

Television News Coverage of the Developing World

A Case Study on America's news coverage on Haiti

Alisha Laventure

INTRODUCTION

Every day, millions of men, women and children living in the Third World become victims of famine, disease and corrupt governments, yet citizens of wealthier nations live their lives oblivious to such privation. However, when the news fails to mention the gross inequalities of our world, then for millions, it is as if such inequality does not exist. In this context, television news serves as a window to the world. Every evening, millions of Americans gather in front of their television sets to watch the news, trusting that the person on the screen informs them of the most noteworthy and urgent occurrences in our world. Third World poverty is of such import.

Regrettably, America's television news coverage of international affairs has dropped significantly since 1990. This downward trend in coverage renders Americans increasingly ignorant of the condition of poverty beyond their borders. Impoverished persons who live outside of the United States comprise approximately 75 percent of the global population. Moreover, while the quantity of international news has dropped among television news, so has the quality of coverage. Television as a news source has been largely criticized of superficial coverage that fails to report much that ought to be known. This is one of several criticisms made by scholars, as well as countries featured in the news.

The news might not tell us what to think, but it tells us what to think about. Of all mass media, television is the most influential because images carry more influence in shaping public

opinion than words.¹ Using Haiti as a case study, this paper will compare television coverage of international affairs between the leading public (PBS), network (NBC, ABC CBS) and cable (FOX, CNN) television news sources during their primetime or evening broadcasts. I have chosen to use Haiti for two reasons: it is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, and the United States has been Haiti's largest donor of foreign aid over the past three decades. The study will examine coverage over a 5-year period starting from January 1, 2004 through December 31, 2008. I will then address common criticisms of television and determine trends in the amount of news content devoted to Haiti, as well as the depth, consistency and merit of coverage of the country's affairs. I will reference the writings of Thomas Pogge in assessing the merit of coverage. Finally, I will suggest remedies to improve the state of America's television coverage of international news.

Washington and Lee University

UNDESTANDING OUR TELEVISION NEWS SOURCES

Generally speaking all media are sources and generators of news. They filter and frame the issues, they contextualize the problem and they set the political agenda. They create both a consciousness and a conscience about the world in which we live. Television is the most global of media mass media in the United States. Ninety-nine percent of American households have at least one television; the majority of households have more than one.² It is well established that image carries more influence in shaping public opinion than words.³ Accordingly, television is recognized as 'authoritative' and trustworthy.

¹ Paterson, Chris A., and Annabelle Sreberny. International News in the 21st Century. Eastleigh: Published by John Libbey Pub. for University of Luton Press, 2004. p.48.

² Herr, Norman. The Source book for Teaching Science. 2007. 13 Apr 2009.
<http://www.csun.edu/science/health/docs/tv&health.html>

³ Paterson, Chris A., and Annabelle Sreberny. International News in the 21st Century. Eastleigh: Published by John Libbey Pub. for University of Luton Press, 2004. p 48.

Television news in the U.S. comes from three different sources: network television and cable television, both of which comprise commercial news, and public television. Commercial outlets provide content that attracts a large audience and is funded by advertising and sponsorship. Those who watch cable news pay a subscription fee to do so. Public television is funded by the government and freely available to anyone who owns a television. However, it has a far smaller role in the United States than in most other countries (Appendix A). Research shows Americans get most of their evening news from the 30-minute nightly news segments of the “Big Three” television networks: the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), the American Broadcasting Company (ABC), and the Columbian Broadcasting System (CBS) respectively. Prime-time news is more narrowly focused and attracts the most viewers. It features each channel’s best-known talent and most sharply defines the personalities of the channels.⁴ Cable news’ “Big Three” companies are the Fox News Channel, most commonly referred to as FOX, the Cable News Network, (CNN) and the MicroSoft National Broadcasting Company (MSNBC) respectively. The primary difference between cable and network news is cable news relies more on outside news agencies such as Reuters and the Associated Press (AP) for information than network news. The Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) and American Public Television (ATP) are the major sources of publically funded news for Americans. While PBS is more preferred among public news viewers, ATP is the largest television syndication distributor of programming for public television in the United States.

(FOREIGN) COVERAGE AND AUDIENCE DEMOGRAPHICS BETWEEN NEWS SOURCE VARIETIES

Public news v. Commercial news

⁴ The State of the News Media: An Annual Report on American Journalism. 2006. 12 Apr. 2009.
<http://journalims.org>.

The NewsHour has been a staple of public broadcasting since 1983. Compared with viewers of network news and cable news, those watching the NewsHour on PBS tend to be more educated and have higher incomes, according to survey data by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. Slightly more than 34% of NewsHour viewers have a college degree. That compares to 23% of network evening news viewers, 28% of cable news viewers and 28% of Americans in general.⁵ NewsHour viewers also tend to have higher incomes. About 30% of NewsHour viewers make \$75,000 or more, compared with 24% of network news viewers, 19% for cable news, and 27% for Americans generally. However, reports from the Pew Research Center's Annual Report on American Journalism show that NewsHour routinely draws about one-fifth of the ratings the average commercial network news program each weekday night. An estimated 23 million U.S. residents watch the 22 minutes of evening news the three networks broadcast on an average weekday evening. Although cable news - including CNN, Fox News and MSNBC - has made important gains in the number of viewers who watch them, the audience for the network news is still roughly 10 times larger.

