

# The Last Word

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## Protests and perceptions: Mass media, free trade and muted voices

### ABSTRACT

Protests and Perceptions: The Framing of the Modern Protester considers the role of the modern mass media in creating and perpetuating simplified images of newsworthy events and people. Specifically, an in-depth analysis of *New York Times* and *Washington Post* coverage of the Summit of the Americas held from April 20, 2001 to April 22, 2001 in Quebec, Canada, provides examples of media framing of both Summit participants and protesters. The analysis shows that newspaper reports on the debate are presented through a pro-capitalist framework, which influences readers' perception of those who oppose globalization and free trade.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Anarchists. Hooligans. Communists. These labels represent mediated descriptions of the modern protester. A recent resurgence of protests and activism in the U.S. has garnered substantial coverage in the media. Today's protesters demonstrate against a global economic structure that is perceived as unfair to both workers and the environment. Demonstrators have frequently made news by disrupting several high profile international trade meetings, including the 1999 World Trade Organization meetings in Seattle. For the purposes of this study, however, the motives behind protesters' actions and the specific events through which these protesters have sought a public voice are not the primary focus. The media coverage stemming from the protests represents the author's primary emphasis. It is the author's contention that media representations, as unbiased and objective as they claim to be, have profoundly influenced the ways in which audiences have come to perceive both protesters themselves and the act of protesting as a viable form of public response to government policies and decisions. This study will examine the notion of media framing and prototype theory through an examination of the coverage by the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* of the Summit of the Americas, a free trade conference held from April 20-22, 2001 in Quebec, Canada.

Historically and contemporarily, mass media scholars and journalism practitioners actively strive to report in an 'objective' manner. The notion of objectivity continues to remain elusive within the discipline, as it is not only a lofty, but also an unattainable goal. As a human being reporting on issues affecting the human condition, one cannot separate one's history from oneself. In other words, the socialization agents that shape and mould the person one becomes are active, and they continuously influence the way one views the world and ultimately the way one will 'report' newsworthy events. Each person's unique history provides standpoint epistemologies that vary from person to person. Dependent variables that might influence one's standpoint epistemology include things such as age, race, class and gender. Ultimately, these dependent variables create the lens through which one views the world. Hence, a number of journalists viewing the same event will likely 'see' things differently as the lens through which they view the event will vary from journalist to journalist. With this in mind, it becomes clear that objectivity is not only unfeasible but also inaccessible. Ethical journalists should, therefore, seek balance in their reporting. That is, while recognizing the inherent biases all journalists maintain as a result of their standpoint epistemologies, journalists must actively seek oppositional views when reporting news. Currently, the majority of newsroom employees are white and male ("American Society of Newspaper Editors", 2001). Consequently, media consumers are provided with a news 'voice' devoid of diversity and in the end they receive a homogenous view of the world.

Media framing of events and individuals is also profoundly influenced by the biases inherent in ownership patterns of various message-producing entities. Oftentimes, the media “act purposefully to support the values dominant in a community or nation and act on behalf of a ruling class in suppressing or diverting opposition and constraining political and social deviance” (McQuail, 2000, p. 467). Essentially, this means that those in power use the media to stay in power. Fiske (1987) argues that television in particular often carries the message of the dominant ideology. Public television (PBS) is particularly guilty in this regard. Many pundits point to PBS as a liberal stronghold; however, giant corporations with conservative interests such as Paine Webber and Mobil fund most of the network’s programmes. Parenti (1995) goes so far as to label PBS derisively as the “Petroleum Broadcasting System”. Furthermore, well-known conservative journalists like John McLaughlin (*The McLaughlin Group*) and William F. Buckley, Jr. dominate its commentary. While proponents of liberal media bias point to the political orientation of most journalists and the semantics used in news reporting to support their claim, evidence suggests that the media are, in fact, more conservative (or at the very least pro-big business) in their messages, practices and policies. The recent trend towards media concentration underscores this evidence.

Edward Herman (1999) writes that in 1990 there were about 25 major media companies. That number has been drastically reduced by a spate of mergers and acquisitions in the media industry. In fact, today there are just five giant corporations that produce roughly 90 per cent of media content (Nichols & McChesney, 2000). Giant corporations such as Disney, General Electric (GE) and AOL Time Warner own most U.S. media, maintaining the framework upon which capitalistic ideals are built and maintained. Michael Parenti (1995) calls the heads of these corporations “the lords of the media” (p. 9). These media owners are multimillionaires and sometimes billionaires such as William Randolph Hearst, Henry Luce, Rupert Murdoch and Walter Annenberg staunch conservatives who “regularly leave their ideological imprint on both news and editorial content” (Parenti, 1995, p. 9). Furthermore, the boards of directors of print media and representatives of giant non-media corporations like Ford, GM, Alcoa, Philip Morris and IBM are also board members of broadcast news organizations. It is not surprising then that the major stockholders of the three largest broadcast networks are financial giants (Chase Manhattan, J.P. Morgan and Citibank). Merrill Lynch is the prime shareholder of the Associated Press, the country’s largest wire service (Parenti, 1995).

