results for *Malcolm X* are positive ones for agenda-setting. While the rise in racism-related articles cannot necessarily be attributed to the film, the sudden press interest in Malcolm X himself certainly can. Just like *The Terry Fox Story* -- perhaps more so because of the dearth of Malcolm X articles previous to this film's release -- the *Malcolm X* cases clearly demonstrate evidence of media agenda-setting by a motion picture.

Graph 5J³⁴

Mississippi Burning and Racism Articles in Canadian Periodicals

Number of Articles

Mississippi Burning Articles

Racism Articles

Graph 5J³⁵

Malcolm X and Racism Articles in Canadian Periodicals

Number of Articles

Malcolm X (move) Articles

Racism Articles

Malcolm X Articles

³⁴ Information from CBCA, 1988-1994.

³⁵ Ibid.

Philadelphia and AIDS

Philadelphia was released in December 1993. It involved major stars including Tom Hanks and Denzel Washington, remained in the number two position on the Canadian charts six weeks after its release³⁶, and received critical acclaim in the form of two Academy Awards and three other nominations. *The Motion Picture Guide* stated the following about Philadelphia:

The first mainstream Hollywood film to deal with the subject of AIDS, and one of the few to feature gay characters in a serious dramatic context, Philadelphia is highly competent and equally -- if surprisingly -- conventional.³⁷

The fact that Philadelphia was conventional probably helped it maintain such a large audience, while the fact that it was the first film to deal with AIDS -- a widely known subject -- meant that there was some agenda-setting potential.

The main fear in this study was that AIDS would be too salient an issue -- the effects of Philadelphia might only be minimal, and would likely be unobservable. This fear was proven well-justified -- while there was a high result for articles per month in the Mafia study, citations in this study hovered around the one hundred and fifty mark. While there is an observable rise in the months following *Philadelphia's* release, therefore, the results do not seem incredibly high compared to the months previous to the film.

If Philadelphia did help to create media interest in AIDS in early 1994, the results in Graph 5K show that the result must have been delayed. The peak in AIDS-related articles is in March -- three months after the film's release. In all probability, therefore, Philadelphia either did not affect the previously-salient issue it dealt with, or

³⁶ *Variety*, Jan 31-Feb 6 1994, 13.

³⁷ *Motion Picture Guide Annual 1994*, James Pallot, ed., (New York: Cinebooks, 1994), 210.

its affects were to small to be observed in the large numbers of AIDS articles each month in Canadian periodicals.

Graph 5K³⁸

Philadelphia and AIDS Articles in Canadian Periodicals

Number of Articles

Philadelphia Articles
AIDS Articles

³⁸ Information from *CBCA*, 1988-1994.

Jurassic Park and Dinosaurs

The film selected that presented the most successful results was *Jurassic Park* -- a movie which was not particularly political, but which is included here because it demonstrated remarkably well media agenda-setting. *Jurassic Park* presented the perfect agenda-setting demonstration for several reasons. It was, for instance, an incredibly popular film -- more so than any other film investigated. It reached number one on the movie charts in *Variety* immediately after its release in July of 1993, and six weeks later it remained number one in Canada and number three in the United States³⁹ -- leading it to become the top-grossing film of 1993⁴⁰. The film involved a famous director and several well-known actors (Steven Spielberg, Laura Dern, Jeff Goldblum), and earned three Academy Awards. *The Motion Picture Guide* awarded *Jurassic Park* three and a half stars, and wrote the following testament to the film's popularity:

Largely powered by its landmark digital special effects and ferocious marketing/ merchandising campaign, it took in over \$346 million at the domestic box office, to end up second (behind E.T.) in the all time highest-grossing charts.⁴¹

Certainly, then, *Jurassic Park* reached a large enough audience and became a large enough entertainment phenomenon that it had good agenda-setting potentials. Furthermore, the subject which *Jurassic Park* deals with made it a good demonstration of agenda-setting. Firstly, with a story about a genetically-regenerated dinosaur theme park, there is no doubt that the central theme of *Jurassic Park* is dinosaurs. Secondly, dinosaurs are not a dominant subject one for the average Canadian citizen. It is a topic

³⁹ *Variety*, Aug. 2, 1993, 14, 18.

⁴⁰ *Variety*, Jan. 24-30, 1994, 14.

⁴¹ *The Motion Picture Guide Annual 1994*, 147-148.

which is a familiar one for most individuals, but not one which is often given attention to on a day-to-day basis. There was a good chance, therefore, that any rise in issue salience could easily be observed. Unlike previous investigations dealing with subjects such as Vietnam, terrorism, or AIDS, dinosaurs was not a salient issue on a day-to-day basis at the time of the film's release. *Jurassic Park* was also a good choice because there were no other major dinosaur-related issues happening when the film was released -- it would not fall into the same trap as *The Accused* or *Apocalypse Now*. Changes in issue salience, therefore, can in this case be accurately attributed to the movie itself rather than to real-life events.

Not surprisingly, therefore, Graph 5L is a near-perfect demonstration of agenda-setting by a motion picture. The number of *Jurassic Park*-related articles clearly mark the film's release in June, and the number of dinosaur-related articles that were recorded surrounding the release of *Jurassic Park* is remarkable. Just previous to the film's release, there is clear rise in the number of these articles dealing not with the film itself, but rather with the topic of dinosaurs in general. Interestingly enough, this rise and the subsequent fall in the salience of dinosaur-related subjects for the media follows the kind of issue attention cycle pattern that Neuman and Downs suggested. Graph 5M shows that the results of this study almost perfectly follow this agenda-setting curve outlined in Chapter IV.

