Jimmy Swaggart once said, "The media is ruled by Satan," and Jimmy Swaggart should know, having spent a lot of time becoming pretty knowledgeable about both.

Indeed, there are times when the phrase "news media" does seem to conjure up a vision of some sort of faceless, amorphous, evil—or at least obnoxious—force, when uttered by those who would decry the press's many reputed sins. How many times have we heard politicians refer to the "media" as though it were a dirty word?

The public has a far more nuanced—and often more cordial—relationship with its news providers than these references would suggest.

True, the amount of trust and confidence Americans say they have in the mass media has declined significantly since the 1970s, and the public puts journalists at the low end of the honesty and ethics spectrum. Nearly three-quarters also think the media have too much power and influence in Washington, and that they use their influence to drive controversy rather than just report the news about it.

Majorities, some of them quite large, worry about biases they perceive in the news, and the ease with which special interest groups seem to be able to manipulate the press. And for decades, people have condemned the amount of coverage news organizations devote to such sensational stories as the O.J. Simpson trial, the death of Princess Diana, and the Monica Lewinsky scandal—even as other indicators, such as the Pew News Interest Index, have shown that they generally follow them quite avidly.

Even journalists themselves sometimes take a rather jaundiced view of their own profession, with two-thirds majorities in a Pew Research Center poll seeing a failure to draw a clear line between reporting and commentary and an excessive predisposition to entertain.

Yet it is these very journalists who comprise the frontline of that seemingly amorphous force we call "the media," and, despite a reputation for being cynical and hardboiled, they seem to be a pretty idealistic bunch. Nearly two-thirds feel the thing that most distinguishes journalism from anything else is the contribution it makes to society; 100% say that getting the facts right is a core principle of their profession; 96% say an important reason for being a journalist is to provide people with information they need in their lives; and 93% are proud of the work they do.

And the public, for all its professed dissatisfaction with the news media in recent years, still acknowledges the vital role a free press plays in a free society. On September 11, when there was nowhere else for millions of Americans to turn for information, we were forcibly reminded of just how much we need "the media," and we roundly applauded their efforts.

— Lisa Ferraro Parmelee, Editor
Good News and Bad News

Question:
Which of the following two statements about the news media do you agree with more?... The news media helps society to solve its problems. The news media gets in the way of society solving its problems.


Question:
Recent nationwide polls have shown that there is increased public dissatisfaction with the press. Do you think this public dissatisfaction with the media is justified, or do you think the press is simply an easy target to blame for deeper problems in our society?


Question:
In general, do you think news organizations get the facts straight, or do you think that their stories and reports are often inaccurate?


Question:
In general, how much trust and confidence do you have in the mass media, such as newspapers, TV, and radio, when it comes to reporting the news fully, accurately, and fairly—a great deal, a fair amount, not very much, or none at all?

Source: Surveys by the Gallup Organization, latest that of July 6-9, 2000.

Question:
Please tell me how you would rate the honesty and ethical standards of people in these different fields—very high, high, average, low, or very low?

Some people think that by criticizing leaders, news organizations keep political leaders from doing their job. Others think that such criticism is worth it because it keeps political leaders from doing things that should not be done. Which position is closer to your opinion?

**Question:** Do you think... the news media have too much or too little power and influence in Washington?

- **Too little** - 14%
- **About right** - 9%
- **Too much** - 72%
- **Not sure/Refused** - 5%

Source: Survey by Harris Interactive, February 13-19, 2002.

**Question:** Some people say that in covering the personal and ethical behavior of public figures, news organizations are only reporting the news. Others say that news organizations are driving the controversies themselves, by devoting as much coverage to these stories as they do. Which view comes closer to your own?

- **Criticism keeps leaders from wrongdoing** - 67%
- **Criticism keeps leaders from their job** - 32%
- **Neither** - 1%


**Question:** How much influence do you feel the news media have on each of the following areas? Would you say they have a great deal of influence, a moderate amount, only a little, or no real influence at all?...

- **Who becomes president** - 90%
- **The policy decisions a president makes** - 72%
- **Whether a president is re-elected** - 86%
- **How a president behaves in private** - 40%
- **How a president behaves in public** - 77%


**Question:** Thinking about... US presidents in general, who do you believe has more influence on what goes on in this country— the president or the news media?

- **The president** - 73%
- **The news media** - 18%
- **Both equally** - 7%
- **Don't know** - 2%

Some people say that the news media are biased, while others say that's not true. In general, do you agree with the assessment that there's bias in the news media?

Question:

Do you think that stories in the news media are generally balanced, or are they biased toward liberal positions or biased toward conservative positions?

Balance: 30%
Biased toward liberals: 30%
Biased toward conservatives: 16%

Question:

In your opinion, do journalists generally favor Democrats or Republicans, or are they impartial?

Impartial: 38%
Favor Democrats: 33%
Favor Republicans: 14%

Question:

Would you say that you strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree?... I believe that it's pretty easy for special interest groups to manipulate the press.

NATIONAL ADULT SAMPLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

JOURNALISTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question:

Would you say that you strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree?... It's pretty easy for me to spot when the personal bias or preconceived notions of a reporter show up in a news story.

NATIONAL ADULT SAMPLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

JOURNALISTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Journalist survey used self-administered questionnaires to poll 1,714 journalists working at US newspapers with daily circulation of 5,000 or more.

Source: Surveys by Urban & Associates/American Society of Newspaper Editors, April-May 1998 (public) and May-June 1998 (journalists).
Some people feel that there has been an increase in the amount of coverage that news organizations give to sensationalized news and scandals these days. Which one of the following do you think would be most to blame for an increase in coverage of sensationalized news and scandals?