Lee and Solomon (1990) maintain that this pattern of conservative influence and ownership affects how news and commentary are produced. They point out several cases in which NBC edited or removed stories critical of the nuclear power industry when pressured by executives from GE, the corporation that owns the network. Jack Welch, the CEO of GE, once approached the news editor at NBC and reminded him to remember that he worked for GE (Parenti, 1995). When Murdoch, an admitted

conservative who owns FOX and hundreds of newspapers worldwide, was asked if he influenced the editorial views of his newspapers, he responded: "My editors have input, but I make the final decisions" (Parenti, 1995, p. 10).

Pertinent to the study at hand is a number of research efforts that demonstrate the effects of conservative media biases on the outcomes of various protest movements both within the U.S. and abroad. According to Smith, McCarthy, McPhail and Augustyn (2001), for example, the tendency of media reports to engage in episodic rather than thematic analyses of protest events generally favours the establishment over the protesters, since thematic exploration is often necessary for viewers and readers to understand and sympathize with the complex causes behind many protest actions. Similarly, Adkins-Covert, Ferguson, Phillips and Wasburn (2000) indicate that media reports overwhelmingly support structures of power while often failing to provide the kinds of specific information that would lead viewers and readers to hold institutions responsible for the abuses that generate protests in the first place. As a result of these failings, audiences are not receiving a complete picture of the issues, and are thus left to question the motives of protesters and other opponents of status quo realities.

Slanted reporting due to ownership biases and thematic simplifications of complex issues may have implications beyond providing readers and viewers with an incomplete understanding of important world events. According to Entman and Rojecki (2000), humans process their perceptions of the world by classifying this information into distinct cognitive categories. As a way of reducing the complexity and effort involved in this process, observers often construct a mental image of an "ideal" or representative member of each category. Once put into place, these ideals – known as prototypes – influence the ways in which we perceive other objects or concepts contained within our mental categories. According to Entman and Rojecki (2000), we come to expect certain kinds of behaviours out of those others whom we compare to our "ideal" or prototype group members; these expectations, in turn, "drive social perceptions and act as inertial restraints on peoples' ability to interpret behavior that is incompatible with their stereotypes" (pp. 61-62). While dealing specifically with the formation and encouragement of racial prototypes in television news programmes, the authors' discussion of prototype theory may easily be extended to other mediated images of specific characters or cognitive types.

These and other investigations have provided a solid rationale for the author's own review of mainstream newspaper reports of the globalization issue to follow.

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## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

On April 20, 2001, leaders representing every nation in the Western Hemisphere with the exception of Cuba convened in Quebec City to discuss the future of trade in the Occident. Dubbed "The Summit of the Americas", the talks revolved around the proposed drafting and ratification of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) - an expansion of the existing North American Free Trade Agreement to include nations and peoples "from Alaska to Argentina" ("No NAFTA" 2001, p. 4).

As with any controversial act of government involvement or control, opinions vary widely as to the impetus behind the FTAA as well as to the potential benefits or harms that might result from its passage. What is generally conceded by both supporters and detractors of the measure is that the proposed FTAA is the culmination of a process that began in 1988 with the ratification of a free-trade agreement between the U.S. and Canada, and that passage of the FTAA, as presently conceived, would create the largest free-trade zone in the world, one encompassing some 800 million people and a combined GDP of \$11 trillion ("NAFTA for the Americas," 2001). In order to achieve these ends, the proposed treaty would call for the gradual reduction and eventual abolition of import tariffs on trade between member nations, the harmonization of investment rules within the hemisphere, the liberalization of trade in services and the gradual dismantling of quotas and other non-tariff barriers ("Betting on free trade" 2001).

While the actual measures that would constitute the agreement are fairly clear-cut, the motives behind the creation of the FTAA, not to mention the ramifications of a free-trade zone in the Western Hemisphere, remain very much a matter of contention among the many parties and interests disputing the treaty's ratification. Perhaps predictably, this review found that reports in mainstream, large-circulation periodicals tend to support the FTAA initiative, while stories in smaller-circulation, independent magazines and newspapers more frequently side with those opposing the forces of globalization. Opponents claim, for example, in one *Earth Island Journal* article that the Summit of the Americas was simply the final, public exposition of a long-secret process to "impose NAFTA's failed model of increased privatization and deregulation throughout the hemisphere" ("NAFTA for the Americas", 2001, p. 24). According to these detractors, the first Summit of the Americas, held in Miami in 1994, was soon followed by a series of clandestine meetings between representatives of Western nations and those of numerous private corporations in an effort to broker a deal that would benefit free enterprise to the detriment of the environment and the hemisphere's poor. Furthermore, they claim that the FTAA as envisioned would include language to encourage transnational corporations to assume control of services ranging from health care, museums, libraries and insurance to broadcasting, legal services and prisons. In these

opponents' way of thinking, even the most precious of natural resources would not escape the clutches of the Free Trade Area of the Americas, as the measure would bring to fruition what has been for Western government leaders a long-standing dream of creating a hemisphere-wide for-profit market ("NAFTA for the Americas", 2001).