Nevertheless, it is clear that public news has more of a focus on international affairs than network news (Appendix B). Almost a quarter (23%) of the news on PBS was devoted to foreign affairs – both those that directly involved the U.S. and those that did not. Foreign affairs only accounted for about 13 percent of the content on the three network newscasts. Other than Iraq, the war in Afghanistan, the cyclone in Myanmar, the turmoil inside Pakistan, the elections in Zimbabwe and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict all made the NewsHour's top-10 roster of stories in 2008. With the exception of Iraq and Afghanistan, none of the remaining topics were on that list on the commercial networks' nightly programs. In fact, the amount of foreign coverage on

⁵ The State of the News Media: An Annual Report on American Journalism. 2006. 12 Apr. 2009.
<http://journalims.org>.

commercial newscasts dropped from 24 percent in 2007 to 11 percent last year. This is largely attributed to the 2008 presidential election.

Network news V. Cable news

When The Pew Research Center compared network and cable news, it also found that the Big Three network half-hour evening newscasts as a group continue to attract bigger audiences, claiming twice as many viewers as the average prime-time cable audience.⁶ However, foreign-related news coverage by the three major U.S. television networks fell to a record low during 2008, according to the latest annual review of network news coverage by the authoritative Tyndall Report.⁷

Among the three leading cable news providers, FOX news had the highest ratings during primetime newscasts (Appendix C). However, a look at the top stories featured on both commercial news outlets shows that cable news' FOX has had the highest ratings during primetime newscasts from January 2004 - December 2008. There were distinctions among the three major cable channels themselves in prime-time news judgment. Fox News, for example, tended to focus more on crime, while CNN covered more immigration than the others. The most glaring differences, though, stemmed largely from virtually wall-to-wall coverage of the presidential election by one cable channel, MSNBC.

Coverage of overseas events generally accounted for just 7% of the cable prime time studied. That is less than half of all international news across all media. (Appendix D). The deadly Mumbai attacks that terrorized India, however, comprised more of cable's news compared to all other news media. It generated more coverage in primetime cable than any other

⁶ The State of the News Media: An Annual Report on American Journalism. 2006. 12 Apr. 2009.
<http://journalims.org>.

⁷ The State of the News Media: An Annual Report on American Journalism

sector. As far as news quality, the Pew Research Center discovered in network news a certain thoroughness and precision of reporting not seen in cable news—a characteristic it largely attributes to a reliance on taped and edited correspondent packages as the core of the nightly newscast.

For the purposes of this study, it is important to reiterate the following trends in evening network news viewers: network news is the preferred news source for most Americans public news, yet public news' content features a greater amount of international news. While the audience of public news tends to be more educated, the audience of evening network news is younger and larger. Keeping in mind the size of the audiences, one could argue that the youth factor of network news' audience makes it more impactful than public news.

CRITICISMS OF TELEVISION NEWS MEDIA

The world of market-driven broadcast media is increasingly characterized by battles for ratings, fostering television networks to reorient their editorial priorities. News about developing countries is usually one of the first casualties - unless it concerns 'humanitarian interventions' of course.⁸ Perhaps the most controversial of all commercial news criticisms is that media decision-makers have succumbed to the economic factors and homogenizing pressures of globalization. As a result, giant transnational corporations mandate orders from above to seek news that is profitable. Commercial television is broadcast for profit. There is a built-in discrimination against news events that cannot be 'sold,' resulting in a distorted presentation of events 'to make them more marketable.' Media clients argue their viewers are not very interested in foreign news.

⁸ Paterson, Chris A., and Annabelle Sreberny. International News in the 21st Century. Eastleigh: Published by John Libbey Pub. for University of Luton Press, 2004. p 47-48.

Yet critiques say Americans are uninformed about the world because their news media report so little about it.⁹

Proponents of public television argue the original mandate to provide universal access, particularly to rural viewers and those who cannot afford to pay for the private television services, remains vital. As they are publicly funded, they don't owe as many allegiances to large companies as commercial networks. Unfortunately however, they are largely failing in reaching the masses.

Once the corporate giants determine what brings them the most revenue, television networks throw their resources and considerable talents into high-profile, sexy stories about scandal and celebrity. The sensationalism of such “news” as White House sex scandals and the O.J. Simpson trial essentially means the neglect of foreign news. During the Simpson trial in 1994 and 1995, interest in foreign news plummeted. However, CNN audiences soared when it provided “gavel-to-gavel” coverage of the trial.¹⁰ Throughout 1990s, NBC, ABC and CBS more than halved their foreign coverage.¹¹ Moreover, foreign correspondents are unevenly distributed around the world. One study found that over one-half of all American reporters abroad were stationed in 19 European countries.¹²

A second criticism of television news deals with the principle of negativity. Poorer nations claim there is very little “development journalism,” or attention paid to achievements of countries under extreme conditions. Such achievements would include the work of local groups,

⁹ Hachten, William A., and Harva Hachten. The World News Prism: Changing Media of International Communication. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1999. p 133.

¹⁰ Malek, Abbas, and Anandam P. Kavoori. The Global Dynamics of News: Studies in International News Coverage and News Agenda. Contemporary studies in international political communication. Stamford, Conn: Ablex Pub, 2000. p. 49.

¹¹ Paterson, Chris A., and Annabelle Sreberny. International News in the 21st Century. Eastleigh: Published by John Libbey Pub. for University of Luton Press, 2004. p 42.

