

**H**ow nutritious is our daily fare of the media? Do newspapers, radio, television, and the internet enrich or impoverish our political diet? And how healthy is the political process itself? These questions are increasingly raised as the role of the media in the political life of the U.S. is changing and expanding, especially with the development of new media forms.

What are we to make of the fact that more and more of the younger generations are turning to comedy shows for their political information? How is the internet affecting the running of political campaigns and the terms of political engagement? Is the media becoming more partisan, and what does the history of the media in the U.S. tell us about this development? What changes are taking place in the ongoing love-hate relationship between journalists and politicians? What role do political ads, photo-ops, and other media spots constructed by political parties play? Has commitment to investigative reporting all but disappeared, and are there ways to reinvigorate it despite its huge price tag and the time investment required?

The essays in this issue of *The Hedgehog Review* take up these questions from a variety of angles. Michael Schudson draws our attention to the range of roles journalism can and should play in a democracy, from informing citizens, investigating politicians, analyzing information, creating empathy in the public for those who may be unlike them, providing a public forum for discussion of key political ideas, and motivating political action and engagement in public life. He also suggests that journalists should work towards a richer sense of liberal democracy, rather than simply a majoritarian democracy.

The next three essays diagnose the current state of the media for political life. Kiku Adatto examines the intense focus on the photo-op, which engenders both cooperation and antagonism between journalists and politicians, and argues that too much attention on these images impoverishes our political process. Doris A. Graber suggests that while there is plenty of junk food in the daily news diet, there are enough nutrients to sustain the democratic process, particularly when we include the wide range of media that people are accessing today. Likewise, Paul Freedman suggests that political ads, contrary to the many criticisms against them, serve as the multivitamin in a poor political diet.

The final two essays call our attention to some significant problems in the media that need to be addressed for the good of our political life. Thomas E. Patterson argues that, as many complain, the media does have a bias, but it is not the kind of bias that many claim—that is, towards the Left or the Right. Rather, the bias of the media is towards criticism, and this negative focus has led to the public's poor view of the political process and to diminished respect for political leaders and institutions—all to the detriment of our political life. Robert W. McChesney focuses our attention on the

institutional arrangements and policies that inhibit a robust media, particularly government subsidies of media monopolies and the profit-driven decisions that have led to the decline of investigative and political reporting, as well as international journalism.

In Charles T. Mathewes's interview with E. J. Dionne, Jr., the *Washington Post* columnist reflects on the challenges facing the old media, such as newspapers and radio stations, and the promises of the new media, like the internet. While he worries about the former in the short run, Dionne thinks the old media will be able to adapt and find ways to sustain themselves, including ways to support the in-depth reporting that is needed to enrich our political life.

While each author has a different diagnosis of the problems facing the relationship between politics and the media in the U.S., all of them agree that the media play a vital role in the health of our democracy and that it is crucial that we focus our attention on identifying and addressing these problems. This issue of *The Hedgehog Review* attempts just such a focusing of attention on this crucial area of our public life.

—T.H.R.