- Journalists chase sensational stories because they think it'll sell papers, not because they think it's important news.

**Note:** Journalist survey used self-administered questionnaires to poll 1,714 journalists working at US newspapers with daily circulation of 5,000 or more.

**Source:** Survey by Urban & Associates/American Society of Newspaper Editors, April-May 1998 (public) and May-June 1998 (journalists).

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**Question:**
Would you say the news media have given the O.J. Simpson case too much coverage, not enough or about the right amount?

**Source:** Survey by the Los Angeles Times, December 16-18, 1997.

**Question:**
Thinking about the media's coverage of the investigation into President Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky... do you think the media has paid too much attention to this story, too little attention, or the right amount of attention?

**Source:** Survey by Yankelovich/Time/CNN, September 16-17, 1998.

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**Question:**
...Tell me if you would like to have more news about [what happened to Edward Kennedy at Chappaquiddick Island], less news, or about the same amount of news about it as now?

**Source:** Survey by the Los Angeles Times, December 16-18, 1979.

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**Question:**
I believe that newspapers frequently over-dramatize some news stories just to sell more papers.

**Source:** Survey by ABC News, September 27, 1995.

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**Question:**
Do you think that there has been too much press coverage regarding the death of Princess Diana or that it has received that right amount of press coverage?

**Source:** Survey by NBC News/Wall Street Journal, September 11-15, 1997.

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**Question:**
Do you think the news media coverage of the Catholic Church sex abuse scandal has been responsible or has the coverage been sensationalized?

**Source:** Survey by Opinion Dynamics/Fox News, April 2-3, 2002.

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**Question:**
[Would you say that you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree?]

**Journalists**

- Strongly agree: 27%
- Agree: 53%
- Disagree: 14%
- Strongly disagree: 3%

**Public**

- Strongly agree: 36%
- Agree: 49%
- Disagree: 36%
- Strongly disagree: 10%

**Note:** Journalist survey used self-administered questionnaires to poll 7,174 journalists working at US newspapers with daily circulation of 5,000 or more.

**Source:** Surveys by Urban & Associates/American Society of Newspaper Editors, April-May 1998 (public) and May/June 1998 (journalists).
The Being of a Journalist

Questions:

I’m going to read to you a list of personal reasons people sometimes give for entering journalism. As I read each, please tell me how important—if at all—it was to you. How about...? Was this very important, fairly important, not too important, or not at all important?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>Fairly important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To be able to write or communicate for a living</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The promise of an exciting career</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be one of the first people to know something</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Multiple responses were allowed.

Questions:

Now I’m going to read a list of reasons that people give for being journalists. As I read each one, please tell me how important—if at all—you think it is for journalists you know. How about...? Do you think this is very important, fairly important, not too important, or not at all important for journalists you know?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>Fairly important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Providing people with information they need in their lives</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having the chance to uncover wrongdoing</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a witness to history</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping to create a sense of community</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becoming famous or well-known</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Questions:

As I read from a list, please tell me whether you think this is a core principle of journalism, or not. How about...?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Percent responding core principle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Getting the facts right</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting both sides of the story</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping the business people out of the newsroom</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making your [reader/viewer/listener] your first obligation</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always remaining neutral</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing an interpretation to news</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting the story first</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question:

When you meet someone for the first time and tell them where you work, do you generally feel proud, or do you feel somewhat apologetic?

- Proud: 93%
- Apologetic: 5%
- Both: 2%
- Neither/Depends (vol.): 5%
I’m going to ask you a few questions about some criticisms made of the press. For each, I would like to know if you feel this is a problem, or not. ...Overall, do you think this is a valid criticism of the news media, or not? Some critics charge that...
Turning Points

**Question:**
Early on election night (November 7, 2000), news organizations mistakenly declared Al Gore the winner in Florida. Do you think this mistake had any effect on how people in other parts of the country voted, or don’t you think it had any impact?

- Had an effect: 52%
- No impact: 41%
- Don’t know/Refused: 7%


**Question:**
What was your reaction when you first learned that news organizations had made a mistake early Wednesday morning in declaring George W. Bush the winner of the presidential election? Were you angry with the news organizations, just disappointed in them, or didn’t it bother you that much?

- Didn’t bother: 48%
- Just disappointed: 21%
- Angry: 27%
- Don’t know/Refused: 2%


**Question:**
Why do you think news organizations sometimes make projections too quickly? Is it mostly because they want to be first to call the winner or mostly because they feel it is important for their audience to know the outcome as soon as possible?

- Important for audience to know: 81%
- Want to be first: 13%
- Don’t know/Refused: 4%


**Question:**
In general, how would you rate the job the press has done in covering the terrorist attacks and the war against terrorism—excellent, good, only fair, or poor?

- Excellent: 32%
- Good: 42%
- Only fair: 17%
- Poor: 6%


**Question:**
Do you approve or disapprove of the job the media is doing covering the war on terrorism?

- Approve: 45%
- Disapprove: 46%
- Not sure: 9%


**Question:**
What was your reaction when you first learned that news organizations had made a mistake early Wednesday morning in declaring George W. Bush the winner of the presidential election? Were you angry with the news organizations, just disappointed in them, or didn’t it bother you that much?

- Angry: 21%
- Just disappointed: 48%
- Didn’t bother: 27%
- Don’t know/Refused: 2%


**Question:**
[...Please tell me whether you think that this change is temporary and will return to normal after awhile, or whether you think that it is a long-term change that will last for many years.] The news media are paying more attention to important issues.

- Long-term change: 32%
- Temporary change: 55%
- Not sure: 5%
- Not changed (vol.): 8%


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