

CHAPTER 1

Master Myths, Frames, Narratives, and Guard Dogs

Journalists at first paid little attention to Michael Newdow's suit. Several of the journalists with whom I spoke about Newdow argued there was a good reason for the absence of coverage: the suit, originally filed in Florida, was dismissed by a federal judge in the Eastern District of California a little more than six months after it was filed. In addition, Newdow, who earned a law degree from the University of Michigan, chose to represent himself. I instruct my journalism students to jump at such an obvious "David v. Goliath" story. But he was mounting his challenge in Sacramento, California—not Los Angeles, New York, or Washington, where much of a reporter's attention is typically focused—without a lawyer, and he had lost on the district court level.

So much for David and Goliath.

One journalist, who covered the case for the *New York Times*, said he would not have dreamed of pitching the story—at this stage, anyway—to his editor. "Nobody would have thought this suit would succeed," he said (A. Liptak, personal interview, July 2004). "Here's this little guy who can't even get a lawyer." On top of that, the reporter said, the district court gave Newdow, in essence, "the back of its hand" when it dismissed the suit. "There was no news there," Liptak said. A reporter for the *San Francisco Chronicle* who covers the Ninth Circuit acknowledged that he had never even heard of Newdow until the Ninth Circuit issued its controversial ruling in June 2002 (B. Egelko, personal interview, July 1, 2004).

I conducted a series of computer searches using the Lexis-Nexis database in 2003, 2004, and 2005. I searched for news articles, editorials, and broadcast transcripts that appeared in the nation's major daily

newspapers and television networks from the day Newdow filed his suit in March of 2000 to May 15, 2005. I also conducted lengthy e-mail and telephone interviews in 2004, 2005, and 2006 with several of the journalists who covered the case, several of the attorneys involved in the case, and a number of interested observers.

As I read and reread the newspaper articles and news transcripts, I looked for key themes and narrative strands, keeping in mind Jack Lule's idea that news "comes to us as a story" (2001, p. 3). News is composed of what Lule believes are "enduring, abiding stories." In covering what goes on in the world, journalists tap "a deep but nonetheless limited body of story forms and types." This reliance on certain story forms is no surprise, writes Lule, given our love for stories. "We understand our lives and our world through story," he argues (p. 3).

Perhaps more important, Lule contends that familiar myths—"the great stories of humankind" (p. 15)—regularly come to life in news reporting. Lule defines myth as "a sacred, social story that draws from archetypal figures to offer exemplary models for human life" (p. 17). Myths empower society to express its "prevailing ideals, ideologies, values, and beliefs." They are, Lule writes, "models of social life and models for social life" (p. 15). Myths are not evident in every news story, as Lule cautions, but in many instances journalists draw upon "the rich treasure trove of archetypal stories" to revisit those shared stories that help us make sense of the world in which we live.

Lule's analysis of news produced seven of what he calls "master myths": the *victim*, whose life is abruptly altered by "the randomness of human existence"; the *scapegoat*, deployed in stories to remind us of "what happens to those who challenge or ignore social beliefs"; the *hero*, there to remind us that we have the potential for greatness; the *good mother*, who offers us "a model of goodness in times when goodness may seem in short supply" (p. 24); the *trickster*, a crafty figure who usually ends up bringing "on himself and others all manner of suffering," thanks to his crude, boorish behavior; the *other world*, which enables us to feel good about our way of life by contrasting it, sometimes starkly, with ways of life elsewhere (as when reporters wrote of life in the former Soviet Union during the Cold War); and the *flood*, in which we see the "destruction of a group of people by powerful forces," often because they have "strayed from the right path" (p. 25).

Lule's assessment meshes with Richard Campbell's claim that while we talk a good game when it comes to individualism, we really embrace it only when it is situated in what John Fiske calls our "communal allegiances" (quoted in Campbell, 1991, p. 142). Our path in life should not

be so unique that we forget how to conform, or that journalists are unable to make it seem like we conform. Put even more simply, you can take individualism only so far.