Graph 5M excludes January to March because of the rise in issue salience that is apparent in January in Graph 5L. This rise, however, provides an attractive opportunity for analysis. Dinosaur-related articles rose in January because of an important dinosaur finding in Argentina. This was one of the most important findings in years for paleontologists -- they uncovered what many believed to be one of the common predecessors to a variety of dinosaurs. The *Globe and Mail* wrote that the

finding "is structurally the most primitive dinosaur ever discovered, and dates back to the beginnings of the dinosaur age 225 million years ago."⁴²

It is interesting to note that this incredibly important finding, however, did not generate even half as many dinosaur-related citations as did *Jurassic Park* in the first month after its release. A ground-breaking real-life event, in the case of dinosaurs, did not create as much media interest in dinosaurs as a major motion picture about the subject.

Jurassic Park served as good example -- although not a particularly political one -- of media agenda-setting by a motion picture. The film was an important one -- due to its high-profile director, its accordingly high budget, and its ground-breaking special effects. Accordingly, *Jurassic Park's* production, release, and -- more importantly in this case -- its subject matter became important to the mass media. *Jurassic Park*, therefore, effectively set the media agenda.

⁴² "Most Primitive Dinosaur Dug up in Andes," in *Globe and Mail*, 6 Jan 1993, A7.

Graph 5L⁴³

Jurassic Park and Dinosaur Articles in Canadian Periodicals

Graph 5M⁴⁴

Jurassic Park and the Agenda-Setting Process Curve

⁴³ Information from *CBCA*, 1988-1994.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Schindler's List and the Holocaust

A slightly less popular, yet more political film, *Schindler's List*, also demonstrated agenda-setting by a motion picture. This film was about Oscar Schindler, a German who saved hundreds of Jews from the Nazi death camps in W.W.II. The film, just like *Jurassic Park*, was a high-budget, high-profile film that became an important media event. It was also directed by Steven Spielberg, and included stars such as Liam Neeson and Ben Kingsley. Six weeks after the film's release, it was sixth on the U.S. charts, and ninth on the Canadian charts⁴⁵. According to *The Motion Picture Guide*,

The seven Academy Awards and virtually unanimous acclaim accorded to *Schindler's List* were entirely merited. Deftly wielding the dollar-driven apparatus of 1990s Hollywood, director Steven Spielberg has achieved something close to impossible -- a morally serious, aesthetically stunning historical epic that is nonetheless readily accessible to a mass audience.⁴⁶

The question in this case was whether *Schindler's List*, with its wide audience and explicitly political theme, lead to increased media issue salience for the Holocaust.

The results of this study were of particular interest because of a preceding study in 1980 on the effects of the NBC series *Holocaust* in West Germany and Austria⁴⁷. The airing of *Holocaust* in these countries was a significant political event, and it became an important press event. Markovits and Hayden found that

Long after the telecast, *Holocaust* remained a major subject for discussion in the West German press. It also became the center and starting point for an array of topics... Various magazines ran series on aspects of the War and anti-Semitism, and the different Centers for

⁴⁵ *Variety*, Jan. 31-Feb. 6 1994, 10; Jan. 24-30 1994, 16.

⁴⁶ *The Motion Picture Guide Annual 1994*, 238.

⁴⁷ Andrei S. Markovits and Rebecca S. Hayden. "'Holocaust' before and after the event: reactions in West Germany and Austria." in *New German Critique*, no. 19 (Winter 1980): 53-80.

Political Education were deluged with letters requesting material related to the show. This entire episode and experience came to be known as the 'Holocaust Wave'...⁴⁸

That Markovits and Hayden deal with agenda-setting -- and find evidence of it -- is important in itself, but the fact that they also deal with the same general topic as the *Schindler's List* study make their findings especially relevant. So too does the fact that, as the above quotation illustrates, *Holocaust* demonstrated substantial media agenda-setting abilities.

The data in the following graph demonstrated that, above and beyond the movie-related articles, *Schindler's List* did play a significant part in sparking increased mass media interest in the Holocaust and the events surrounding it. A cursory look at Holocaust-related articles in Canadian periodicals, as shown in Graph 5N, revealed a marked increase in the number of articles following the release of *Schindler's List* in late 1993. Graph 5N shows, in fact, that in April and May -- months after the film was released -- mass media interest in the Holocaust continued to remain powerful. A review of the articles did not reveal any real-life occurrence that could have affected this massive increase in Holocaust-related articles. In light of the complications in the *Out of Africa* study due to feminist journals, articles published in the *Canadian Jewish News* were identified in this case, and it was found that this magazine had minimal effects on the data. The trends in Graph 5N, therefore, can be positively attributed to the release of *Schindler's List*.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 74.

Graph 5N⁴⁹

Schindler's List and Holocaust Articles in Canadian Periodicals

Number of Articles

Schindler's List Articles

Holocaust Articles

⁴⁹ Information from CBC, 1988-1994.

The pattern for *Schindler's List* was similar, although not as marked, as that for *Jurassic Park*. *Schindler's List* proved to demonstrate reasonable proof of media agenda-setting. It also demonstrated results similar to *Malcolm X* and *The Terry Fox Story* -- articles on Oscar Schindler himself also increased dramatically after the film's release.

Jurassic Park and dinosaurs proved to be more picture-perfect short-term subject for analysis than did *Schindler's List* and the Holocaust -- both because dinosaurs were seldom on the media's mind without a related occurrence, and because one year of analysis allowed for the reasonably accurate comparison of a real-life event to a movie. This kind of real-life event/ motion picture comparison, however, is not impossible for the subject of the Holocaust. To this end, a more thorough study was performed that involved a survey of Holocaust-related articles in Canadian periodicals from July 1984 to April 1994. Graph 50 displays the results of this study.

This extended study of *Schindler's List* proved very interesting. There were, over the almost ten years surveyed, several major Holocaust-related events that affected the number of articles in Canadian periodicals. A number of these events are recorded in balloons in the preceding graph.