Other detractors have formulated their own reasons for opposing an Americas-wide free trade zone. Weekes (2001), who served as Canada's ambassador to the World Trade Organization from 1995 to 1999, is against an FTAA treaty he calls "too small-bore to be achievable" (p. 39). The former representative has pointed out that the U.S. is unlikely to relax such trade restrictions as agriculture subsidies unless or until the European Union does the same - and with this in mind, a Western Hemisphere-only free trade measure is unlikely to succeed without being expanded to the other side of the globe.

Predictably, proponents of the treaty have taken a far different perspective on the issue. In a *Washington Quarterly* article, Fauriol and Weintraub (2001) describe the FTAA proposal as a chance to "highlight the salience of the Western Hemisphere in a manner that has not come naturally to most U.S. leaders in the post-World War II era". The authors further suggest that the treaty is the natural culmination of three forces at work in modern world politics: the development of a special relationship between the United States and Mexico, a relationship that necessarily competes with historical interactions between the U.S. and Europe; a political process emphasizing liberalized trade in the West, with its attendant focus on common economic and political reforms; and a push toward a more successful U.S. foreign policy and economy based not on imperialism, but on mutual benefits among hemispheric nations. Still others admit that the Executive Branch's eagerness to ratify the FTAA is due, at least in part, to U.S. President George W. Bush's desire to complete a hemispheric free trade process put into motion by his father in the 1980s ("Betting on free trade", 2001), or, conversely, the president's desire to eclipse Clinton's achievement in forging the passage of NAFTA in 1994 ("The real trade wars", 2001).

While a good deal of disagreement exists as to the motives behind the passage of an FTAA measure, opinions are even more polarized concerning the effects such a treaty would have on the nations of the Western Hemisphere. Adversaries of the measure warn that an expansion of NAFTA to all the nations of the Americas would only extend the miserable results of that 1994 treaty: after eight years of NAFTA, they claim, poverty rates in Mexico have soared to 70 per cent, 90 million Mexicans are now without homes, and the use of pesticides in the country has tripled from 1996 rates. And the ill effects of the treaty have reached to American shores as well: almost 400000 U.S. jobs have relocated to the south as domestic companies rush to take advantage of lower employee wages and relaxed working standards below the border ("NAFTA for the

Americas", 2001).

Opponents of free trade have also turned to non-economic effects of the proposed FTAA measure for inspiration in their battle against the initiative. Newman (2001) notes in *Maclean's* that the rioting engendered by the Quebec City summit "had nothing to do with [the rioters'] fear of free trade, and everything to do with their dread of cultural genocide", further explaining that the most devastating impact of the FTAA treaty "will be the cultural homogenization of the Americas" (p. 20). Phillips' (2000) concerns voiced in *Social Policy*, while directed specifically at the World Trade Organization, echo the fears and reservations of many FTAA opponents. The author claims that free trade will result in an entire list of individual, societal and political harms, including "environmental degradation, international systemic sweatshops, loss of American jobs, diminishment of nation-state sovereignty, and undemocratic processes" (p. 34).

Of course, proponents of free trade in general and of the FTAA in particular have a much different opinion about the potential effects of the proposed treaty. In a *Newsweek* article, Zakaria (1999), for example, calls the expansion of free trade "one of Washington's most remarkable acts of global leadership this century" (p. 40), while others have compiled a list of benefits that easily rivals the detractors' compendium of reservations. One report in *Business Week* claims that a free trade zone in the Americas would boost hemisphere-wide growth, give support to lagging Western democracies, and even build a model for global interaction that would emphasize concern for education, democracy and the environment ("The real trade wars", 2001). Still, one cannot ignore the fact that many of the greatest advantages to be gained from the passage of such a treaty are described, even by the FTAA's biggest supporters, as being very much to the liking of the hemisphere's most prosperous and powerful nation. Perhaps the biggest boon to U.S. interests in the treaty's passage, according to news reports, would be the opening up of trade channels between the United States and South American nations. At present, only eight percent of all U.S. trade is aimed at the southern continent ("The real trade wars", 2001), and estimates suggest that America's current \$29 billion a year trade with Brazil alone could triple under the FTAA ("Betting on free trade", 2001).