And while journalists routinely criticize powerful institutions, they do so by “personalizing” issues, or casting them as battles between individuals. This shift comes with a cost. “The social origins of events are lost,” Lule writes. I tell my journalism students “news” is “anything that breaks the routine.” Such an approach may ensure that they produce good stories, but it also robs journalism of its ability to place events in historical context, as John Fiske contends.

In his excellent book on the mythic structure of the CBS newsmagazine *60 Minutes*, Campbell (1991) argues that the show portrayed former president Ronald Reagan as embodying Middle American values despite the fact that they he and his wife, Nancy, were wealthy, powerful people. Similarly, in a story on Joyce Brown, a homeless person from New York, the program symbolically moved her from the “periphery” to “a central location more in line with a consensual middle ground” (p. 151). Those from the periphery fare better with journalists, Campbell argues, if they are able to make their arguments in a “common sense” fashion.

The late celebrated columnist Molly Ivins, a staunch liberal from Texas, was a frequent guest on television news and discussion programs, despite her ideological leanings and her ongoing criticism (maybe “lampooning” is a better word) of President Bush. The reason? She’s smart—and funny. Bill Moyers, a brilliant, skilled journalist who recently retired as host of the PBS program *NOW*, was a television fixture, despite some very harsh criticism of the Bush administration during his stint as *NOW* host and editor. Why? Again, he’s smart, eloquent, and speaks “liberal” in a way that even centrists—not to mention conservatives—can stomach, even appreciate.

Reporters tend to draw nonconformists like Ivins and Moyers “back into the consensus,” as Stuart Hall argues (quoted in Campbell, 1991, p. 151). By doing so, these individuals manage to reaffirm the communal allegiances noted by Fiske. Individuals who resist, or who espouse, excessively radical viewpoints are “not allowed to speak directly, but are reported, that is, mediated if their point of view is represented at all,” argues Fiske (*ibid.*, p. 153).

Consider the case of 2004 presidential candidate Howard Dean, the former governor of Vermont. Journalists credited him with breathing fresh air into the political fund-raising and outreach process by using the Internet to, for example, set up “meet-ups” across the country. Soon, other candidates were copying Dean. He was the front-runner; that is, until mainstream journalists started talking about how truly liberal he

was, and how he might scare off Democrats looking for a more centrist alternative—which we eventually got in Senator John Kerry. But the moment that crystallized this unease for reporters was the “I Have a Scream” speech following Dean’s disheartening third-place finish in the Iowa caucuses. I’m sure you remember the scene: Dean, sleeves rolled up, trying to calm the fears, and stoke the passions, of more than 3,000 crestfallen Iowa volunteers, exhorting them, pumping his fist, and then finally letting out a raspy scream.

At that moment, Dean crossed the line separating “breath of fresh air” and fire-breathing nonconformist. He was soon seen as a liability to the party. He had to defend his enthusiasm; journalists asked him to explain why he colored outside the lines, why he for the moment burst out of the typical political package. “Was it over the top? Sure, it was over the top,” he told Diane Sawyer of ABC’s *PrimeTime Live*. Dean, with his wife, Judy, now by his side, felt no regrets. “I’m not apologetic because I was giving everything to people who gave everything to me,” he said (“Dean: I Have,” 2004).

Reporters probably felt all along, perhaps with good reason, that Dean never had a legitimate shot at the nomination. To be sure, his speech damaged his standing. But reporters soon committed what I believe is a key error: they started *writing and intoning about* how Dean’s standing had been damaged—and little else about his ideas. We read about his temper and Judy Dean’s desire to continue practicing medicine if her husband won—to my amazement, women seeking self-fulfillment by pursuing a career is still an alien concept to many people.

