

VII - The Electronic Media

"One of the basic troubles with radio and television news is that both instruments have grown up as an incompatible combination of show business, advertising and news. Each of the three is a rather bizarre and demanding profession. And when you get all three under one roof, the dust never settles."

Edward R. Murrow

Murrow's comments of almost twenty years ago still apply to an American system of broadcast media unique in the Western industrialized world. Regulated by the Federal Communications Commission, the vast majority of radio and television stations are privately owned. Although connected via a complex structure of regional and national news and entertainment networks, they have been able to thrive as local communications centers.

U.S. broadcast statistics are awesome. There are almost twice as many radios in the U.S. as people. Virtually every household has at least one working radio and there are an additional 104 million car radios which are turned on well over half the driving time. Stations compete fiercely for the captive audience of "drive time".

More than half of all Americans over 18 get their morning news first from radio, and identify it as their primary news source during the day.

At 6 p.m. television becomes America's primary news source. As with radio, news is transmitted instantly and the visual dimension is added. Events that have been developing during the day, stories that have been described in twenty-second bursts on radio newscasts now unfold in as many as 71.5 million