Opinions about free trade are decidedly divergent - and a wide range of media reports may well be at least partly responsible for the framing of a complex socioeconomic/political problem as a matter of a few simple ideological concepts, and for the polarization of opinions that have resulted from this overly simplistic framing. Documents generated by both sides of the free trade divide have remarked on the disparate collection of people and interests that converged to protest the 1999 World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle, an event that led quite naturally to a similar confluence at Quebec

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City in 2001. Phillips' (2000) *Social Policy* report called the gathered protestors an "in-your-face mobilization of labor unions, environmentalists, liberals, progressives, family farmers, small business owners, and human rights advocates" (p. 34); in contrast, *Time* magazine referred to them as a rag-tag group of protestors supported and even covered by several thousand union members in fear of losing their jobs to free trade ("The new radicals," 2000). Wildly varied as they were in approach and ideology, these opponents were united against a single process - globalization - and its unstated threat to the environment and human rights (Naim, 2000).

Numerous statistical reports and qualitative evaluations of the forces that converged at Seattle and Quebec City suggest that media manipulation prior to the events, as well as the extensive news coverage of the events themselves, may have played a significant role in the escalating violence at both trade summits. An article in *The Ecologist* ("Protestors play the media pipe", 2000), for example, celebrated the protestors' effective use of college radio stations, the Internet, and more traditional poster and billboard campaigns to rally the troops weeks before the Seattle showdown. Additionally, a 60-second advertisement on CNN that aired the day the WTO summit began provided a direct call for free trade opponents to join in the struggle:

Under images of global ecological devastation and frenzied market trading, a voice said:

"Overproduction. Overconsumption. An unregulated global casino. A world awash in chemicals. Let's go to Seattle and put those issues on the WTO agenda" (p. 11).

Of course, such open and widespread appeals to action could not have escaped the notice of WTO organizers. Ernsberger Jr., Woznicki, Meyer and Haskins (1999) note that officials were expecting some 20000 protestors representing more than 1200 non-governmental organizations to converge at the event, and that city police would be assisted by representatives of the FBI, ATF and Secret Service in an attempt to bolster security for the event. Despite such preparations, the handling of para-summit activities was an "unmitigated disaster" (Zakaria, 1999, p. 40). *Time* magazine referred to the fracas as a collection of "40,000 protestors from across the ideological map [who] surrounded, shouted down and roundly embarrassed the assembled representatives of the World Trade Organization" ("The new radicals", 2000, p. 42), whereas in the *Multinational Monitor*, Weissman (1999) reported that alleged mistreatment of those arrested in the protests had led to investigations by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International - and Seattle's own mayor.

Organizers of the Quebec City summit, alerted to the potential hazards by media reports of the goings-on in Seattle, took a more proactive approach to crowd control for the

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FTAA convention. More than 6000 police officers in bulletproof riot gear were deployed around the city, and a 2 ½-mile barrier of concrete blocks and wire mesh was constructed around the buildings scheduled to host various meetings of the summit (Wright, 2001a). Free-trade opponents, having claimed victory for disrupting the Seattle summit two years earlier (Weissman, 1999), responded in predictable fashion to these heightened security efforts: the barrier around the central FTAA complex was quickly dubbed “the Wall of Shame” (Wright, 2001a, p. A8) by protestors, who responded to pre-emptive fusillades of police tear gas and pepper spray with ice balls, sticks, chunks of cement and verbal tirades against the “potential human costs of political and commercial globalization” (Gerstenzang & Kraul, 2001, p. A1).

Responses to the events at both Seattle and Quebec City also point to the media’s influence in framing the issue as one involving decidedly polarized points of view. Naim (2000), for example, suggested that the protesters’ united stand against the concept of globalization had failed to take into account the many benefits of worldwide economic and political cooperation - a sense of global unity, which was celebrated, not so long ago, with the demise of Communism in the East.

“The bricks people collected as souvenirs from the Berlin Wall in 1989 were thrown through the windows of McDonalds in 1999”, Naim wrote, adding that opponents of globalization had unfairly blamed this ambiguous concept for “poverty, inequality, environmental decay, corruption and cultural degradation” (p. 96).