The survey begins with the period of the Zundel trial, and the Keegstra trial that followed six weeks later. The increase in Zundel-related articles is clear during the trial period in early 1985, although news of the trial generated very few Holocaust articles aside from those directly related to the trial. While there was certainly a rise in Holocaust-related news, a significant majority of the articles dealt specifically, and often singularly, with the trial itself, and not necessarily the Holocaust.

There were other events related to the Zundel trial following 1985, but these events rarely generated very many articles, and are therefore not given mention in the above graph. Several other events, however, such as the 50 year anniversary of the Holocaust and the discovery of Nazi diaries are pointed out in order to account for

several sharp rises in the number of Holocaust articles between the Zundel trial and the release of *Schindler's List*. March/ April 1993 sees an incredible rise in the number of Holocaust articles, due to several related newsworthy events at the time -- the opening of the Holocaust museum in Washington, the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, and the first press releases about the upcoming *Schindler's List*.

Once *Schindler's List* is released, the obvious rise in Holocaust articles that was observed in the first, smaller study is apparent. March/ April 1994 marks the peak of Holocaust articles -- 54 citations, 15 of which were related directly to the film, and the other 39 of which were more general articles with the Holocaust being the main topic.

This survey points to several interesting facts. Just as with the *Jurassic Park* case, *Schindler's List* generated more Holocaust-related articles in Canadian periodicals than did any of the real-life events in the preceding ten years. And this is despite the fact that the film was an American one, and the Zundel and Keegstra trials were exclusively Canadian events.

Events in 1989 also demonstrate the kind of logistic model of agenda-setting that was suggested by Neuman (as shown in Graph 5M in the case of *Jurassic Park*). There are, for instance, an average number of articles in January/ February -- immediately following the 50 year anniversary of the beginning of the Holocaust. This event, however, coupled with the discussions surrounding a Catholic convent located near the Aushwitz concentration camps, appears to have sparked an increase in media issue salience for the Holocaust. The salience rises quickly and reaches a peak by September/ October of that year, and then slowly -- over the next eight months -- returns to normal. Judging from the *Jurassic Park* case, articles generated by *Schindler's List* might also follow Neuman's agenda-setting model as the Holocaust issue slowly loses salience -- it will be another few months before one can tell.

Examinations, Implications, and Conclusions

While not all the above experiments were successful at demonstrating media agenda-setting, they do provide significant proof of the agenda-setting abilities of motion pictures. Furthermore, the less successful studies allow for some hypotheses as to why certain motion pictures were more fortunate.

The flaw with *The Accused* and *Out of Africa* experiments was merely that the film's effect were not clear enough -- real-life events complicated the results. The Vietnam and terrorism films suffered similar problems, coupled with the fact that the issues they addressed may have been too salient at the time to allow for a recognizable change in press coverage. This was certainly the case for *Philadelphia* -- there were far too many AIDS-related articles on a regular basis to allow for a proper analysis of the film's effects. Mafia-related films did not seem to have an effect, perhaps due to the fact that their subject, more than any other explored here, is a quintessentially American one. *Do the Right Thing* may not have been popular enough to affect the press, but *Mississippi Burning* did seem to have an effect on racism-related articles. So too did *Malcolm X* and *The Terry Fox Story* -- each film lead to an increase in articles about the film's protagonist. *Jurassic Park* and *Schindler's List* were the most successful at setting the media agenda.

What did the successful films have in common? Firstly, each was extremely popular, the exception being *The Terry Fox Story*, which probably benefited instead from being a Canadian product about a Canadian. In fact, -- *Terry Fox Story* aside -- there seems to be a direct relationship, among the successful agenda-setting films, between popularity and agenda-setting ability. *Mississippi Burning* and *Malcolm X* were moderately popular films, and therefore demonstrated moderate agenda-setting abilities. The two most popular films examined -- *Jurassic Park* and *Schindler's List* --, on the other hand, were also the most successful agenda-setters.

The secondly common feature of the five successful agenda-setting films was a subject that was not particularly salient before the film's release. Racism, Terry Fox and his fight with cancer, dinosaurs, and the Holocaust are all subjects that are acknowledged, but not salient on a daily basis. Each of these issues, previous to the films' release, fit into what Downs referred to as the "pre-problem stage"⁵⁰ -- a stage during which the problem/ issue may exist, but is not salient. That the studies of these films were not thwarted by non-fiction events was also certainly a fundamental element in the experiments' success.

Jurassic Park was the most successful agenda-setter observed here. Accordingly, it was an incredibly successful film dealing with an issue that was far from salient previous to its release. The 10 year study of Holocaust articles further buttressed the argument the *Jurassic Park* experiment made for the media agenda-setting power of movies. *Schindler's List*, along with some of the previous investigations, seems to give further evidence that a major motion picture can affect the media agenda. This conclusion has two important implications.

The first of these deals with selectivity, as described by Ball-Rokeach et al. in their study of *Roots II*. According to these authors, the selectivity hypothesis is as follows:

... selective exposure refers to two related processes: (a) individuals who agree with or expect to agree with a particular media message are more likely to expose themselves to that message than those who are neutral or indifferent toward it, and (b) individuals who disagree with or expect to disagree with a particular message are more likely than those who are neutral or indifferent to avoid exposing themselves to that message.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Downs, 27-33.

⁵¹ Ball-Rokeach et al., 59.

In light of films' agenda-setting powers, however, the effects of selectivity in regard to the message in a major film such as *Schindler's List* may be minimal. It was observed, for instance, that *Schindler's List* affected the agenda of print media, and it would not be stretching too far to state that it probably affected the agenda for television as well. Assuming that most people either read a newspaper, read a magazine, or watch television once every few days, therefore, it would follow that many individuals who had no intention of seeing *Schindler's List* were unwittingly -- although perhaps very briefly -- subjected to some kind of Holocaust-related report at some time in the winter of 1993-94. Perhaps, therefore, a major motion picture that can set the mass media agenda can also avoid to some degree the effects of selectivity. An agenda-setting movie has the potential to send its message, or at least introduce its topic, to a large number of individuals who have and will not see the film.