So when a public figure is too controversial, reporters move that person to what Daniel Hallin (1986) has called the “sphere of deviance.” Occupying this space are “those political actors and views which journalists and the political mainstream of society reject as unworthy of being heard” (pp. 116–117). Journalists resolutely guard the boundary between this zone and the “sphere of legitimate controversy,” where public officials are allowed to determine how and when we discuss important issues. Those in the “sphere of deviance” rarely get near the innermost sphere in Hallin’s model, the “sphere of consensus,” where hallowed ideas and values—Hallin calls it the “region of motherhood and apple pie” (p. 116)—are kept and protected, in part by journalists whose actions suggest that debate on these ideas and values would be pointless. When consensus on an issue wanes, reporters intensify their focus on objectivity, Hallin suggests. But with that focus comes reliance on official versions of events. Those figures that challenge the consensus are sent packing—symbolically, anyway—to the “sphere of deviance.” Some are

simply treated like unruly children; others are exposed and criticized for their nonconformity.

But these assessments of how journalists treat dissenters beg the question: How *did* Newdow manage to earn so much coverage, especially in light of the fact that the symbolic deck was stacked against him? I fully expected to find that reporters invoked the “scapegoat” myth—that they simply acted as a conduit for the government’s position on (and for public outcry about) Newdow’s suit, and subsequently held Newdow up as an example of what happens when someone has the audacity to challenge one of our most beloved ritualistic expressions of patriotism, audacity amplified in the minds of many in our collective reaction to the 9/11 attacks. My analysis reveals, however, a more complex deployment of the master myths discussed by Lule.

Frame Analysis: Journalists *Make* the News

An explanation of framing begins with this idea: journalists *make* the news. Not “make” in the sense that they are the subjects of their own coverage, but “make” in the sense that they piece together the stories we see and read each day from the information available when the story unfolds. In doing so, they highlight some parts of a story, making them seem more significant than other parts. Frames direct our attention to certain aspects of a story. Some scholars argue that frames even suggest to us how we should view a story—the “preferred reading” of the facts.

Like journalists, we develop and deploy frames to help us make sense of the world around us. Let’s try a simple example: think about setting up a photograph—during a recent family get-together, perhaps, or a memorable vacation. You don’t try to include everything in the shot; you *select* what will go in the photo—nice scenery, local citizens, maybe your hotel room—and what you’ll leave out, based on what you think your friends and family will want to see. The photo may some day come to represent the totality of your trip (you’ll look at it and say, “Boy, I really loved our trip to Williamsburg), but it’s really just a slice of that trip built with pieces you choose and arrange.

It’s the same with news. A reporter makes a series of careful choices about the information, quotes, visuals, and descriptions that go into a story. A reporter covering a protest march, for example, is faced with a great deal of information—the marchers, information about their positions on issues, reactions of residents and merchants—so organizing it in some fashion is vital, especially when a story is, in the words of John Fiske, “unruly.”

Frames help the reporter understand a story, and, eventually, help the reader or viewer understand the story. The key difference is that journalists, unlike our intrepid tourist-photographer, are supposed to observe a code of ethics that requires they cover a story in a fair, balanced, and objective fashion. Thus, even though a journalist might not have the time or the space to create an exhaustive report about an event, he or she is obligated to piece together what famed journalist Bob Woodward calls “the best available version of the truth”—a version that is accurate, and that does not favor a particular worldview or ideology.

Framing is a popular tool in academic research; there have been literally hundreds of articles written in which scholars use frame analysis to evaluate the depth and balance of news coverage. Noted sociologist Erving Goffman (1974) began the dialogue on framing. He wrote that a frame is a “principle of organization which governs events—at least social ones—and our subjective involvement in them” (p. 11). Frames enable us to “locate, perceive, identify, and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences” (p. 21). We use frames to make sense of the world around us. Journalists create news frames to help them “simplify, prioritize, and structure the narrative flow of events (Norris, 1995, p. 357). As Oscar Gandy (2001) explains, frames “are used purposively to direct attention and then to guide the processing of information so that the preferred reading of the facts come to dominate public understanding” (p. 365).

Kathleen Jamieson and Paul Waldman (2003) contend that frames are “the structures underlying the depictions that the public reads, hears, and watches” (p. xii). Framing takes place when journalists “select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text” (Entman, 1993, p. 52). By attempting to organize experiences for readers, journalists “highlight some bits of information about an item that is the subject of communication, thereby elevating them in salience” (p. 53).