Others have been even more explicit in their condemnation of protesters opposed to what is seen as a largely media-created amalgamation of forces and political views. *Time* magazine suggested that those battling against globalization must be in favour of its opposite; however, “What’s the opposite of globalization? Socialism? Isolationism? Vegetarianism? The answer is all three things, and many more” (“The new radicals”, 2000, p. 43). Similarly, Zakaria (1999) insisted that concerns over human rights and environmental contamination are wrongly directed at those seeking unfettered trade borders. “The purpose of trade agreements is to reduce trade barriers and thus expand economic growth. Period. They do not exist to make the environment safe, give workers health care or make countries democratic. There are other methods, treaties and organizations aimed at pursuing these worthwhile goals” (p. 40). And there was no way for the various news organizations represented in and around Quebec City to deny at least partial responsibility for the crowds gathered outside the central summit cordon: according to Wright (2001b), the number of protestors swelled to 30000 for the second day of the meetings, presumably due to media reports of scattered violence that followed the first day of FTAA discussions, and to news that Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien had denounced the protesters as a “small group of extremists” who were behaving “contrary to the principles of democracy we all hold dear” (Gerstenzang

& Kraul, 2001, p. A1).

While the debate as to the relative merits or drawbacks of free trade continues, then, so too does the United States' open pursuit of the FTAA treaty. Despite more than 400 arrests and injuries to at least 46 police officers and 57 demonstrators, the three-day summit came to an end with President Bush feeling confident about the measure's future (Gerstenzang, 2001). In a nod to the thousands of detractors outside the fortress of meeting halls in Quebec City, the president announced a host of U.S. initiatives designed to ease the transition to a hemispheric free trade zone, including the establishment of such efforts as centres for teaching excellence, an inter-American e-business fellowship programme, and a programme for nations to trade civil servants for a year to promote excellence in government, as well as a strong commitment to labour standards and the environment (Wright, 2001b).

Still, significant opposition from officials both within and without the United States could derail the measure long before the January 1, 2005 deadline for its ratification. Externally, numerous nations have expressed concerns over the FTAA treaty creating even more disparity between rich and poor nations (Wright, 2001b). Brazil in particular is balking, largely over the U.S. refusal to cut subsidies to its farmers, a move which would open up new markets to Brazil's massive surpluses of sugar and produce. Internally, Bush faces opposition from Congress, particularly from the Democrat-controlled Senate, which is not likely to grant him "fast track" authority for the FTAA measure - status that would require the House and Senate to either approve or deny any treaty legislation without amendments. Officials predict that most Western nations will be reluctant to sign a free trade treaty with the U.S. unless Bush is granted such authority, since without it, any measure signed by the nations will be subject to an unending process of adaptation and renegotiation in the halls of the American legislature ("The real trade wars", 2001).

### 3. METHODOLOGY

Fundamentally, qualitative researchers seek to preserve the form and content of human behaviour and to analyze its qualities rather than subject it to mathematical or other formal transformation (Lindlof, 1995). Qualitative methodology considers a variety of analytical means for understanding texts used in the construction of "reality" and the implication of such texts. The "voice" in which the author writes influences how readers imagine a scene and, in this particular case, construct reality. The basic premise of textual analysis is to understand how people think, and consequently act, by studying patterns displayed in their discourse, broadly defined.

Information sharing through mass communication channels can be described as being

in a permanent revolutionary state (McQuail, 2000). That is, the process is simultaneously pre-paradigmatic, quasi-paradigmatic and multiparadigmatic. Consequently, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* greatly impact readers' everyday ways of knowing by influencing their cognitive functionalist and interpretive paradigms. There are various ways of portraying one specific event; the representations depicted involve the notion of selection and salience. Journalists, therefore, select specific aspects of reality to highlight and use a variety of techniques to make certain messages more salient, that is, more noticeable or meaningful. In short, print journalists have the ability to frame for their audience a specific vision of the world. Hence, media professionals are sanctioned by the virtue of their profession, with the ability to set the cognitive parameters for their readers. One of the goals of this article is to call attention to the preset frameworks and parameters established by media's hegemonic strata that limit the reader's cognitive complexity. The ways in which newspapers frame relationships and explain events lie at the heart of this critique.

In analyzing the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, the authors asked specific questions including why did the journalist write this text? That is, what goals might the journalist have sought to accomplish through the writing? In answering this question, the authors generated a list of possible goals. Upon reviewing the text, the authors sought to uncover evidence that specifically supported or undermined each of the goals previously listed. A depiction of the overall agenda of the journalist is provided for the reader by a compilation derived from the authors' reflection upon the completed process. Hence, the authors defend their depiction of the journalists' agenda through identification of specific evidence found in the papers' articles.

This article critiques the framework upon which one's epistemological views are built. Using textual analysis as a technique for describing and interpreting the characteristics of communication texts (newspapers), the authors seek to debunk commonly held viewpoints. Examining communication outputs allows the authors to rely on indirect observation. This unobtrusive methodology is relatively free from contamination by the research procedure. The primary goal of this textual analysis is to describe the characteristics of messages embedded in mediated texts. In essence, the authors seek to examine the phenomenon of reality construction by media outlets.