¹² *Ibid.* p. 43.

everyday courage and energy, inventiveness and solidarity of people.¹³ Instead, most of the coverage ends up being superficial coverage of such events as hurricanes and tsunamis. This is the third and most prevalent critique of all television news – that there is a one-sided emphasis on “crisis reporting” when reporting on the Third World. Extensive coverage of natural disasters such as hurricanes, earthquakes, war, violence and terrorism are all examples of crisis reporting. Disaster coverage depends very much on who is affected and where they live or have lived. John Mutter contends that almost regardless of the death toll, disasters in remote parts of the world hold media attention for only a short time unless, like the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, they affect tourist resorts.¹⁴

Jaap van Ginneken holds the view that coverage of disasters by the media is selective and arbitrary.¹⁵ He argues that they essentially ‘create’ a disaster on the air waves because it is these stories that are susceptible to sensationalism. While live television coverage has, at least, given a human face to disasters, van Ginneken maintains, “There is no news genre that is more ahistorical than [live news].” The “live” news report is really a summary of events that have already happened before the reporter got there. At best, raw emotions outdo rational analysis. At worst, we see images that seem to make no sense at all: explosions, screaming people lying on the ground bleeding; the accompanying commentary clarifies.¹⁶” In the case of war, such stories

¹³ Malek, Abbas, and Anandam P. Kavoori. The Global Dynamics of News: Studies in International News Coverage and News Agenda. Contemporary studies in international political communication. Stamford, Conn: Ablex Pub, 2000. p. 49

¹⁴ Mutter, John C. "Preconditions of Disaster: Premonitions of Tragedy." Social Research 75.3 (Fall2008 2008): 691-724. Academic Search Complete. EBSCO. [Library name], [City], [State abbreviation]. 30 Mar. 2009 p. 691.

¹⁵ Ginneken, Jaap van. Understanding Global News: A Critical Introduction. London: Sage, 1998. p 10.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 11.

are usually not of interest to the U.S. unless American lives – soldiers or terrorism victims – are at stake.¹⁷

Though disasters are far more devastating in human terms for the people who are not like us and live in remote countries (and do not have camcorders), they receive far less media attention than those nearby, especially those that directly impact the United States.¹⁸ As Gibbon noted, "Our sympathy is cold to the relation of distant misery."¹⁹ Most of the remaining coverage is devoted to athletics or Westerners visiting these regions.²⁰ The irony is that in seeking to grab the attention of audiences by sensationalizing natural disasters and violent wars in the Third World, editors and producers foster negative attitudes towards the developing world that ultimately reduce audience interest in the long run.²¹

When it comes to reporting on these far and distant regions, foreign news adheres less strictly to objectivity than foreign news, which brings us to a fourth criticism of television news media: International news is often presented from a purely national perspective.²² International journalists are seldom encouraged by their editors to probe how the situation at hand developed, how the event in question is related to its socio-economic and political environment, or to explore alternate viewpoints. American news media tend to hew closer to the State Department line on foreign news than to the White House line on domestic news.²³ Accordingly, news reports relay accounts in simple terms of "good" and "bad." This becomes especially

¹⁷ Malek, Abbas, and Anandam P. Kavoori. The Global Dynamics of News: Studies in International News Coverage and News Agenda. Contemporary studies in international political communication. Stamford, Conn: Ablex Pub, 2000. p. 51.

¹⁸ Mutter, John C. "Preconditions of Disaster: Premonitions of Tragedy." Social Research 75.3 (Fall2008 2008): 691-724. Academic Search Complete. EBSCO. 30 Mar. 2009. p. 692.

¹⁹ Ibid p .692.

²⁰ Paterson, Chris A., and Annabelle Sreberny. International News in the 21st Century. Eastleigh: Published by John Libbey Pub. for University of Luton Press, 2004. p 202.

²¹ Ibid. p. 222

²² Ginneken, Jaap van. Understanding Global News: A Critical Introduction. London: Sage, 1998. p. 26.

²³ Ibid. p. 26.

troublesome when good and bad are determined by the United States' personal interests. To construct a black and white world where the good guys clash with the bad guys only hampers mutual understanding, negotiation and compromise between countries.

One explanation for these distorted depictions of foreign political news is because of what Pogge calls common nationalism, a fifth critique of television news. There is a strong tendency of delegitimizing anti-Western heads of State or government by not acknowledging their formal title.²⁴ An example would be to refer to Fidel Castro simply as Fidel Castro, without acknowledging his title of president of the country. This is done because our representatives in international negotiations do not consider the interests of the global poor as part of their mandate. They seek to shape each agreement in the best interests of the American people, as well as American corporations.²⁵ Explanatory nationalism ultimately makes us look at poverty and oppression as problems whose root causes and possible solutions are the priorities of the foreign countries in which they occur.²⁶ Ultimately, nationalism has the potential to distort cultural conceptions of both the U.S. and countries reported on in American news media.

It is important to acknowledge the criticisms made about television news media because they all give rise to shoddy international coverage. While media companies invest heavily in reshaping the political and legal landscape in their own image, they spend less money on jobs, less money on training their staff and less money on research and investigative journalism. Driven by new technologies and the lure of lucrative mass markets, media owners are themselves guilty of upsetting the balance of interest between journalism as an instrument of democracy and its exploitation as a tradable commodity.²⁷

²⁴ Ibid. p.107.

²⁵ Pogge, Thomas. World Poverty and Human Rights. 2007. p. 27.

²⁶ Ibid. p.147.

