

113C 0189 015
VHS

ONLY THE NEWS THAT FITS

Who decides what's news? How much of what we see and read about world events is fact? Are foreign correspondents free to describe what they see or are they just mouthpieces for a corporate editorial line?

ONLY THE NEWS THAT FITS, a half-hour video version of the Genie award-winning hour-long documentary film THE WORLD IS WATCHING, takes a probing look at the news business and, at the same time, raises some key moral issues of the electronic age. The video focuses on several journalists working in Nicaragua during the negotiations surrounding the Arias Peace Plan in November 1987, and simultaneously documents the editorial process in the ABC newsroom in New York City. Elements of electronic news gathering are examined: how powerful editors monitor every word, serving as "gatekeepers"; how the restrictions of time and format pressure journalists in the field; how world events are condensed into easily digestible "news bites". ONLY THE NEWS THAT FITS provides an inside view of a highly competitive business that has the power to turn real events in history into carefully constructed "news stories".

(See verso for study suggestions.)

Produced by Investigative Productions Inc., Toronto in co-production with the National Film Board of Canada, Ontario Centre.

29 minutes 35 seconds
Order number: C 0189 015

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A
Half
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THE INTERNATIONAL
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GEORGE BLACK
Foreign Editor
of the Nation.



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STUDY SUGGESTIONS

ABOUT THE FILM: Excerpts from an Interview with Harold Crooks, Writer and Co-producer

"In 1984, Peter Raymont and I were both in Nicaragua, picking cotton for three weeks with a brigade of young Canadians. We stayed on a while longer as journalists, Peter for CBC Radio and myself for Canadian Forum magazine. We had thought, before going, that we were fairly well-informed about the situation there, so it was a powerful experience for us to realize how badly the media had prepared us for what we actually found when we got there."

"We decided a film had to be made that would demystify the role of the mass media in its coverage of international news stories. We planned to do this by revealing how the highly packaged and processed commodity we call news can often impose a quite fictional form on local reality."

QUOTATIONS FROM THE FILM FOR DISCUSSION

Richard S. Salant, former president, CBS News:

"Our reporters do not cover stories from their point of view. They are presenting them from nobody's point of view."

Randolph Ryan, editorial writer and columnist for the Boston Globe:

"I think the basic issue for a journalist is to apply the same standards and ask the same questions of governments on both sides of the fence. You've got to be as tough in looking at the friendly governments, the ones that are called 'democratic,' as at the unfriendly governments, the ones that are called 'communist, totalitarian, Marxist-Leninist.'"

Bill Lord, Executive Producer, ABC News:

"(The Sandinistas) should understand that today the spotlight is there and if they do something after 7 o'clock at night, it'll be a much smaller light bulb that will be put on it tomorrow."

ACTIVITIES

1. As a class or group exercise, view a taped TV news program. How many specific stories can you recall at the end?
Watch it again with a few of the following questions in mind: Can you recall three news stories? What is the content of each item? What is the approximate length of each item? Can you recall specific visuals? How were graphics used? What about music? What have you learned from each news item? Do the stories have any connection with each other? Is there any follow-up of stories from one evening to the next?
2. Many Canadian journalists feel strongly that there is a substantial difference between the way news is reported on Canadian and American television networks. Compare a CBC newscast with one from a major U.S. television network, and contrast a CBC newscast with one shown on a privately owned Canadian station. Are there any noticeable differences in style or presentation, pacing ("jolts per minute"), commercial content or types of stories?
3. Examine a newspaper or television report and try to determine what is fact and what is opinion or judgement.
4. In class, compare the ways in which different newspapers in the same city report the same story. Take note of the headlines, the content and where the item gets placed. What gets on the front page? Which items get juxtaposed next to one another and what do such juxtapositions suggest? How are photographs used? Based on this discussion, create a newspaper front page which subtly tries to put across a particular point of view.
5. Everyone in the group, prepare a report on the same school or community news item, using the same medium. (The report may be written, taped or videotaped.) After the items have been presented, discuss the differences in these presentations. If they are similar, what kinds of conventions are being used?
6. Prepare a report on a school or community news item from a personal point of view. Report on the same item again, adopting another point of view. Discuss the differences.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

"One of the things that is most distinctive about TV news is the extent to which it is an ideological medium, providing not just information or entertainment, but "packages for consciousness" — frameworks for interpreting and cues for reacting to social and political reality."

Daniel C. Hallin, "We Keep America On Top of the World," in Watching Television, ed. Todd Gitlin (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), p. 13.

"... with media whose structure is biased toward furnishing images and fragments, we are deprived of access to an historical perspective. In the absence of continuity and context, bits of information cannot be integrated into an intelligent and consistent whole."

Neil Postman, Amusing Ourselves to Death (New York: Penguin, 1986), p. 137.

"91% of the experts, 70% of the people in the street and 84% of the eyewitnesses in television news were men."

Media Watch: National Watch on Images of Women in the Media Inc., monitoring study, 1984.

SUGGESTED READING

Chomsky, Noam and Edward S. Herman. Manufacturing Consent, The Political Economy of the Mass Media (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988).

Chomsky, Noam, Necessary Illusions, Thought Control in Democratic Societies, CBC Massey Lectures (CBC Enterprises) 1989.

Cocking, Clive. Following the Leaders, A Media Watcher's Diary of Campaign '79 (Toronto: Doubleday Canada Limited, 1980).

Gitlin, Todd. Inside Prime Time (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983).

Hertsgaard, Mark. On Bended Knee, The Press and the Reagan Presidency (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1988).

Manoff, Robert Karl and Michael Schudson, eds. Reading the News, A Pantheon Guide to Popular Culture (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986).

SUGGESTED CURRICULUM AREAS

Media Studies, Journalism, Latin American Studies, Political Science, Ethics, English, International Relations, Social Studies, History, Sociology.

CREDITS

Director
Peter Raymont

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Pathe Sound

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