Selectivity, however, relates to the kind of direct media-individual connection that this study has attempted to steer away from thus far -- not so much because it is not plausible, but rather because it is very difficult to empirically prove. (The preceding paragraph, full of hypothetical conjecture and postulation, certainly attests to this.) The second implication of this study is a more elementary one -- it is merely that Combs and his cohorts were right.

There is proof here that major motion pictures can affect the media agenda. The preceding experiments provide evidence of the power of films. As Palmer alleged,

In most instances, film is reactive analytic text that explores what happened after the historical fact, but in some instances film takes up direct simultaneous participation in the texts of social history and even predicts the direction that social history will ultimately take...
...Hollywood creates a discourse in clearly defined texts that not only comment perceptively upon contemporary social history but actually participate in it.⁵²

⁵² Palmer, *The Movies of the Eighties*, xi.

Conclusions

In the mid-1970s, Jane Fonda told *Cineaste* magazine that she had trouble deciding to remain an actress¹. Having recently finished political films such as *They Shoot Horses, Don't They* (1969) and *Klute* (1970), Fonda was in the process of becoming a somewhat of a political activist. She was debating remaining in Hollywood, or joining a group like Newsreel, where it seemed she might better address her political concerns. Two of her activist friends, however, convinced her to remain an actress. According to Fonda, they said, "There's a need for people who can reach mass audiences. You must continue."²

Having completed this study, it seems that Fonda may have made the right choice in careers. For while analysis of news programs has demonstrated some connection with the public agenda, it seems that entertainment may have similar effects. As cases such as *Schindler's List* demonstrate, Fonda may actually have a larger audience for her political speeches as a movie star than she would have as a reporter.

Conclusions on Popular Culture...

The results of the previous experiments do not support an incontestable wholesale claim that movies affect politics. They do, however, suggest that this popular culture-politics relationship is possible, given the appropriate circumstances. Christensen claimed that "A few political films, like *Birth of a Nation* and *The China Syndrome* have had a

¹ Dan Georgakas and Lenny Rubenstein, *The Cineaste Interviews: On the Art and Politics of the Cinema*, (Chicago: Lake View Press, 1983), 106-118.

² Ibid., 106.

direct impact on politics."³ She is probably correct in the case of Griffith's 1915 film *Birth of a Nation* -- Simcovitch stated that the film is often linked with the subsequent growth in the Ku Klux Klan, and that it was used by the Klan as propaganda to recruit members⁴. The relevance of this film to politics is obvious. The case for *The China Syndrome* (1979), however, is slightly more tenuous. While the popular film dealt directly with the problems of nuclear power, its effects are easily confused with the media effects of the real-life nuclear plant leak at Three Mile Island that occurred just weeks after the film's release. The film became a more important political phenomenon as a result of the real-life event, but it serves less as an empirical example of the political impact of movies than it does as a peculiar study of life imitating art.

Christensen's point -- that movies affect politics -- is demonstrated by the preceding experiments, but so too is her mistake. Despite a film's popularity, its star-power, and its critical acclaim, it is often difficult to find substantial quantitative evidence of any impact. This is not to say that there is no impact, but merely that it is hard to demonstrate. Real-life events coupled with varying degrees of issue salience can make it difficult to confirm the political power of motion pictures. Nonetheless, it is possible -- as several experiments indicated.

Certainly the results of the *Jurassic Park* and *Schindler's List* studies alone are enough to implicate some kind of relationship between movies and politics. These two films stand out as exemplary media agenda-setters. Including the moderate success of other experiments, such as *Malcolm X* and *The Terry Fox Story*, Chapter V stands as reasonable proof of the beginnings of the motion picture-politics relationship that popular culture theorists believe exists.

³ Terry Christensen, *Reel Politics: American Political Movies from Birth of a Nation to Platoon*, (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 4.

⁴ Maxim Simcovitch, "The impact of Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* on the modern Ku Klux Klan," reprinted in *Celluloid Power: Social Criticism from The Birth of a Nation to Judgment at Nuremberg*, David Platt, ed., (Metuchen, N.J. and London: The Scarecrow Press, 1992): 72-82.

It is important to note that this is by no means the first study to identify movies as a political phenomenon. The connection between the two has been widely acknowledged by popular culture theorists. Ryan and Kellner stated, for example, that

The political stakes of film are thus very high because film is part of a broader system of cultural representation which operates to create psychological dispositions that result in a particular construction of social reality, a commonly held sense of what the world is and ought to be that sustains social institutions.⁵

Authors such as Ryan and Kellner base their analysis of motion pictures and politics on their understanding of popular culture, and on the notions expressed in Chapter III about the uses and powers of popular culture to affect the way in which people view the world around them.

We may say, then, that movies are political communication, even when those movies are not overtly about politics. Ostensibly non-political feature films are 'about' politics in the sense that we may interpret them politically as part of a political-culture-in-time.⁶

This statement by Combs exemplifies the relationship many popular culture theorists see existing between movies and politics. Previous to the above investigations, however, this affiliation proved difficult to verify empirically.

Some of the many theorists searching for a direct connection between movies and public opinions might be disappointed -- this study proved no such direct association. By taking heed of the accomplishments of news-specific agenda-setting researchers like Iyengar, however, this study has begun to pave the way for proof of an indirect connection between movies and public opinion. Using agenda-setting analysis to examine motion pictures was not unconditionally successful in this case, but it was a more successful and

⁵ Ryan and Kellner, 14.

⁶ James Combs, 1990, xii.

reliable demonstration of some relationship than the direct approach of many previous theorists has been. Remember Cumberbatch and Howitt's 1989 summation of previous research: "Evidence for direct influence is generally weak with many trivial results reported which are themselves controversial."⁷

It is hoped that a critique of this study would not find its results so trifling. Although these experiments have only been a first step, they did nonetheless reach some level of success, and they do present the possibility of further and more developed successful research. This study could represent the beginnings of more advantageous line of empirical research for proponents of the popular culture-politics connection.