²⁷ <http://www.conflictrecovery.org/bin/ichrp-media-2002.pdf>

In an effort to keep revenue up and costs down, news networks rely more and more on news films provided by syndicates and other foreign broadcasters for international coverage. A few years ago, an international news story reported on, say, NBC News, chances are it was reported by an NBC reporter with an NBC crew. Networks are relying more and more on less expensive, often less experienced, freelancers and independent contractors whose products are rarely identified as such on air.²⁸ The less costly ways of collecting news have undermined the credibility of some foreign news.

When such criticisms of television news media prove to be true, then international news coverage as a whole suffers. Rather than informing the American public of events that are of true import, such events that may encourage action by the U.S. government and interest groups to actually change in some way the condition of Third World countries, such events that desperately seek the attention of the greater world, they are underreported, if not reported on at all. Moreover, the changing perception of news as a product rather than a reflection of the world around us diminish the quality of reportage.

DETERMINING THE LEVEL OF DISCOURSE

There are three stages to the flow of communication. The first is *selection* - how some events, issues or parts of the world receive attention. *Presentation* is how particular issues or items of information are framed. Finally, *effects* are the impact on the public of particular stories or media events.²⁹ Most journalists would agree that the imperatives of journalism are truth-telling, independence, and a consciousness of the impact their words and images have on society. When the flow of communication applies to news, what matters above all else is whether or not a

²⁸ Hachten, William A., and Harva Hachten. The World News Prism: Changing Media of International Communication. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1999. p. 132.

²⁹ Cohen. *Publicity: Getting into the Media.*, in Cohen, 1995, pp. 89-116.

story constitutes news: new, unexpected, affecting current affairs both large and small.³⁰ The challenge television news stations face, however, is communicating news in such a way that is relevant and interesting to their consumers of news.

So when news media cover issues of poverty, do they simply report what is obvious? Or does it seek to address the root of the problem? Do reporters make the effort to explain the complexities and origins of international poverty with respect to the country in which they report? Who do journalists hold accountable from the problems about which they report in that country? Do they dig deep enough until they discover the underlying institutions that contribute to the state of poverty in that region?

A majority of non-western governments act as gatekeepers, screening news in and out of the country. These political controls, in addition to poverty and illiteracy, deprive a great majority of the world population from learning of the mere occurrence of major current news. News flow is vertical, from the more developed countries in the Northern hemisphere to lesser developed countries in the Southern hemisphere. When people live in countries where information is withheld from the masses, they turn to outside news outlets like those of the United States, to learn about affairs concerning their own country. Those countries that are in the process of developing their television news medium look to the United States as an example for news gathering. The “American influence” is most profound among broadcasters. Thus, U.S. television news serves as an example to Third-World countries that continue to adopt American methods of news production.³¹ For this additional reason, it is important for American television coverage to be complete and thorough.

³⁰ Website PDF p. 28.

³¹ Hachten, William A., and Harva Hachten. The World News Prism: Changing Media of International Communication. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1999. P. 129.

German philosopher Thomas Pogge has written extensively on political philosophy, cosmopolitanism, and, more recently, extreme poverty. In his book, *World Poverty and Human Rights*, he argues that few realize severe poverty is an ongoing harm we inflict upon the global poor. He contests that if more of us understood the true magnitude of the problem of poverty and our causal involvement in it, we might do what is necessary to eradicate it. More importantly, he challenges the common assertion that affluent countries like the United States and the global economic order sustained by them are not substantial contributors to life-threatening poverty.³²

Pogge contends that in conducting our foreign policy and shaping the global order, we have a moral collective responsibility to acknowledge the global poverty. His interpretation of moral cosmopolitanism asserts that every human being has a global stature as an ultimate unit of moral concern. Therefore, each person has a duty toward *every* other not to take part in imposing an unjust institutional order upon her, even while this general duty triggers obligations only towards those to whom one has actually made a promise.³³

Accordingly, I am inclined to believe that Pogge would expect journalists, particularly those who are heavily involved in foreign correspondence, to conduct their work with the underlying goal of improving the condition of the developing world given the potential of news media to inform. Furthermore, while journalists oblige themselves to principles of objectivity and impartiality when reporting, Pogge would agree that doing so would contribute to the preservation of global poverty. Thus, in fulfilling one's moral obligation to society, Pogge would necessitate journalists to consider consistently the following questions:

1. What is the quality international news coverage?
2. What level of discourse is the media engaged in when covering international poverty?

³² Pogge, Thomas. *World Poverty and Human Rights*. 2007. P 32.

³³ Pogge, Thomas. *World Poverty and Human Rights*. 2007. p. 175-177.

3. How can coverage be improved to benefit populations of poor nations?

CASE STUDY – TELEVISION COVERAGE OF HAITI FROM 2004-2008

The Vanderbilt Television News Archive holds over 835,000 records of segments broadcasted on leading public and commercial news networks in the United States from 1968 to the present. A search on “Haiti” produced 230 occasions on which the country was featured in the evening newscasts of ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN, FOX, MSNBC, PBS, C-SPAN from January 2004 to December 2008, (this figure excludes the occasions on which Haiti was mentioned unintentionally during 11 presidential press conferences). Coverage was dominated entirely by commercial news. PBS, the only public network included in the search, devoted no coverage to Haiti during this time. Between cable’s “Big Three” networks – FOX, CNN and MSNBC, MSNBC also featured no coverage of Haiti. The only networks that covered Haiti during the 5-year period were NBC, ABC, CBS, FOX and CNN.