Any exploration of phenomenology as a research method needs to be set in a wider context of research and what Kuhn (1970) calls a paradigm shift. The research paradigm shift is only part of a larger paradigmatic shift taking place in the Western world. The moves from modernity to post-modernity, from nationalism to globalization, from cultural supremacy of one group over others to the concept of multiculturalism and the acknowledgment of cultural diversity, from an understanding of one faith and its dominance in society to acceptance of multi-faiths, are some of the major changes

taking place in the world in which we live and which we accommodate. A recent paradigm shift has to do with the way knowledge is constructed and created. The authors of this article contend that the "informed public" receives its knowledge through a mediated prism that operates to colour information on pre-ordained, paint-by-numbers schemata. In short, the informed public receives knowledge from a media that reflects the ideology of the political and economic elite with a goal en masse consent.

The authors will analyze newspaper coverage of the Summit of the Americas held on April 20-22, 2001 in Quebec by the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*. Any article and/or editorial piece (focusing on the Summit) appearing in the papers (excluding letters to the editor) from April 1 – April 30, 2001 was coded, classified and analyzed. This sample demonstrates the validity of their opposition to the widely held notion of the U.S. press as an independent, free and objective entity. The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* were selected for this research because of their inter-media agenda setting power. When the news agenda of one medium follows that of another, inter-media agenda setting occurs (Atwater, Fico and Pizante, 1987). The *Times* and the *Post* are both powerful and influential. In fact, Massing (1984) suggests the agenda of network television news is heavily influenced by the coverage of elite newspapers, particularly the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*.

The *New York Daily Times* published its first edition on September 18, 1851, and was seen as "more balanced, reasonable and objective than its rivals and excelled in foreign coverage" (Lovell & Geraci, 1987, p. 58). The *New York Times* has maintained that reputation and has since grown into a powerhouse, which attracts an impressive amount of national advertising revenue. The newspaper boasts three daily editions - the National, the Northeast, and the main Metro edition (Gealogo, 1997); it maintains 16 news bureaus in the New York region, 11 national news bureaus and 26 foreign news bureaus (The New York Times Company, 2001). As one of America's leading newspapers, the *Times* has satellite-to-plant distribution throughout a great deal of the United States (Lovell & Geraci, 1987). The *New York Times* has received 81 Pulitzer Prizes (38 more than any other news organization), and currently has an average weekday circulation of 1.1 million and 1.7 million on Sundays (The New York Times Company, 2001). In 1999, the Audit Bureau of Circulation ranked The *New York Times* third in circulation among all U.S. papers (Editor & Publisher Online, 2001).

The *Washington Post* began publication in 1935 under the tutelage of Eugene Meyer (The Washington Post Company, 2001). The *Washington Post* banked \$12.9 million in revenue between January and May 2001 (The Washington Post Company, 2001). The paper maintains 22 foreign, six national and 12 metropolitan news bureaus, and has an average weekday circulation of nearly 800000 and just over one million on Sunday

(The Washington Post Company, 2001).

In 1999, The *Washington Post* was ranked fifth by the Audit Bureau of Circulation among all U.S. papers (Editor & Publisher Online, 2001).

Data Analysis

From April 1, 2001 to April 30, 2001, the *Washington Post* contained 25 articles covering the Summit of the Americas in Quebec. During the time period, the *New York Times* published 20 articles focusing on the summit.<sup>1</sup> The papers' coverage of the summit revealed that all of the news stories fit within three broad categories: opinion/editorial pieces, protest stories (focusing on demonstrations outside the conference), and political stories related to the proposed FTAA (dealing primarily with the meetings and events occurring within the conference). The textual analysis of the news coverage shows treatment that is overwhelmingly pro-business, pro-globalization, and anti-protester.<sup>2</sup>

### **3.1 Opinion/Editorial Content**

Editorials represent the views of the newspapers while opinion pieces represent the views of the journalists. It is the authors' contention that if these two papers are truly liberal, then an analysis will yield a clear slant towards a pro-labour policy/ideal. This investigation yielded the opposite; in fact, the editorial content of the *Washington Post* reads like an advertorial for corporate interests. Of the six editorials relating to the topic, four make the case for the FTAA pact as unilaterally beneficial. Moreover, the articles ignore, condescend to or even dismiss outright the environmental, labour and human rights issues voiced by the protesters. In his column on April 20, Don Evans writes that "governments have come to understand that knocking down barriers to trade creates the strongest possible engine for economic progress, technical innovation and, ultimately, a higher quality of life . . . Clearly, trade and the conditions that promote foreign commerce are things we want to encourage" (p. A16). He even credits free trade as a tool of democracy, citing NAFTA as the impetus for the election of opposition candidate Vicente Fox in Mexico. Evans, it should be noted, is the Secretary of Commerce for the Bush administration.

