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INFLUENCE OF THE MEDIA ELITE

On July 14, 1964, at the Republican National Convention in the Cow Palace in San Francisco, I watched many thousands of Republicans give wildly sustained applause to an unexpected paragraph in the formal address made by former President Dwight Eisenhower. Here is the way the official Convention proceedings report what happened.

"Let us particularly scorn the divisive efforts of those outside our family [of Republicans], including sensation-seeking columnists and commentators. (Cheers and Applause) Thank you. (Extended Cheers and Applause) Because, my friends, I assure you that these are people who couldn't care less about the good of our Party. (Cheers and Applause)"

David Brinkley and the other television personnel who were present were glad they were high above the crowd in the safety of the glassed-in network observation boxes. For a tense moment, it almost looked as though the crowd was ready to tar and feather them after the usually soft-spoken Ike pointed the finger of shame at the liberal news media.

Nobody had taken a poll of the media in 1964, but the Delegates believed that the media were their political enemies. Now, 18 years later, a study of the presidential voting record of the media elite proves that the intuition of Eisenhower and the Goldwater Delegates was correct.

The media elite voted 94% for Lyndon Johnson to 6% for Barry Goldwater in 1964; 87% for Hubert Humphrey to 13% for Richard Nixon in 1968; 81% for George McGovern to 19% for Richard Nixon in 1972; and 81% for Jimmy Carter to 19% for Gerald Ford in 1976. (The 1980 election was not included in the survey.)

These figures are from an extraordinary in-depth study of the national media elite made by S. Robert Lichter and Stanley Rothman and recently published in the magazine PUBLIC OPINION. Their findings were based on hour-long interviews with 240 journalists and broadcasters at the most influential media outlets, such as the NEW YORK TIMES, the WASHINGTON POST, the WALL STREET JOURNAL, TIME, NEWSWEEK, CBS, NBC, ABC, and PBS. Their findings make sensational reading even for those who have long recognized the liberal

media bias.

The Lichter-Rothman survey took a searching look at the social and personal backgrounds of the media elite. What comes through loud and clear is that they are a socially privileged class from upper-middle-income homes. Not only are they well educated, well paid and well-to-do, their parents were also well educated and well-to-do.

Here are some of the Lichter-Rothman statistics: 95% are white, 79% are male, 93% are college graduates, 55% have postgraduate study, and almost half have a family income in excess of $50,000. Since 68% come from the northeast or north central states, and only 3% come from the entire Pacific coast, it's no wonder they don't warm up to Ronald Reagan.

The most striking and predominant characteristic of the media elite is what Lichter and Rothman called their "secular outlook." Another way of expressing that observation would be to call it an anti-religious outlook. It's no wonder they oppose prayer in the schools; most of the media don't even believe in prayer in church or synagogue.

Exactly 50% say that they have no religious affiliation whatsoever, and 86% admit that they seldom or never attend religious services. Only 8% go to church or synagogue weekly. Almost one in four was raised in a Jewish household; only one in eight identifies himself as Catholic.

The survey shows that the media elite are strong supporters of sexual permissiveness: 90% agree that abortion should be legal; 54% believe that adultery is not wrong; 76% believe that homosexuality is not wrong; 85% believe that homosexuals should be permitted to teach in public schools.

The media take their power seriously. When asked to rate the major groups according to their current influence over American life, the media elite ranked them as follows: business, media, unions, consumer groups, intellectuals, blacks, and feminists. But when asked WHICH groups SHOULD rule America, the media elite chooses itself as number one. After that, in descending order, the media would list consumer groups, intellectuals, blacks, business, feminists, and unions.

The media elite are not always successful in telling Americans what to think, but they are stunningly successful in telling them what to think about. The ability to set the agenda for discussions about social policy is what makes the media so powerful.