Haiti was most prevalent in American evening news in 2004, during which time reportage was dominated by tropical storm coverage and civil unrest, which eventually led to the arrest and exile of Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. During the 5-year period, coverage of Haiti steadily declined from 2004-2007, reflective of television’s downward trend in international news reportage. However, coverage more than doubled in 2008, largely because of a series of hurricanes that devastated multiple Caribbean countries after having left southern states in the U.S ravished.

Coverage of Haiti in 2004 comprises nearly 75 percent of all coverage during the 5-year period. Overall, FOX provided the most continuous, day-to-day coverage of political conflict and civil unrest. From 2/13 and 3/10, FOX devoted a daily minimum of 20 seconds to Haitian unrest.

It was the only station to report on Haiti from 3/16- 3/25. Coverage was a combination of brief mention within larger reports to two-minute packages exclusively discussing Haiti. CNN featured Haiti on 38 occasions in 2004 – only one less instance than FOX – but provided more thorough coverage than FOX. The longest stint of coverage FOX ever devoted to was 4:50; that of CNN included 6-minute, 8- minute and 12-minute broadcasts of coverage devoted exclusively to Haiti. ABC reported on Haiti 37 times and tended to focus more on the political occurrences of the country. Unlike FOX and CNN however, ABC produced two, 30-minute segments focusing in-depth on crisis and rebellion in Haiti. In addition to this special programming, its day-to-day coverage of Haiti ranged from 20-second blurbs to 7-minute segments. NBC's coverage of Haiti devoted longer segments of coverage, though less often than the previously mentioned networks. Finally, CBS' coverage lacked in-depth, extended coverage during the events of this year.

Between 2004 and 2005, evening news coverage of Haiti dropped by 92 percent. The country was featured on only 14 occasions as opposed to the 173 occasions of the previous year. Hurricane coverage was the topic of most segments with intermittent mention of violence and social disorder throughout the year. CNN provided the most varied news content, as well as the most quantity of coverage, followed by FOX. ABC and CBS each featured Haiti only once during their evening newscasts for 2005. Both reports discussed tropical storms. NBC provided no evening coverage of Haiti that year.

Overall coverage of Haiti in 2006 was even less than the previous year, featured on 11 instances. FOX provided two accounts of political conflict, one account of a national celebration and one instance of violence. CNN, ABC and CBS each featured Haiti on two occasions with CBS providing the most diverse content. NBC made one reference to Haiti regarding its

HIV/AIDS statistics. In 2007, CNN and ABC were the only networks to cover Haiti. ABC's news content was more varied than of CNN, whose coverage only discussed tropical storms.

Coverage of Haiti picked up in 2008 however, focusing almost exclusively on nearby hurricanes. ABC provided the greatest quantity and diversity of news coverage, ranging in content from hurricanes to famine to political climate. Moreover, ABC broadcasted a 30-minute segment on child slavery and was the only network to have done such a special report. NBC provided the next best coverage, though its coverage often lacked depth. Any coverage offered by CNN and CBS only discussed hurricanes. FOX did no reports on Haiti during its nighttime segments.

After evaluating the news content, quantity of news, depth of coverage and regularity of coverage on Haiti for each network, I conclude that by and large, ABC provided the best coverage of network news and CNN for cable news. The Pew Research Center determined that in 2008, the average CNN package in 2008 ran for 2 minutes and 45 seconds, compared with 2 minutes and 25 seconds on Fox. Lest those differences seem relatively minor, 20 seconds is a significant chunk of time in television that can be used for more detailed reports.³⁴ Unfortunately, there was, and still is, much more that desperately requires extensive reportage from these leading networks.

For starters, the 80 percent of Haiti's population lives below the poverty line. Of all countries in the western hemisphere, Haiti has the highest death rate, the highest infant mortality rate and the least developed economy. Half the population can be categorized as "food insecure," and half of all Haitian children are undersized as a result of malnutrition. According to the United Nations World Food Programme, less than half the population has access to clean

³⁴The State of the News Media: An Annual Report on American Journalism. 2006. 12 Apr. 2009.
<http://journalims.org>.

drinking water, a rate that compares poorly even with other less-developed nations. It also has the highest incidence of HIV/AIDS outside of Africa. Annually, 5,000 Haitian babies are born infected with HIV, causing a fifth of all infant deaths. Abuses against women and children are common, and arbitrary and political killings, kidnapping, disappearances, torture, and unlawful arrest and incarceration are common unofficial practices, especially during periods of coups or attempted coups. More than 40 percent of the population is under the age of 15, only 3 percent age 65 and older/³⁵

In actuality, it is not the natural disasters or global, systematic factors that cause severe poverty in countries like Haiti. Rather, it is the flawed national economic regimes and corrupt, oftentimes incompetent elites responsible for national growth who fail miserably to operate the country in a constructive way.³⁶ It is this contextual information that makes such events as hurricanes remotely newsworthy - because Haiti currently suffers such devastation, a hurricane further menaces an already fragile country trying desperately to carry on. Failing to include Haiti's current condition when reporting on a tropical storm tells Americans nothing about the enormity of such a storm. Accordingly, American viewers are not moved to act when told of such destruction.