The *Post* also serves to marginalize oppositional views on globalization. Michael Kelley's April 25 column refers to protesters as union hacks and states: "the anti-globalization movement is largely the well-intentioned but ill-informed being led around by the ill-intentioned and well informed" (p.A31). While the *Washington Post* devotes ample coverage to the cause of free trade, it merely skims over protester concerns. In an April 24 editorial, the *Post* states: "The finessing of labor and the environment may offend the advocates for those causes, but it shouldn't. The responsible lobbyists in

both camps say they are not against globalization and seek only to influence its character" (p. A22). So, according to the *Post*, opponents of globalization and in particular the FTAA are not responsible human beings. If the editorial page truly reflects a newspaper's ideology, then in the case of the *Post's* editorial coverage of free trade, the newspaper's liberal reputation is unwarranted.

An analysis of the *New York Times* editorial desk's coverage of the Summit yields similar results.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the *New York Times* included an opinion piece by Secretary of State Colin L. Powell, whose pro-Bush, pro-globalization stance was neither balanced (with other viewpoints) nor camouflaged by the paper. In his April 19, 2001 column Powell states, "President Bush and I are optimistic about the future for Americans here at home and in our larger neighborhood". He concludes with the following, "we will work with our neighbors to build a Western Hemisphere of freedom and prosperity—a hemisphere bound together by shared ideals of free trade" (p. A25). The following day (April 20, 2001) the editorial desk of the *Times* continued to disparage any notion contrary to globalization. In a story entitled "The Summit of the Americas" the paper made the following claim, "...trade liberalization and economic globalization offer poor nations the best opportunity for improving their standards of living. There are no models for the notion that less interdependence with the global economy is a recipe for success" (p. A18).

Paul Krugman (April 22) adds a similar view when he asserts that Third World countries desperately need globalization. He ends his commentary with the following: "So who are the bad guys? The activists are getting the images they wanted from Quebec City: leaders sitting inside their fortified enclosure, with thousands of police protecting them from the outraged masses outside. But images can deceive. Many of the people inside that chain-link fence are sincerely trying to help the world's poor. And the people outside the fence, whatever their intentions, are doing their best to make the poor even poorer" (p. A17).

Perhaps the sarcastic lead written by Thomas Friedman on April 24, 2001 best illustrates the *Times's* culpability in the perpetuation of a pro-business "reality", Friedman writes, "I thought about going to the Quebec Summit of the Americas, but I lost my gas mask so I decided to go to Africa instead" (p. A19).

#### Coverage of Protesters

Six of the 25 stories appearing in the *Post* addressed the "Quebec protester". Coverage of demonstrators at the Summit of the Americas ranged from flattering and in-depth to condescending and one-sided. On April 20, Ahrens profiled several American college students who planned to protest in Quebec. He found today's campus activists to be "articulate, techno-savvy, and impressively well-informed" (p. A1). This was, however,

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the only detailed account of protester views and ideology set in a peaceful context. This finding is inconsistent with other findings of protester coverage. One of the most obvious ways in which the deviance of protesters is communicated in the media is through the emphasis on violence. Even news programmes attempt to describe deviations from the norm rather than a slice of daily life (Jeffres, 1997). Media coverage of protests often focuses on the violent actions of a few while ignoring the peaceful actions of the majority of protesters (McLeod, 1995).

The *Post* frequently published accounts of clashes with riot police at the Quebec summit while making reference to the demonstrators as anarchists. While the first two days of the conference were marred by violence, it was not widespread, and it is certainly questionable as to whether the area was the “war zone” described in DeNeen Brown’s April 22<sup>nd</sup> article entitled “Demonstrators Turn Anger on Trade Meetings ‘Wall’”. Brown’s account of the events dramatically recalls the images at “ground zero” of Quebec City’s protests—tear gas, bomb sniffing dogs and motorcades speeding through empty streets. She emphasizes the 85 injured and 150 arrested, while providing only passing mention of the 20000 (other reports estimate upwards of 30000) peaceful demonstrators in the city at the same time. Nearly 99 per cent of the protesters marched peacefully, yet the relative handful of rebellious and violent protesters received the majority of media attention. While violent protests are certainly worthy of detailed coverage, the *Washington Post* failed to provide proper context regarding this small group of troublemakers within a large group of peaceful demonstrators.

Similarly, the *Times’* coverage of the “protester” was lacking in both quantity and quality of balance. Anthony DePalma wrote three of the *Times’* four stories devoted to the coverage of the Quebec protester. DePalma polarizes the movement and its activists by depicting the protesters as either genuine but naïve or calculating paid union activists.

