American Media And Its Bias

Throughout human history, different generations have been divided over many fundamental issues and ideologies relating to race, religion and politics. Similar divisions exist to this day despite humanity being more connected and homogenous as ever and I believe this is fundamentally caused by the media. Nowhere is this more obvious that in the United States of America as the American media and its content goes a long way in dividing people as they effectively operate as an entertainment body by providing content that people can enjoy rather than delivering factual news that is based on information and journalism.

Media bias has gotten so strong that different sects of the public get their news from different sources which leads to them getting false or even opposing information and this in turn serves to grow the chasm between the groups. In Richard D. Anderson's The Place of Media In Popular Democracy, the author talks about how the media has evolved out of its intended role as being a deliverer of news to an analyzer of news. The author also cites this shift as a reason as to why public deliberation on key political issues has decreased as most people just look towards the television for that. He also talks about television turning into the main medium for political content has turned it into a much more emotionally charged topic as opposed to being rational and intellectual. This had led to people basing their opinion depending on how the argument is presented to them rather than actually thinking about it themselves.

The concept of media and newspapers has always been to be an organization striving to deliver the truth to the masses, to spread information to the public and to shed light on issues around the globe. However, over time American politics has turned into a quasi reality TV show where the cast is comprised of political leaders and the news now acts as a medium to analyze them. Not only are the individuals analyzed, their policies and ideologies are also being discussed constantly to the point where the viewer's internal thoughts about an issue are not developed rather they are just shaped by whatever he or she hears. The simple fact is that TV networks do not base their agenda on contributing to socio-political awareness rather they just want to attract eyeballs to their product and the best way to do that is to provide entertaining content. This can simply be seen by taking a look at the list of the highest paid political TV show hosts which includes names like Sean Hannity, Tucker Carlson, Ann Coulter and Don Lemon. The simple truth is that these individuals, while extremely accomplished, have not studied politics extensively are not best suited to speak to a country about their opinions on key, layered issues such as health care, taxation or education. Their presence on the screen and their opinions serve only one purpose and that is "strictly to be entertaining" as affirmed by Sean Hannity himself. Nonetheless, their opinions shape the minds of many viewers who watch them and they do not deserve this kind of responsibility when they themselves do not perfectly understand the issues they are speaking on. Debate shows are a popular template for political TV shows because of the entertainment factor that comes with pitting two people with contrasting viewpoints against each other. However, this sort of discussion can have negative consequences as viewers can become attached to a certain viewpoint or ideology if a debater is able to argue his side better than his opponent rather than actually researching and learning about it properly and analyzing it for yourself.

The shift of news media away from the truth and facts towards entertainment and opinions has

sullied the whole concept of journalism and it has decreased self-deliberation and thought by individuals as they are just force fed opinions and are free to pick and side with anyone they like without even understanding what they are picking and siding with. Politics and its impact on everyday life is not something that should be taken lightly; rather, every person must come to their own realizations and beliefs based on their own experiences rather than allowing some man or woman on a TV to do it for them. In Andrew Michael Daniller's Politics As Sport: The Effects Of Partisan MediaOn Perceptions Of Electoral Integrity, the author likens the electoral process in politics to a sports game in which fans of two games will reach different conclusions on the integrity of the game based on the result. A similar phenomenon is seen in elections as the losing side will always try to declare voter rigging and this is further exacerbated by the media. This is something that is extensively seen in American politics particularly because of there being only two dominant parties.

Every election cycle, like clockwork, the losing side and its supporters will refuse to humbly accept their defeat and will rather look for every excuse to point out a flaw in the process of the election or in the resume of the opponent. This can be observed quite clearly in the reaction to Donald Trump's electoral college victory over Hillary Clinton in 2016 despite him having a lesser share of the overall popular vote. Every Republican on TV could be seen defending the electoral college and its importance and while every Democrat was talking about how Hillary Clinton lost unfairly. Each party and its media supporters had made up their mind that they would have an opinion based on whatever suited their parties agenda better.

The truth is that the electoral college is an extremely complicated system that has been meticulously designed and studied by politicians and has many pros and cons. Judging the credibility of such an important system based on how it fits your side's propaganda is extremely short-sighted and unwise. This is done by the media as they understand that this is what their respective audiences would like to see and satisfying the audience has become the number one priority for all television networks. This extreme dichotomy and steadfast support of a certain party by the media has led to a loss of actual nuanced debates that delve deep into socio-political issues to understand them rather than offering up a solution based on whether you vote red or blue. People's opinions on issues are not often as binary as just being left-wing or right-wing as a person who may be in support of universal health care may also be in support of stricter immigration laws. However, almost never will you see a CNN TV host talk about how the government needs to shut down borders rather every host will basically regurgitate the same stance held by their fellow hosts just with different faces and voices. In the current day, most of the public will take facts presented by the media on face value as that is the lowest expectation of any media company, they will not be lying to their audience.