Interestingly enough, the United States is intricately connected to Haiti's history of poverty. It is also significantly financially vested in helping to relieve Haiti's poverty at present. For almost two centuries, the U.S. repressed and exploited the people of Haiti immediately after the island country gained its independence. Americans exploited all of Haiti's natural resources for the United States' own benefit and left the country barren without the infrastructure necessary for economic development.

³⁵ Library of Congress – Federal Research Division.

³⁶ Pogge, Thomas. *World Poverty and Human Rights*. 2007. p 116.

Since 1973 however, the U.S. has been Haiti's largest donor. Between 1995 and 2003, the United States contributed more than US\$850 million to Haiti's development. It also pledged in 2004 an additional US\$230 million in aid through 2006.³⁷ Whether or not this money was given to Haiti remains unknown as far as television news is concerned. Again, broadcasting the numbers of dollars the United States annually contributes to Haiti is only half the story. The true story is that while although monetary aid has temporarily eased suffering in Haiti, it has utterly failed to change Haiti's developmental trajectory in the past.³⁸ This interesting piece of information is rarely, if ever, included in reports on Haiti by American television newscasts. Essentially, rigorous content analysis of all news reports on Haiti would conclude that news networks are guilty of nearly all criticisms made about television news.

Considering the dreadful conditions in which the people of Haiti live, the history between Haiti and the U.S. and the U.S.'s financial investments in the country's advancement, reporters have ample opportunity to depict the country's plight should they find it newsworthy. However, the case study on Haiti revealed that coverage of the country in American television does manage to make it into our evening news reports, but not for the most significant reasons. In fact, the study shows that the medium is largely guilty of sensational journalism, a focus on negative occurrences in the country and accounts of that favor the U.S. in its relations with Haiti.

Pogge criticizes nations such as The United States of willful blindness, or reluctance as a nation to see ourselves casually connected to severe poverty. However, can he really accuse a nation like the U.S. of such blindness when the sources they trust to inform them of what goes on in the world fall short in doing their job? For this reason, examination of our news coverage is important to the prospects of nations like Haiti comprising the Third World.

³⁷ Library of Congress – Federal Research Division.

³⁸ Library of Congress – Federal Research Division.

AMENDING THE CURRENT STATE OF U.S. TELEVISION NEWS

While several criticisms of television news have proven to be true, the efforts made to incorporate international news into their broadcasts are commendable. The reality is the world is just too large to report on every occurrence in every country that warrants news coverage. Albeit, television news has succeeded in providing a porthole to poverty in the Third World. Still, there are several ways in which reporters can revise certain aspects of the newsgathering process and their overall journalistic ideology that can have a greater impact on their audience, as well as those on whom they report.

In the pursuit of better quality international news, foreign correspondents need to be reminded of their role as reporters. They must be aware of who they serve, what they seek and why they report. Journalists need to reacquaint themselves with what it means to be serious about their profession. In doing so, Pogge suggests journalists consider the following:

- How do my actions affect the developing nations on which I report?
- What am I as a provider of information, along with the elites of the nations I report in, doing to improve these countries?
- Rather than seeing my function as helping the poor, I must determine my function to be exposing the injustices suffered by these people that will encourage institutional reforms and eliminate the need for costly, feeble remedial measures.³⁹

While Pogge advocates for journalists to actively report in pursuit of mitigating poverty, this is not the true role of a journalists, nor does it uphold principles of independence and objectivity by which all journalists should abide. The function of a news organization is to obtain, verify and make news known. Journalists may be morally concerned with the abuses they

³⁹ Pogge, Thomas. World Poverty and Human Rights. 2007. p.30.

uncover, but it is not up to them to determine what to do. Their real priority is to understand and improve what is *done* with this information. Still, journalists may think anew about how media play the human rights story and, for that matter, how media serve a changing world. As the international community launches a fierce and protracted battle without borders, there could be no better time for such reflection. Both journalists and rights activists have good reason to make common cause in defense of accurate information, thoughtful global communication and independent journalism.

Once journalists recognize their worth in the global sphere, they need distinctive training in the process of foreign correspondence. Networks should invest in training programs to teach journalists how to improve their professional competence. To improve accuracy, journalists must be sufficiently familiarized with the economic and political sociology of the country to which they are assigned. As many countries in the Third World contend with violence and social dysfunction, all reporters should become familiarized with Conflict Analysis or Peace Research to better contextualize and relay world affairs to their audiences.

Once journalists are sufficiently educated in the political and social climate in which they report, they will better recognize and steer clear from superficial reportage. Viewers deserve to receive news that has been thoroughly researched and conveys the core issues at stake. Simply covering war without mention of the arms trade is one example of superficial reportage that fails to expose the core issue at hand. For television, this may be a challenge because such ‘causes’ as arms deals and money-laundering are not always very visual topics on which to report.⁴⁰ This, however, is not an excuse. News editors and producers must support their reporters and create incentives for more thorough, consequential news reports.

⁴⁰ Paterson, Chris A., and Annabelle Sreberny. International News in the 21st Century. Eastleigh: Published by John Libbey Pub. for University of Luton Press, 2004. p 208.

Once journalists are aligned with their editors and producers, they can then challenge the handicaps of corporate owners. While broadcasts news becomes more and more of a profit-driven market, journalists need to be aligned with their superiors so the executives up top cannot dominate what is “news.” While international news appears unprofitable at present, the demand and need for it will certainly grow as globalization continues to occur. Viewers cannot demand something they do not know exists. In other words, corporate holders should investigate how to “sell it” so that viewers actually seek such news rather than cut international news from their broadcasts.