At the heart of my work is the use by reporters of “keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments” about Newdow, his motives in challenging the Pledge of Allegiance, and the reactions of public officials (Entman, 1993, p. 52) and their actions. Through their reporting, Paul D’Angelo (2002) argues, journalists provide “interpretive packages” of the positions of parties who have a political investment in an issue. In so doing, journalists “both reflect and add” to what William A. Gamson and Andre Mogdilians (1987) call the “issue culture” of a topic. Of particular relevance for our journey are the contentions, summarized by D’Angelo, that frames limit our political awareness, limit activism, and “set parameters for policy debates not necessarily in agree-

ment with democratic norms” (p. 877). Journalists select sources because they are credible, and believe that even a long-standing frame has value because it contains “a range of viewpoints that is potentially useful” to our understanding of an issue (p. 877).

But what happens when some views are excluded? Todd Gitlin, a world-renowned sociologist, explored how the news media, specifically the *New York Times* and CBS News, covered the activities of a group of activists known as Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). SDS was at the forefront of the opposition to America’s involvement in the Vietnam War. Between 1960 and 1965, the news media ignored SDS, in part because the group did not try to attract the media’s attention. By 1965, antiwar protests had begun to capture the attention of more people. Therefore, they had become more newsworthy. As a result, reporters began to cover SDS.

Gitlin (1980) argued that frames are “persistent patterns of cognition, organization, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual” (p. 7). Frames give shape to what parts of a story are told, what parts are given prominence, which sources are used, what groups are marginalized through their portrayal as deviant or illegitimate, and what words are used to describe the parties to a story.

In covering antiwar protests, reporters made fun of how Vietnam War protestors dressed, how they spoke, and of their goals. They likened SDS to violent neo-Nazi groups, and paid an unfair amount of attention to right-wing groups. Reporters focused on disagreements among SDS members, and showed them to be deviant by suggesting that the group included communists. They underestimated the number of SDS members, and suggested that the group was not getting its point across. Reporters relied on statements from government officials and did not gather additional information that might have helped them paint a clearer picture of the group’s activism.

In short, reporters marginalized SDS. They undermined the group’s efforts to “present a general, coherent political opposition.” Reporters suggested that activists spent all of their time and effort on “single grievances” which the significant institutions in society can fix without “altering fundamental social relations”—in other words, without real change. Reporters from the *Times* went from portraying SDS as a bona fide movement to a “menace” in seven months. Editors at the *Times* were concerned that conservatives would charge that the paper was sympathetic to Communism, claims Gitlin. Reporters also suggested that SDS was bent on persuading young people to avoid the draft. Reporters spotlighted tactics, not goals or ideas. But as Gitlin argues, reporters were

only being true to their job routines; they covered “the event, not the condition; the conflict, not the consensus; the fact that ‘advances the story,’ not the one that explains it” (p. 122). Reporters paid a great deal of attention to spokespeople who “most closely matched prefabricated images of what an opposition leader should look and sound like: theatrical, bombastic, and knowing and inventive in the ways of packaging messages” (p. 154) for maximum media exposure. The group’s goals and ideas were less important because they made for less compelling stories.

My own research reveals that journalists have marginalized 21st-century antiwar protestors by using several new frames. First, the movement is large and encompasses a diverse range of people, but its diversity is just as much a weakness as it is a strength. Antiwar activism is too broad, lacks focus, and is on a never-ending quest to define itself. The movement was partially driven by an eclectic mix of aggressive young people and Vietnam War protest veterans whose zeal and computer-savvy on the one hand, and a tendency to go through the motions for old times’ sake on the other, hampered the movement’s progress. Those from the “middle ground” who protested came to the movement suddenly, and at times did so only when protest fit their schedule.