Michael Weinstein (2001) examines similarities of the WTO protester and the Quebec protester in his article “The World: Greens and Globalization; Declaring Defeat in the Face of Victory”. Weinstein opens his article with the following:

REMEMBER all those protesters dressed up as sea turtles and carrying pictures of dolphins as they railed against the World Trade Organization in Seattle in 1999? Well, the W.T.O.-bashers are back, this time in Quebec, where President George W. Bush and 33 other heads of state are gathered this weekend to reaffirm a 2005 deadline for creating a free-trade zone stretching from Canada to Argentina. And once again their target is a global bogeyman that the Humane Society of the United States, speaking for animals, has labeled “the single most destructive international organization ever formed” (A18).

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This condescending view of the protester is one that permeates the paper's coverage of the Summit.

### 3.2 Coverage of Politics

While the protesters warranted only six articles in the *Washington Post*, the paper devoted 13 stories (approximately half) to the politics of the Summit of the Americas and the activities and goals of the 34 national leaders who attended. Of the 20 articles appearing in the *Times*, half dealt specifically with the political aspects of the Summit. There was very little difference in the way in which either paper reported on the political aspects of the Summit. That is, both papers provided a thorough explanation of the issues at hand while simultaneously espousing the goals of the Bush administration for the conference. The journalists at both papers repeatedly lauded the efforts of the world leaders to create a borderless hemisphere where free trade could provide an opportunity for economic empowerment of its citizens. While doing so, the journalists often failed to illustrate any converse views. These papers created for their readers a constructed reality that reinforces the notion that this agreement is important because it will expand free trade, which will in turn spread prosperity and freedom throughout the region.

Journalists from both papers failed to assess Cuba's exclusion from the Summit critically. In short, the U.S. grants "economic empowerment" only to those neighbours who embrace a U.S. ideology. Though the Summit represented Bush's first opportunity to address an international delegation, both papers often quote him as an authoritative figure in free trade and globalization. Other nations' leaders were virtually excluded from press coverage save for Mexico's Vicente Fox and Canada's Jean Chretien, longtime trade partners with the U.S. under NAFTA.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Unfortunately, the notions of balance and fairness seemed to elude both the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* with regard to their coverage of the Summit of the Americas. This is particularly unnerving as both publications maintain exemplary reputations within the industry and with their readers. This analysis indicates that the papers ran only half as many stories about demonstrators as they did about the politicians. In addition, the political stories went into great detail about the benefits of free trade as extolled by the Bush administration, whose representatives were frequently quoted at length; demonstrators, on the other hand, were antagonized, marginalized and dismissed as tree-hugging fanatics or violent troublemakers.

One might expect a liberal newspaper to report on stories concerning big business and



profit-motivated politics with great skepticism. Indeed, a liberal media would be cognizant of, and even advocates for, labour issues and the environment. This study found the *Times* and *Post* to be exactly the opposite, with the only real anti-globalization rhetoric coming from readers in the form of Letters to the Editor. The *New York Times* published eight letters, and six were critical of the paper's coverage of the FTAA.<sup>4</sup> On April 24<sup>th</sup> the *Times* published a letter from Mark Krumholz of El Cerrito, California. He voices his concern in the following passage, "Environmentalists object not just to specific WTO rulings but to a system where corporations get two chances to block environmental labor laws: once in a country's ordinary legislative process and a second time before a WTO trade appeals panel" (p. A18). He further questions why appeals panel hearings are closed to mass media and the public.

Luther Vanummersen of Philadelphia notes that "The protesters in the streets of Quebec City were clamoring for justice. We were not denouncing globalization outright. We are simply speaking out for environmental protections and basic workers' rights because history shows us that without these protections, corporate globalists will not exercise those wise restraints that set people free" (p. A22).

The authors' assessment suggests that both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* rely on a non-critical, non-evaluative workforce to perpetuate capitalism, status quo, and ultimately, media hegemony. The only voice of dissent to the *Times*' static coverage comes from a few readers who dare to question the paper's authority. The challenge to the reality constructed by a small number of media owners comes from disgruntled readers, not from "liberal" reporters or the editorial staff. In essence, these readers represent the sole opportunity to alter a preset reality that forces readers to accept a prescription for big business and unilateral trade without questioning its potentially harmful influence on human rights and environmental issues.

It is the authors' belief that the term "globalization" denotes a two-way symmetrical flow of production and ideas between and among trade partners. The authors further assert that the current use of the term "globalization" represents a misnomer. The FTAA promotes Westernization as opposed to globalization; that is, it promotes a process whereby developing nations are expected to adopt and adapt to Western ideals of capitalism and commercialism.

<sup>1</sup> At least 51 per cent of an article must be allocated to specific coverage of the Summit of the Americas to be included in this analysis.

<sup>2</sup> This ideology is hardly indicative of a paper with alleged liberal leanings.

<sup>3</sup> The *New York Times* also published six editorial pieces focusing on the Summit.

<sup>4</sup> The *Washington Post* did not publish any Letters to the Editor about the Summit of the Americas

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