One of the arguments used against international news is that it takes up too much air time. These stories are often very complex and require more time to contextualize than domestic news.⁴¹ Generally speaking, most network newscasts are only 30-minute segments (more often, cable and public networks broadcasts longer-running shows). Accordingly, the executives rather see two domestic stories instead of one international story, believing the former to be more lucrative. The solution – challenge the media order!

Our television news reflects an extraordinary lack of continuity and perspective in a world that continues to grow more stirring and complex. Journalists who cover a long-running story cannot assume their audience has watched the full sequence of prior reports and, thus, omit pertinent background information from their latest report. It is essential for American news to adopt a policy of summarizing the relations between the U.S. and the developing world. Events must be properly reported and reporters must reiterate why and how these matters relate to their audience. These relationships then need to be referred to routinely in news accounts since there is no guarantee audiences will have seen or understood them the first time mentioned.

⁴¹ Hachten, William A., and Harva Hachten. The World News Prism: Changing Media of International Communication. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1999. p. 128.

If journalists are going to be successful in this feat, they must challenge the media order. A restructuring or reorganization of news broadcasts to eliminate ‘half way through the problem’ and allow journalists enough breathing room to properly develop their stories on air is absolutely necessary. If this calls for longer bulletins and more in-depth interviews then so be it. The day of 30-minute broadcasts is simply outmoded. With the advancements made in communication – satellite television, digitally recorded programming, etc. – journalists as well as networks can find a way of extending the newscasts while maintaining profits. Ultimately, journalists should not allow the agenda of corporate moguls to challenge their authority or prevent them from fulfilling their duty as provider of news.

Journalists can additionally bolster their fight for unadulterated coverage by adopting a universal code of journalism ethics. Virtually all journalists who work for an established news organization adopt some form of a code of ethics written by the company. Unfortunately, most of these codes outline behavior that safeguards the news they produce as a brand (ABC, CNN, etc.) rather than the quality of the actual journalism. I propose adopting a code of ethics that solely preserves the integrity of journalism to be adopted by all journalists. Just as the Hippocratic Oath ensures doctors practice medicine by the book, such an oath or code of ethics for journalists who report news. Journalists would then have an accepted policy by which to do their job, removing (to a degree) the influence of executives from the journalistic process.

Challenges to reform

The collection of news throughout the world is an erratic and imperfect process. Despite the amendments journalists may adopt to improve their quality of reportage, there will always be inevitable challenges to overcome.

Frankly, international news is expensive to gather. While NBC, ABC and CBS were cutting back on overseas operations, CNN was opening bureaus in truly remote places at a cost of \$600,000 a piece.⁴² In addition, technological poverty and censored media of the developing world exacerbate the crisis of journalism. Within the countries themselves, news agencies lack the financial means to purchase basic, necessary equipment to create television news, making it more difficult for journalists to gather news. Local media is often subject to official controls that when challenged, put journalists in precarious situations. Come what may, international news is something we as society cannot afford to let degenerate.

CONCLUSION

News organizations and the media collectively can say a great deal about poverty. What is troubling, however, is that we as Americans are insufficiently aware of the suffering that persists in the developing world. As a country, the United States is more than capable of mobilizing to fight for a cause when adequately inspired. However, no such action will take place if news networks continue to undervalue the importance of international news. Failure to improve the extent and condition of international news disseminated will only hinder the elimination of ignorance and misunderstanding between people and continue to allow heads of influential states to remain desensitized to the needs and desires of others.⁴³

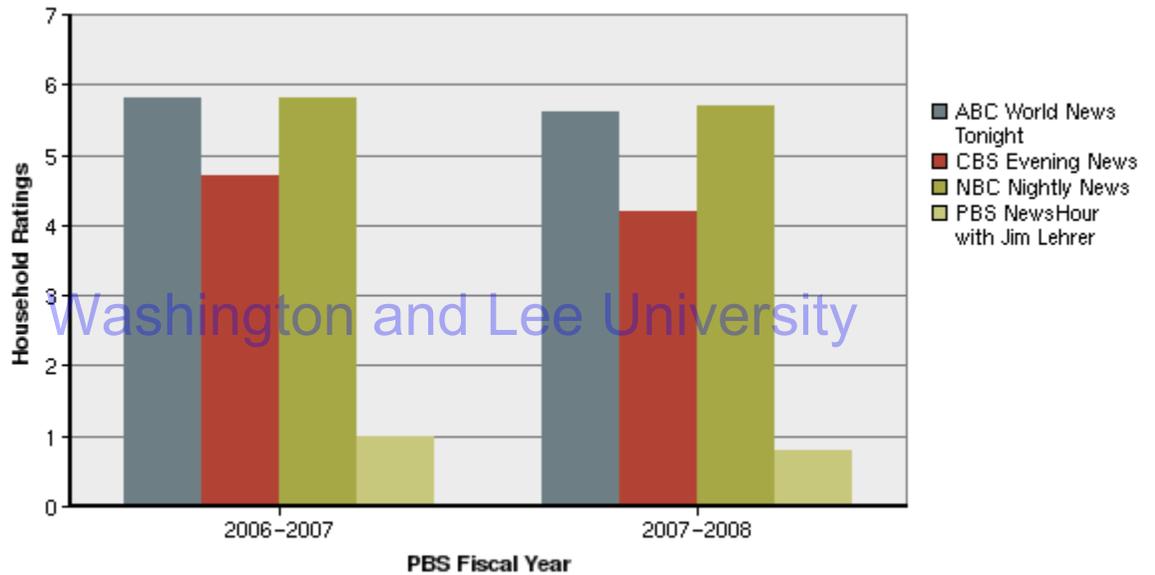
The perception that nothing can be done about poverty in the developing world because it is so grave is indefensible. With the variety of news sources available to the American public, foreign coverage on television news has the utmost potential to shed light on the most hidden,

⁴² Hachten, William A., and Harva Hachten. The World News Prism: Changing Media of International Communication. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1999. p. 48.