That assumption is correct as no matter the agenda of a company it is just not possible to present falsified statistics or facts as it is entirely possible that you will get fact checked and then face a severe backlash. Therefore, the media has resorted to something that is potentially a lot more dangerous, using specific half-truths or facts with no context that cannot be disproven but also do not show the whole picture. This is done by both the right wing and left wing media as they both aim to prove their own side's position rather than have an actual discussion based on facts and statistics and this leaves the audience with an opinion that they support but do not completely understand or know the truth about. An individual could watch a segment on gun rights done by FOX News and be completely convinced in their argument. The same individual could watch CNN make a counter argument to the initial position and think that their opinion makes more sense. This might be understandable if the argument is about something that is

intangible or philosophical but that is seldom the case. In Ian Anson's Just the facts? Partisan media and the political conditioning of economic perceptions, the author specifically explains how Democrats and Republicans react to biased facts about the economy through a study. The study exposed a group of Democrats and Republicans to facts about the economy during the Obama administration and tallied their retrospection. Facts were presented in different manners; facts were told with no bias, congenial facts were told that confirmed their party bias and facts were told with obvious party bias. The study confirmed that individuals were most likely to retain facts that fit with their party bias but were not presented with an obvious party bias. This is likely because individuals want to learn about facts that confirm their position without breaking the illusion that the facts were skewed to make a point. This tactic is employed by both sides of the media and it is why people who identify as Democrats or Republicans in the USA have a different perception on their country's economic strength based on which party is in power despite the obvious fact that they are talking about the same economy. If different media companies present different perceptions of the economy then, how can a person know which one to trust and then how can a person determine if the current government is doing a good job or not. It is remarkable that something as objective as the economy which can be graded completely just based off of stats, can elicit two different perceptions. This leads to a public that is extremely confused and does not have the proper facts and statistics, even about tangible topics, to make a sound and smart decision when casting their vote on election day. In addition to religiously defending their party, partisan media companies also have an unfortunate and dangerous habit of bashing individuals and groups who adhere to the opposing political ideology.

FOX News is famous for labeling liberals as snowflakes whereas the right resent being labeled as racists and white supremacists by CNN. Each side aims to strengthen their point by repeatedly bashing the position of the opposing side and labeling their stance as immoral and wrong while failing to understand and empathize. This is argued by Tim Groseclose who presented his opinion of the existence of a liberial media bias in America in Left Turn: How Liberal Bias Distorts The American Mind by claiming that the overwhelming presence of liberal pundits and personalities and their negative portrayal of the right have had a significant impact on American results. Drawing on his own research, Groseclose claims that John McCain would have beaten Barack Obama in the 2008 presidential elections by a margin of 56%-42% if media bias were to not exist. This bias against John McCain is further proven by a research conducted by the Pew Research Center labeled The Invisible Primary – Invisible No Longer which outlines how John McCain received the most negative press with 47.9% of his coverage by the media being negative. Delving deeper into the number shows how McCain was not given a fair shake by the media, especially the liberal media as his controversial plan for military build up in Iraq was given a lot more coverage at 15% than other candidates received for their plans regarding the military which was 6%. Furthermore, McCain's biggest advantage, which was the allure of his personal journey as a former prisoner of war and a third-generation soldier was given much less coverage at 4% than other candidate's personal journeys, which was at 17%. The biggest culprit in this was CNN who showed a ridiculous bias by covering McCain with a tone that was negative 63% of times. While FOX News was not without bias either it did provide a much more even coverage of Obama which was negative at a much less 32%.

The 2008 election is just an example that stands out as this kind of negative press about the opposing party candidates is ever present and even more so in the 2016 Presidential Election, though that can be attributed to the litany of controversies surrounding Hillary Clinton and especially, Donald Trump at that time. As currently living in liberal-leaning area in Toronto and

being left-leaning myself, the anti-conservative sentiment is quite clear to see to the point where being conservative is semi-synonymous with being racist. However, the truth is that conservatives make up roughly 40% of an average population and considering 40% of the world as being racist implies a disconnect in the liberal public's image of conservatives. This is shown in a study done by More In Common called The Perception Gap. The study asks a random sample of 2100 Americans to answer different political questions from the perspective of an individual from the opposite wing. The tallied results were extremely telling as it showed how the perception between how liberals viewed conservatives and the reality and vice versa. The study showed that Democrats viewed Republicans to be 19% more extreme than reality whereas the Republicans viewed the Democrats as 27% more extreme in their views than actuality. This perception is shown to be directly related to consuming news media as regularly consuming FOX News content added a perception gap of 4% whereas left-leaning publications such as Buzzfeed and Huffington Post also add a perception of 8%. However, the most eye-opening statistic to come out of this study is the correlation between frequency of news consumption and the perception gap. Individuals who seldom followed the news had a perception gap of less than 10% whereas who followed the new most of the time had a perception gap of almost 30%.

This is a corroboration of the fact that news media and its content presents the opposite side as being much more extremist and negative. As Democrats and Republicans are regionally isolated to a certain degree, they rely on news media to help them understand the opposing side and their viewpoints. The news media goes a long way in painting a mental image of the people who support the opposite ideology and rather than trying to bridge the gap between both sides, the media instead decides to present a caricatured and falsified version that will increase division and tension between both sides. America has always been fundamentally divided as the two party structure will always lead to some tension however, the media has not helped reduce these tensions in the slightest, rather they have been extremely selfish by exploiting these tensions for their own gain, in their pursuits of ratings. Their pursuit of these ratings may have been successful but it has come at the cost of the public lacking self thought in politics, group thinking to support their party, presenting half-truths and self-satisfying facts and criticizing the beliefs and ideologies of the opposition. It is quite ironic that the original and slightly naive purpose of the first news publications was to provide information and to connect people from different places and somehow we have arrived at the point where the news media does the exact opposite of that by falsifying information and dividing people.