Conclusions on Agenda-Setting...

In regard to agenda-setting, this study has only been the first step in the exploration of the popular culture-politics relationship. In some ways, this study has taken a step back from its predecessors -- it explores only media agenda-setting as opposed to public agenda-setting. Unlike Iyengar's experiments⁸, for instance, these experiments did not compare the citation index results with Gallop poll findings and make conclusions about popular opinion. Instead, the emphasis here did not go beyond the media agenda. According to Rogers and Dearing's agenda-setting process diagram (see Figure 4:1), this study has not moved very far -- it has not even touched on the relationships between the media, public, and policy agendas that the diagram outlines.

Nonetheless, the analysis in this dissertation has pointed to several important agenda-setting issues. One of these is that the 'media agenda' that most agenda-setting theorists deal with, including Rogers and Dearing, is composed for the most part of news content in the three major mass media (TV, radio, and newspapers). In Mayer's analysis

⁷ Cumberbatch and Howitt, 1.

⁸ See Behr and Iyengar. Iyengar and Simon. Iyengar et al.

of consumer issues, for example, he distinguishes between the three agendas, and states that "The *media agenda* is composed of the issues that are given high priority by the mass media. Indicators of the media agenda might include news coverage, documentaries, and editorials."⁹ And when this definition is not stated explicitly, the exclusion of any entertainment in the 'media agenda' is most often implicit in the analysis. Palmgreen and Clarke, for instance, measure the television media agenda with the *Television News Index and Abstracts*¹⁰.

Granted, the use of news indexes is most often justified in agenda-setting studies -- the studies are, after all, observing the effects of news on public opinion. The use of these indexes is certainly not contested here -- they were used in the above experiments as well to determine the 'media agenda'. Nonetheless, excepting a variety of newspaper or magazine special reports that appear in periodical indexes, the use of these indexes leads to accounts of the 'media agenda' that largely ignore the bulk of mass-mediated entertainment -- including motion pictures, television dramas, music, etc. Since this is the case, it would perhaps be more appropriate to label the 'media agenda' the 'news media agenda'. This title would explicitly illustrate the exclusion of entertainment from the basic agenda-setting model, as most often has been the case in agenda-setting research.

While this study has identified the 'news media agenda', however, it has also pointed to the significant impact of "influential media". Motion pictures are certainly a member of this agenda-setting body, and these "influential media" (as they are termed in the Rogers and Dearing diagram), have been shown to be a significant component in a media agenda-setting process. While this study has not moved on to make connections between the media agenda and public agenda, therefore, it has moved forwards. Rogers and Dearing suggested concentrating on the media agenda-setting process before

⁹ Mayer, 22.

¹⁰ Palmgreen and Clarke, 442.

continuing on to analysis of the public agenda¹¹, and by following their advice this study has identified entertainment-based films as important members of the "influential media", and accordingly moderately powerful determinants of the media agenda (or the 'news media agenda'). In short, this study has acknowledged and identified entertainment as a significant element in the agenda-setting process.

What Comes Next?

According to Ryan and Kellner,

To a certain extent, culture precedes and determines politics...
Popular film articulates fears, desires, and need that are pre-political in character and that could be channeled in politically progressive directions.¹²

This quote not only identifies the importance of popular culture, and motion pictures in particular, but it also points to what must be the next level of agenda-setting analysis for popular culture. This study has identified popular culture as a media agenda-setter -- any following connection with the public agenda remains to be demonstrated.

It was stated at the outset of this investigation that media agenda-setting was useful as a precursor to further agenda-setting studies -- ones which proceed beyond the media agenda and study the potential for effects upon the public and policy agendas. It is perhaps too idealistic to suggest that empirical research could follow an issue from the entertainment agenda to the news media agenda through citations indexes, on to the public agenda through Gallop poll-style research, and finally on to the policy agenda in the form of legislative debate and, possibly, legislation itself. Substantive empirical proof that a film was primarily responsible for legislation is a popular culture theorist's dream, but it is doubtful that it will ever become a reality.

¹¹ Rogers and Dearing, 579.

¹² Ryan and Kellner, 292.

Nonetheless, there are several possibilities for further study suggested by the previous investigation. First and foremost is a continuation of this line of analysis, in the hope that an issue can be effectively traced from a popular culture media agenda to other agendas. Studies with larger samples would also be a step forward -- they would allow for a better assessment of how many films can set the media agenda, and what commonalties these movies share. There are also possibilities for further quantitative agenda-setting studies in relation to motion pictures. The empirical analysis in the preceding study has largely been subjective -- options for more developed scientific research can lead to a better understanding of agenda-setting effects. In an effort to demonstrate one possibility for further empirical research, Appendix B outlines the application of ARIMA models to the *Schindler's List* and *Jurassic Park* data. The results of this test lend further authority to the conclusions made in Chapter V, and allow for a more detailed and effective comparison of the films' impacts on the media agenda. Empirical analysis such as this could lead to a greater understanding of the agenda-setting nature and capabilities of motion pictures.

While the possibility that one could track an issue from a movie to the media agenda, and on to the public agenda may be slight, therefore, there are certainly viable reasons to continue with the lines of analysis this study suggests. Agenda-setting research, judging from the results of Chapter V, may be the most effective way of quantitatively confirming the political power of popular culture. In this case, it was certainly effective at demonstrating the capacity motion pictures have to affect the media agenda.