Second, journalists went from undercounting protestors to focusing almost solely on the number of protestors at each rally, and on the diverse range of their activities. By the time the United States attacked Iraq, reporters were doing little more than telling readers how many protestors were protesting, where they were protesting, and how many were arrested. Missing was intelligent discussion of the issues raised by the protestors. Their arguments were reduced to chants, signs, and the phrase “no blood for oil.”

The “veterans” interviewed by reporters are stuck in the 1960s. They are still devoted to the cause, but are irrelevant. Reporters permitted them to stand at the stylistic barricades erected by colleagues whose writing was analyzed by Gitlin. The use by journalists of Gitlin as a source is a somewhat disconcerting nod to the fact that 1960s style protest is not relevant. Despite covering efforts by protestors to attract “Middle America,” stories tended to focus on preachers (veteran protestors) and students (their contemporary counterparts). Reporters also created the impression that these sentiments sprung up out of the blue, and lacked continuity with earlier antiwar activism. There was little discussion of demonstrations against the Persian Gulf War, and none about antiwar sentiment directed toward Grenada, Somalia, Bosnia, or Kosovo.

Third, coverage suggests that the ambivalence felt by protestors about challenging their government lends at least some support to the idea that this round of protests was unpatriotic. Reporters give ample

space and time to angry, profane individuals who question the patriotism and love of country shown by protestors.

Fourth, if protestors aren't old and irrelevant, they are faceless and violent. We can't identify with them because they are too busy running through the streets, joining themselves together with PVC pipe, chaining themselves to things and too each other, and blocking traffic. Further, today's protestors are well versed in how to use the media to get their message across and to mobilize support. Protestors can generate attendance, journalists suggest, but have no real impact on policy. It is as if protestors are either going through the motions, are worried about fitting activism into their busy lives, or are protesting only because it is fashionable. Whatever their motivation, their efforts are fruitless, journalists suggest.

Then as now, reporters pushed protestors to the edges of the frame. Journalists judged them to be not as newsworthy as the other aspects of the war, even though there was a great deal of antiwar sentiment in the nation at the time. When protest *was* covered, it was treated as being outside the mainstream, even though the right to disagree with our government and show our disagreement in the form of protest is a right that we cherish. Such treatment is not limited to antiwar protestors. Journalists—particularly broadcast journalists—have framed opponents of the World Trade Organization as strident and destructive. Further, journalists have long treated the views of many environmental activists as outside the mainstream. Some groups, like Greenpeace, do cross the ethical line with some of their more destructive actions. But in the early 1960s, journalists permitted government officials and corporate leaders to dismiss Rachel Carson, author of *Silent Spring*, arguably the most significant treatise on the destruction of the environment, as an unqualified trouble-making spinster.

In the chapters that follow, we will explore how journalists used several distinct frames to position Newdow as an erratic outsider who had the audacity to challenge one of this nation's most revered rituals in a time of national crisis.

Narrative Analysis

A third valuable tool for exploring news coverage of the Pledge is narrative analysis. Walter Fisher (1987) defines narrative as “symbolic actions—words or deeds—that have meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them” (p. 58). In short, we are all storytellers. In fact, “enacted dramatic narrative is the basic and essential genre for the characterization of human actions” (p. 58). Fisher firmly rejects the claim that narrative

is not grounded in rationality. “[N]o form of discourse is privileged over others because its form is predominantly argumentative,” Fisher argues. “No matter how strictly a case is argued—scientifically, philosophically, or legally—it will always be a story, an interpretation of some aspect of the world that is historically and culturally grounded and shaped by human personality” (p. 49).

While the focus of narrative analysis is the individual story, it is possible to explore a number of stories that cohere as a larger story—a “metastory” (Berdayes & Berdayes, 1998) that functions “to generate a more inclusive perspective, and to expand the possibilities and range of debate” (p. 113). A metastory can provide the researcher with a clearer understanding of the culture that produces the narrative. Sonja Foss (1996) argues that narrative “functions as an argument to view and understand the world in a particular way” (p. 400). It enables the researcher to explore and define “a coherent world in which social action occurs” (Berdayes & Berdayes, 1998, p. 109).