⁴³ 1978 Unesco declaration on mass media. Sevens, Robert L. "Communication Development and the Third World." Lanham, New York. 1993. P. 143

complex issues of our world. The production and framing of news media reports on poverty influences the political action taken by governments, as well as social efforts of everyday citizens to make change happen. It serves to bring distant nations closer and promotes mutual understanding between these countries. Television news needs to reevaluate its position within the global order because before the newspaper can be printed and after the internet crashes, Americans will turn to their televisions to learn of the crises that occur beyond our borders.

APPENDIX A: Evening news viewership, network news,
Percent of Newshole



Source: The Pew Research Center

APPENDIX B: Top Stories PBS vs. Network TV (w/o PBS)
Percent of Newshole

	PBS		Network TV (w/o PBS)	
1	Election*	32%	Election*	32%
2	U.S. Economy†	20	U.S. Economy†	16
3	Iraq War‡	6	Iraq War‡	3
4	U.S Domestic Terrorism	2	Olympics	2
5	Myanmar Cyclone	1	Warren Jeffs and Texas Raid	1
6	Supreme Court Actions	1	Violent Summer	1

			Weather	
7	Afghanistan	1	Afghanistan	1
8	Pakistan	1	Blagojevich Scandal	1
9	Zimbabwe Elections	1	Holiday Season	1
10	Israeli/Palestinian Conflict	1	Chinese Earthquake	1

* Includes stories about the campaign, results, and the transition

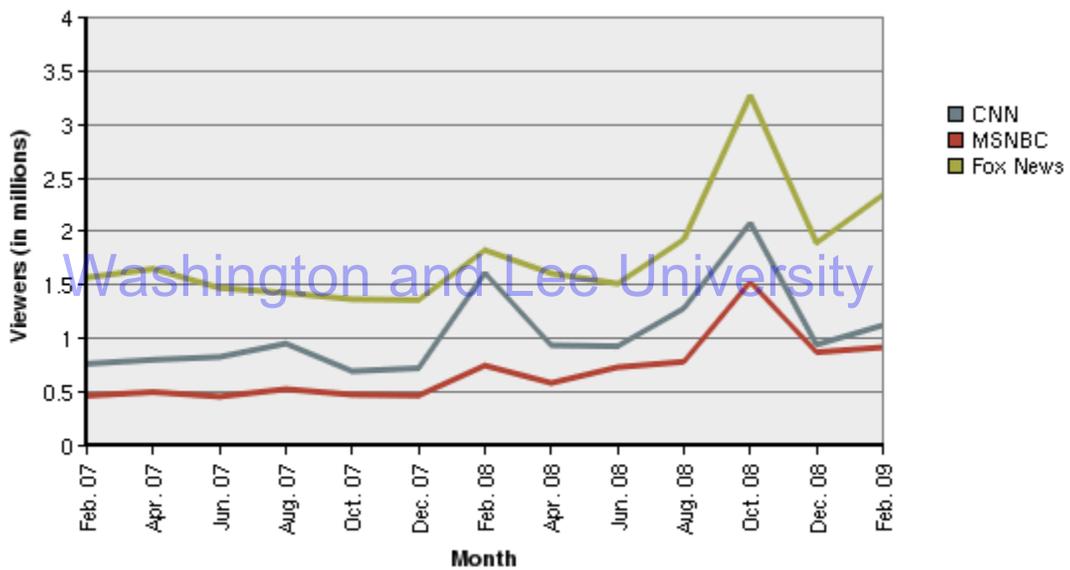
† Includes stories about the financial crisis, economic issues, gas/oil prices, auto industry, and Freddie Mac/Fannie Mae

‡ Includes stories about Iraq policy debate, events in Iraq, and the impact of the war in the U.S.

Source: The Pew Research Center

APPENDIX C: Cable News Prime-Time Audience

February 2007 - February 2009, by channel



Source: The Pew Research Center

APPENDIX D: Top Stories: Cable vs. Media Over All

Percent of Newshole

Cable		Media Over All	
Election*	59%	Election*	36%
U.S. Economy†	10	U.S. Economy†	15
Blagojevich Scandal	2	Iraq War‡	4
Iraq War‡	2	Domestic Terrorism	1
Immigration	1	2008 Olympics	1
Mumbai Terror Attacks	1	Blagojevich Scandal	1

Domestic Terrorism	1	Afghanistan	1
Caylee Anthony	1	Pakistan	1
Spitzer Scandal	1	Immigration	1
Scott McClellan's Book	1	Georgia/Russia Conflict	1

* Includes stories about the campaign, results, and the transition

† Includes stories about the financial crisis, economic issues, gas/oil prices, auto industry, and Freddie Mac/Fannie Mae

‡ Includes stories about Iraq policy debate, events in Iraq, and the impact of the war in the U.S.

Source: The Pew Research Center

Washington and Lee University