Appendix A

Citation Index Searches

Following is a list of the searches used to generate data for all the preceding citation searches on *Canadian Business and Current Affairs (CBCA)* on CD Rom. While there are some commonalities, there are also differences between the search methods used in each case. Although there were some common rules, more limiting catchwords had to be used in some cases in order to isolate the articles being counted. In others, the number of articles was small enough to screen manually. In each case, titles were checked and several articles were read with the aim of ensuring that the data would properly reflect the nature of the articles

The title of each item is listed below in alphabetical order, followed by the catchwords used in the *CBCA* search. The Vietnam search previous to 1980 stands as the one exception -- this search was performed using the *Canadian News Index (CNI)* and *Canadian Periodical Index (CPI)* printed indexes.

AIDS	AIDS, excluding BOOK REVIEWS
Cancer	CANCER, excluding BOOK REVIEWS, MOVIE, MOVIES, FOX
Dinosaurs	DINOSAUR, DINOSAURS, excluding JURASSIC, SPIELBERG, BOOK REVIEWS
Feminism	FEMINISM, FEMINIST, excluding BOOK REVIEWS
<i>Godfather, The</i>	GODFATHER
<i>Goodfellas</i>	GOODFELLAS

Holocaust	HOLOCAUST, HOLOCAUST (JEWISH 1939-1945), excluding ZUNDEL, COURT, SCHINDLER, SCHINDLERS, BOOK REVIEWS.
<i>Jurassic Park</i>	JURASSIC, excluding BOOK REVIEWS
Mafia	MAFIA, excluding BOOK REVIEWS, GODFATHER, GOODFELLAS
<i>Malcolm X</i>	MALCOLM X
Malcolm X	MALCOLM X
<i>Mississippi Burning</i>	MISSISSIPPI, with BURNING
<i>Out of Africa</i>	AFRICA, with OUT, 1985-1986
<i>Philadelphia</i>	PHILADELPHIA
<i>Platoon</i>	PLATOON, excluding BOOK REVIEWS, MOVIE REVIEWS
Racism	RACISM, RACIST, excluding MOVIE REVIEWS, BOOK REVIEWS, MALCOLM
<i>Rambo</i>	RAMBO, RAMBOMANIA, excluding BOOK REVIEWS, MOVIE REVIEWS
Rape	RAPE, excluding BOOK REVIEWS, MOVIE REVIEWS
<i>Schindler's List</i>	SCHINDLER, SCHINDLERS, excluding BOOK REVIEWS
Terrorism	TERRORISM, TERRORIST, TERRORISTS, excluding BOOK REVIEWS, MOVIE REVIEWS, MOVIE, MOVIES
Terry Fox	TERRY, with FOX
<i>Terry Fox Story</i>	TERRY, with FOX
Vietnam (85-)	VIETNAM, excluding BOOK REVIEWS, MOVIE, MOVIES, MOVIE REVIEWS
Vietnam (-80)	in CNI: VIETNAM; in CPI: VIETNAM, VIETNAMESE WAR
Zundel	ZUNDEL, excluding BOOK REVIEWS

Appendix B

Further Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative analysis permits a more thorough, more scientific, method of analyzing agenda-setting. For the purposes of this paper, subjective observation of simple bar graphs was adequate for illustrating trends in the data. More substantive statistical analysis, however, remains a possibility. While statistical analysis could not in all probability show trends which were not already evident in the bar graphs that proceed, it could lead to more objective and measurable agenda-setting investigations. It could, for instance, quantitatively gauge the agenda-setting effects of films.

A thorough statistical analysis of motion picture agenda-setting effects is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Nonetheless, the following pages will provide a background to the quantitative study of agenda-setting, and give one example of how statistics can be used in assessing agenda-setting processes and effects.

Quantitative Possibilities

There are several different methods of quantitatively studying agenda-setting. Regression techniques are one example. In their study of public issue salience, however, Zhu et al. have noted that a simple linear regression model is not an appropriate one for agenda-setting analysis. This model is as follows,

$$y = a_1 + a_2x + e$$

where y is the dependent variable (in this case, the number of articles), x the independent variable (time), and e the presence of error. Zhu et al. state that this model puts no limit on the possible salience of an issue, and treats agenda-setting setting effects as fixed parameters rather than time-varying¹. On a more basic level,

¹ Zhu et al., 9.

however, the linear regression model is inappropriate simply because the relationship between the number of articles and time is not linear (as illustrated in Graphs 5A to 5O). Certainly the data gathered in the present study demonstrates that the initial agenda-setting effects are closer to Neuman's logistic model (as described in Chapter IV) than they are to a linear model.

Zhu et al.'s study is based partially on Neuman's proposed logistic model. The authors create an integrated nonlinear model of public agenda-setting based on models of agenda-setting and social interaction, with the aim of predicting public opinion. Their study is one example of the potential for statistics in agenda-setting studies. Statistical analysis need not, however, be as complex as Zhu et al.'s study.

The use of polynomial (or curvilinear) regression, for example, allows for a quantitative assessment and comparison of the agenda-setting effects of various films. The polynomial regression formula is as follows,

$$y = a + a_1x + a_2x^2 + \dots + a_nx^n + e$$

where n is the order of the polynomial. This regression model is better-suited to find a line of best fit for the case of media agenda-setting than is a linear model². With the introduction of higher-powered terms into the equation, the model is capable of accounting for the shifts in direction in the data -- specifically, for the rise and subsequent fall in most successful media agenda-setting cases.

Polynomial regression was applied to the following graphs of four of the more successful agenda-setting films (see Figure A:1). The curved line that appears over each bar graph is a "least squares" estimate of data for a selected series, and the resulting formula appears below along with the coefficient of linear correlation (or

² This section on linear and/ or polynomial regression is based on the following publications. For further information, refer to them directly: Robert R. Johnson, *Elementary Statistics*, 3d ed., (North Scituate, MA: Duxbury Press, 1980); John Neter, William Wasserman, and G.A. Whitmore, *Applied Statistics*, (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1978); Michael S. Lewis-Beck, *Applied Regression: An Introduction*, Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1980).