Narrative analysis also enables the researcher to explore assumptions at work in the narrative. Researchers can isolate and examine closely the “linguistic and cultural resources” drawn on by the creators of a narrative. This enables the researcher to assess how these resources persuade the reader to accept the narrative as a realistic portrayal of events and people. Keep in mind, too, that some narratives resonate longer, and have more cultural authority, than others. One narrative can, over time, come to dominate our understanding of a person or an issue.

Try this: ask a Republican about former president Ronald Reagan. You’ll get something like, “Oh, he encouraged America to love itself again” and be told what a great communicator he was—and you’ll probably get a sizable dose of his enduring adoration for his wife, Nancy. What you won’t hear are his ignorance of the growing AIDS crisis in the world, and his involvement in the Iran-Contra scandal. You get “the shining city on the hill” narrative. It’s incomplete, inaccurate—but it hangs together and it sounds good.

Thus, we use narrative, Foss (1996) argues, to “help us impose order on the flow of experience so that we can make sense of events and actions in our lives” (p. 399). For the purposes of this analysis, narrative’s most salient quality is that it “provides clues to the subjectivity of individuals and to the values and meanings that characterize a culture” (p. 401). Narratives typically include logical reasons for the actions of the participants. They also reflect the values that drive these actions. These values, claims Fisher, “determine the persuasive force of reasons.” They enable individuals who hear the narrative to decide whether they will act

on it. But the question that always tantalizes me is: what happens if the narrative isn't made up of accurate information—that truth has been sacrificed for the sake of a good story? The stories that your parents tell about you, for example, resonate like crazy. They become powerful because, in part, they hold together and are told with conviction.

Thus, special attention will be paid during our journey to what journalists invited their readers and viewers to think—and not to think—about Newdow and his lawsuit. Jamieson and Waldman (2003) argue that nothing is more important to journalists than a compelling narrative, one that will attract and keep readers. Journalists, they argue, work to “deliver the world to citizens in a comprehensible form” (p. 1). Elements and ideas that might damage a narrative's coherence—how well the story hangs together—will be avoided or discarded by the reporter.

As an example, consider how popular women's magazines like *Vogue* and *Redbook* cover eating disorders like anorexia nervosa and bulimia. The narrative that emerges from articles in these publications offers a distorted picture of what life is like for someone suffering from an eating disorder. Victims typically suffer alone, trapped by their selfishness and perfectionism, while stunned family members and peers stand by, watching as the disease suddenly takes hold.

In the latter stages of the narrative, writers blame the media both for the victim's illness and for the overall increase in the number of cases of eating disorders. This narrative provides a distorted picture of what goes on outside the discourse of dieting—outside the symbiotic relationship between food companies and diet product makers carried out in the pages of women's magazines. Editors of women's magazines probably would not want to despoil an editorial approach built around the “health and beauty consciousness” discussed by Robin Andersen (1995, pp. 15–17). These articles disrupt the diet-friendly editorial environment sold by women's magazines to their readers and to their advertisers.

But this level of sensationalism does little to advance understanding of eating disorders. As David Morris (1998) explains, “[P]ostmodern ideals of beauty do not circulate in an innocent realm of fantasy but support and promote a consumer economy” sustained by creating “strangely immaterial needs” (p. 154), chief among them the need for a perfect body. But the information that fuels this narrative is not placed in context. We see only the “privatized landscape” of the anorexic's experience. Women's magazines deploy this metastory not for genuine change, or to encourage debate about the need to diet; instead, it allows women's magazines to continue normalizing diet while paying narrative lip service to the experience of those who suffer from eating disorders.

The “Guard Dog” Function of Reporting

Our final theoretical stop is the “guard dog” function of journalism advanced by George Donahue, Philip Tichenor, and Clarice Olien (1995). Journalists (and journalism professors) talk a great deal about how journalists are supposed to act as “watchdogs.” They monitor the conduct of public officials and large corporations, and expose corrupt behavior for the public’s benefit. Starting with the Watergate scandal, the list of corporate and governmental acts of misconduct revealed by journalists is impressive.