Pearson's product moment, r). In each case, a total of 4 terms were used in the equation -- the smallest number required to attain an equation which followed the data trends. As the r tests for linear correlation, it is virtually insignificant in these polynomial cases, and serves for the most part to demonstrate the inappropriateness of linear regression models for agenda-setting studies. The r in three of the following cases is especially low for this reason, coupled with the fact that, with only twelve observations, conclusions are easily distorted by random disturbances. Future experiments of this kind would certainly have to include far more observations.

Figure A:1 -- Polynomial Regression Graphs

The Terry Fox Story

$$y = 6.201132 + 5.900045x^{*1} + -1.601403x^{*2} + 0.19564x^{*3} + -0.006464x^{*4} \quad r = 0.06618$$

a)

Mississippi Burning

$$y = 0.445692 + -32.7582x^{*1} + 3.011372x^{*2} + -0.491853x^{*3} + 0.020015x^{*4} + -0.1^{*5} \quad r = 0.6902$$

b)

Jurassic Park

$$y = -0.548571 + 0.266051x^{*1} + 2.855646x^{*2} + -0.449959x^{*3} + 0.017872x^{*4} \quad r = 0.06068$$

c)

Schindler's List

$$y = 4.369882 + 3.981024x^{*1} + -1.730943x^{*2} + 0.319223x^{*3} + -0.016153x^{*4} \quad r = 0.78374$$

d)

The above graphs do not provide a thorough analysis, but do serve to illustrate the kind of investigation that polynomial regression makes feasible. By analyzing the coefficients (and their corresponding significance levels) in each equation, for example, it is possible to draw conclusions on the agenda-setting processes. There are, however, other methods which allow for more thorough agenda-setting analyses.

One such method is time series analysis³. This method is based on the preceding regression techniques. According to Uslaner, in time series data "...one has a set of observations on some variables for the same unit of analysis... over a series of time points."⁴ The study of agenda-setting, therefore, is well-suited to time series analysis -- and especially to interrupted time series analysis. According to McDowall et al.,

The widest use of this method has clearly been in the area of legal impact assessment. Time series quasi-experiments have also been used, however, by experimental psychologists to test and measure the impacts of treatments ... and by political scientists to test and measure the impacts of political realignments.⁵

Interrupted time series analysis breaks a series into two sections -- before and after an intervention (in this case, the release of a film), and judges whether the intervention in question had an effect on the time series. This method is perfectly suited, therefore, for the empirical assessment of a movie's effect on the media agenda. McDowall et al. portray a time series analysis model as follows,

³ This section on time series analysis is based on the following publications. For further information, refer to them directly: Charles W. Ostrom, *Time Series Analysis: Regression Techniques*, Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1978); David McDowall, Richard McCleary, Errol E. Meddinger, and Richard A. Hay, Jr., *Interrupted Time Series Analysis*, (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1980); G.V. Glass "Analysis of Data on the Connecticut Speeding Crackdown as a Time-Series Quasi-Experiment," in *Law and Society Review* 3, 55-76; Neter et al., 604-658; SPSS Inc., *SPSS-X Trends*, (Chicago: SPSS Inc., 1988).

⁴ E.M. Uslaner, "Editor's Introduction," in Ostrom, 5.

⁵ McDowall et al., 11.

$$y = a_{pre} + a_{post} + e$$

where y is the time series observation, a_{pre} is the preintervention series level, and a_{post} is the postintervention series level⁶. One model used for interrupted time series analysis is the ARIMA model.

ARIMA Models: Theoretical Background

A common interrupted time series analysis model is the AutoRegressive Integrated Moving Average (ARIMA) model. This model can account for most noise in a time series (trend, seasonality, and random error), isolate the effects of an interruption, and then assess the effects of this interruption⁷. ARIMA analysis allows not only for an analysis of the agenda-setting process, but also an empirical measurement of the agenda-setting power of films. Following is a brief summary of the theory behind ARIMA models.

McDowall et al. portray an impact assessment model is as follows,

$$Y_t = N_t + I_t$$

where Y_t is the time series observation, N_t is the "noise" component, and I_t is the intervention component⁸. An ARIMA process accounts for the N_t -- it identifies a model which explains the typical behavior of Y_t , and allows us to isolate and identify the effects of I_t on the time series observation.

The various ARIMA models are generally identified by three digits (p,d,q), identifying the three structural parameters the model takes into account. The d denotes differencing (I), a process which can account for a general upward or downward trend in the data (a 'nonstationary' process). This will not generally be

⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁷ The ARIMA model is described and described in the following: Box, G.E.P. and G.M. Jenkins, *Time Series Analysis: Forecasting and Control*, (San Francisco: Holden-Day, 1976); McDowall et al.; SPSS Inc., *SPSS-X Trends*.

⁸ McDowall et al., 13.

required for the analysis of motion pictures -- the preceding bar graphs do not show any evidence of overall trends in the number of articles dealing with any of the subjects observed (see Graphs 5A to 5O). Nor do the graphs show any seasonality -- none of the subjects explored in this study increase in salience at the end of each month, for example. The use of q indicates the order of the moving average (MA) component, and can be used to account for seasonality -- this is also not necessary in an analysis of any of the preceding films.

A decision about which ARIMA process to use, however, should be based not only on a general knowledge of the data trends, but also on an assessment of the autocorrelation function (ACF). A description of this process is not necessary here; suffice it to say that for the study of motion picture impact, an ARIMA (1,0,0) model is most often appropriate. In this model there is no differencing (I), no moving average process (MA), and one autoregressive (AR) process. Any time series observation (Y_t) in this model, therefore, is based in part on the observation that immediately preceded it. This model is also called an AR(1) model, and can be expressed as follows,

$$Y_t = \mu + \phi_1 Y_{t-1} + e_t$$

where ϕ_1 is the coefficient for time, μ is the constant, and e_t is the error term. There is also a possibility that an AR(2) model might be appropriate -- this model was also tested in the upcoming experiment.