But Donahue and his colleagues (1995) see the journalist’s role differently. They argue that journalists often play the role of guard dog. Think of an alarm system—I use the popular Slomin Shield in my classes to illustrate these ideas. But journalists don’t sound “the alarm” to protect their readers; they do so to protect large cultural institutions, institutions that, frankly, don’t need their help. They act when “external forces present a threat to local leadership” (p. 116). Journalists tend to go after individuals, but often fail to explore the institutional flaws that cause the threats. It would be like reporting a string of murders without exploring how the alleged perpetrators were so easily able to obtain weapons.

Journalists are trained to act as “sentry” for dominant institutions, patrolling the perimeter, searching for threats, and sounding the alarm when one is identified. The dominant institution may have no idea why the alarm is being sounded. When a threat causes conflict, journalists address it in “a constrained way and only on certain issues and under certain structural conditions” (p. 116). They seek to reinforce, not challenge, these institutions, and lead the community back toward cohesion.

We can see the “guard dog” in action by briefly exploring coverage by print journalists of the internment of Japanese-Americans. On February 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which empowered the secretary of war to “exclude any and all persons, citizens, and aliens, from designated areas in order to provide security against sabotage, espionage, and fifth column activity” (Daniels, 1993, p. 129). Immigrants born in Japan (“*issei*”) and second generation Japanese-Americans (“*nisei*”) were not allowed to work or travel anywhere on the West Coast. They were eventually rounded up and sent first to “assembly centers,” and then to one of ten relocation centers run by the civilian-staffed War Relocation Authority.

We now know that the threat of “fifth column activity” never existed. A key FDR adviser, General John DeWitt, lied in a report to the president about alleged acts of spying by Japanese-Americans. Among the

most ardent advocates for relocation were then California Attorney General Earl Warren, later a revered champion of civil rights, and Secretary of War Henry Stimson, who encouraged the president to pursue evacuation as a viable means of ending the alleged Japanese-American threat to national security.

Journalists fell right in line, although not right away. Two strands of news coverage emerged immediately following the attack on Pearl Harbor. The first focused on efforts by Japanese-Americans to show their patriotism, their support for the war effort, and their loyalty to the United States. One headline in the *Los Angeles Times*, for example, read “Japanese-Americans Pledge Loyalty to the United States” (“Japanese-Americans Pledge,” 1941). The Japanese-Americans Citizens League guaranteed its “fullest cooperation and its facilities to the United States Government.” The Japanese consul in Los Angeles even apologized to the United States for Japan’s actions.

Slowly, however, the tone of the coverage shifted, once the government developed its ill-conceived policy for dealing with the alleged threat. On December 8, 1941, the *Los Angeles Times* referred to California as a “zone of danger” (Daniels, 1993, p. 28). Of the thousands of Japanese-Americans living in the area, “some, perhaps many are good Americans. What the rest may be we do not know, nor can we take a chance in light of yesterday’s demonstration that treachery and double-dealing are not major Japanese weapons” (p. 28). The paper called on “alert keen-eyed citizens” to look out for what were surely “spies, saboteurs, and fifth columnists in their midst” (Daniels, 1981).

As Donahue and his colleagues (1995) argue, reporters pay a great deal of attention to “nation and society—their persistence, cohesion, and the conflicts and divisions threatening that cohesion” (p. 116). Jamieson and Waldman (2003) agree, arguing that journalists “report from a sense, perhaps visceral, perhaps cerebral, that their reporting should instill public faith in the proposition that, despite its flaws, the democratic system does work” (p. 130). To do that, they must tell us what is and what is not a “threat” to that system. Journalists write to show us not only that democracy survives threats (like those mounted by Newdow), it also corrects underlying problems with the system. Journalists may be wary of powerful individuals, but they express a staggering amount of reverence for the institutions through which their power is exercised (p. 136). Thus, much of their reporting seeks an answer to the question, “did the system work?”