The acceptability of an ARIMA model is based both on the statistical significance of the results for ϕ_1 and μ , and on an analysis of the model's residuals. The model is acceptable providing that: (1) the results for the coefficient and constant are statistically significant, and (2) there is no further correlation among the residuals.

Once an acceptable ARIMA model has been found, the noise component (N_t) has been accounted for. It is possible now to proceed to an analysis of the intervention component (I_t) of the impact assessment model. There are two kinds of

impacts, represented by step and pulse functions. A step function signifies a permanent change, while a pulse represents a temporary one. A motion picture has, judging from the preceding agenda-setting studies, a temporary impact. A pulse function should therefore be used to signify the release of a motion picture.

There are two parts to a model for I_t which creates a pulse function. The first is a dummy variable, P , which is equal to 1 on the month of the film's release, and equal to 0 every other month. The second is a lagged value of the time series, which creates an exponential decay in impact following the intervention.

$$f(I_t) = \delta Y_{t-1} + \omega P_t$$

The kind of impact this model provides for is shown in Figure A:2 -- one with an immediate beginning, and a subsequent decay. Note the similarity to the agenda-setting model based on Neuman and Downs (Figure 4:2).

*Figure A:2***Impact of a Pulse Function**

Time series analysis using an ARIMA model provides three findings that are pertinent to media agenda-setting as explored in this dissertation. The first of these is the coefficient ω , which serves as a quantitative measurement of the impact of a film. The second is the δ coefficient, which describes the rate of the impact decay, or the fall in issue salience. If $\delta = 1$, then there is no decay, whereas if $\delta = 0$, the decay is instant. Several possibilities for δ and the subsequent decay patterns are illustrated in Figure A:2. The third finding is a calculation of the total impact of a film, based on both coefficients. Because the pulse function can be followed by a decay, some of a film's impact may be spread over the next few months. A calculation of the total impact is as follows⁹:

$$\text{total impact} = \omega / 1 - \delta$$

Using ARIMA models, therefore, it is possible to quantitatively assess the impact of motion pictures on the media agenda. Because it isolates the film's impact, interrupted time series analysis using ARIMA models is an effective method of empirically judging and comparing agenda-setting powers.

ARIMA Applied: Schindler's List vs. Jurassic Park

Most of the preceding film studies do not include enough observations to adequately assess the film's impact using an ARIMA model. The case of *Schindler's List*, however, is an exception to this rule -- the extended study of this film includes 121 observations. This film, therefore, will be used as an example for analysis using an ARIMA model.

In the case of *Schindler's List*, an AR(1) model was applied to the period preceding the release of the film. Film-related articles were not included in the analysis, so that the results would reflect the film's effects strictly on Holocaust-related articles. The model's results were statistically significant, and the ACF for the model's

⁹ Ibid., 83.

residuals showed them to be nothing more than white noise (no correlation). An AR(2) model was also applied for the sake of comparison -- in this case the second coefficient was not statistically significant.

An AR(1) model, therefore, was accepted. Then a dummy variable was created, which was equal to 1 on the month of the film's release, and equal to 0 the rest of the time. The AR(1) model was applied again, this time including all the data along with the dummy variable. The results were as follows:

δ (time coefficient)	= 0.327	with T-ratio	3.655
ω (dummy coefficient)	= 11.049	with T-ratio	2.229
μ (constant)	= 8.880	with T-ratio	12.664

Observation of the ACF of the residuals showed them to be uncorrelated, and the AR(1) model was therefore accepted.

Several conclusions can be drawn from these results. The result of 11.049 for ω suggests that, on the month of its release, 11 of the 20 Holocaust-related articles were directly attributable to *Schindler's List*. As $\delta = 0.327$, it is also possible to suggest that despite its initially strong impact, *Schindler's List's* impact died off relatively quickly. The overall impact of *Schindler's List* was judged as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{total impact} &= \omega / 1 - \delta \\ &= 11.049 / 0.673 \\ &= 16.418 \end{aligned}$$

It is possible to suggest, therefore, that *Schindler's List* was responsible for generating approximately 16 Holocaust-related articles in Canadian periodicals.

For the sake of comparison, further data was collected on dinosaur-related articles so that the effects of *Jurassic Park* could be compared with those of *Schindler's List*. In order to make this kind of comparison, the number of data entries for each film must be equal. Data for *Jurassic Park*, therefore, also begins in May 1984.

An AR(1) model was applied to the *Jurassic Park* data, and the results for the coefficients were statistically significant. There was no correlation amongst the model's residuals, and the model was therefore accepted. Results for the study are as follows:

$$\begin{array}{ll} \delta = 0.302 & \text{with T-ratio } 3.388 \\ \omega = 18.400 & \text{with T-ratio } 5.231 \\ \mu = 6.151 & \text{with T-ratio } 12.744 \end{array}$$

According to these results, *Jurassic Park's* impact died out slightly faster than did *Schindler's List's*. This is not surprising -- judging from the bar graphs for each film, *Schindler's List's* impact does last longer (see Graphs 5L and 5N). The impact of *Jurassic Park*, however, was significantly stronger. Approximately 18 of the 30 dinosaur-related articles written that month are attributable to the film's release, and the total impact of the film measures 26.361 articles.

Conclusions

This cursory look at quantitative possibilities has demonstrated some of the applications and advantages of statistical analysis in agenda-setting studies. Polynomial regression is one empirical method with which to explore the agenda-setting process. Time series analysis using ARIMA models, on the other hand, allows for a far more scientific comparison of agenda-setting effects than the subjective analysis in Chapter V. The information presented in this appendix is certainly testament to the fact that this dissertation is only a first step in analyzing the relationship between popular culture and politics. Many aspects of the agenda-setting capability of motion pictures, for example, remain unexplored.

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