Chapter 1: A Propaganda Model

1. See note 4 of the preface.
2. Media representatives claim that what the government says is "news-worth}y" in its own right. If, however, the government's assertions are transmitted without context or evaluation, and without regard to the government's possible manipulative intent, the media have set themselves up to be "managed." Their objectivity is "nominal," not substantive.

In early October 1986, memos were leaked to the press indicating that the Reagan administration had carried out a deliberate campaign of disinformation to influence events in Libya. The mass media, which had passed along this material without question, expressed a great deal of righteous indignation that they had been misled. To compound the absurdity, five years earlier the press had reported a CIA-run "disinformation program designed to embarrass Qaddafi and his government," along with terrorist operations to overthrow Qaddafi and perhaps assassinate him (Newsweek, Aug. 3, 1981; P. Edward Haley, Qaddafi and the United States since 1969 [New York: Praeger, 1984], p. 272).

But no lessons were learned. In fact, the mass media are gullible on an almost daily basis, but rarely have to suffer the indignity of government documents revealing their gullibility. With regard to Libya, the media have fallen into line for each propaganda ploy, from the 1981 "hit squads" through the Berlin discotheque bombing, swallowing each implausible claim, failing to admit error in retrospect, and apparently unable to learn from successive entrapment—which suggests willing error. See Noam Chomsky, Pirates & Emperors (New York: Claremont, 1986), chapter 3. As we show throughout the present book, a series of lies by the government, successively exposed, never seems to arouse skepticism in the media regarding the next government claim.

3. For a description of the government's strategy of deflecting attention away from the Nicaraguan election by the fabricated MIG story, and the media's service in this government program, see chapter 3, under "The MIG Crisis Staged during the Nicaraguan Election Week."

5. Quoted in ibid., p. 23.
6. Ibid., p. 34.
10. Note that we are speaking of media with substantial outreach—mass media. It has always been possible to start small-circulation journals and to produce mimeographed or photocopied news letters sent around to a tiny audience. But even small journals in the United States today typically survive only by virtue of contributions from wealthy financial angels.
11. In 1987, the Times-Mirror Company, for example, owned newspapers in Los Angeles, Baltimore, Denver, and Hartford, Connecticut, had book publishing and magazine subsidiaries, and owned cable systems and seven television stations.
14. The four major Western wire services—Associated Press, United Press International, Reuters, and Agence-France-Presse—account for some 80 percent of the international news circulating in the world today. AP is owned by member newspapers; UPI is privately owned; Reuters was owned mainly by the British media until it went public in 1984, but control was retained by the original owners by giving lesser voting rights to the new stockholders; Agence-France-Presse is heavily subsidized by the French government. As is pointed out by Jonathan Fenby, the wire services "exist to serve markets," and their prime concern, accordingly, "is with the rich media markets of the United States, Western Europe, and Japan, and increasingly with the business community." They compete fiercely, but AP and UPI "are really U.S. enterprises that operate on an international scale. ... Without their domestic base, the AP and UPI could not operate as international agencies. With it, they must be American organizations, subject to American pressures and requirements" (*The International News Services* [New York: Schocken, 1986], pp. 7, 9, 73–74). See also Anthony Smith, *The Geopolitics of Information: How Western Culture Dominates the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), chapter 3.
15. The fourteenth annual Roper survey, "Public Attitudes toward Television and Other Media in a Time of Change" (May 1985), indicates that in 1984, 64 percent of the sample mentioned television as the place "where you usually get most of your news about what's going on in the world today ..." (p. 3). It has often been noted that the television networks themselves depend heavily on the prestige newspapers, wire services, and government for their choices of news. Their autonomy as newsmakers can be easily exaggerated.
16. The members of the very top tier qualify by audience outreach, importance as setters of news standards, and asset and profit totals. The last half dozen or so in our twenty-four involve a certain amount of arbitrariness of choice, although audience size is still our primary criterion. McGraw-Hill is included
because of its joint strength in trade books and magazines of political content and outreach.

17. As noted in table 1-1, note 7, Storer came under the temporary control of the securities firm Kohlberg Kravis Roberts & Co. in 1985. As its ultimate fate was unclear at the time of writing, and as financial data were no longer available after 1984, we have kept Storer on the table and list it here, despite its uncertain status.


19. A split among the heirs of James E. Scripps eventually resulted in the sale of the *Detroit Evening News*. According to one news article, “Daniel Marentette, a Scripps family member and a self described ‘angry shareholder,’ says family members want a better return on their money. ‘We get better yields investing in a New York checking account,’ says Mr. Marentette, who sells race horses” (Damon Darlin, “Takeover Rumors Hit Detroit News Parent,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 18, 1985). The Bingham family division on the matter led to the sale of the *Louisville Courier-Journal*; the New Haven papers of the Jackson family were sold after years of squabbling, and “the sale price [of the New Haven papers], $185 million, has only served to publicize the potential value of family holdings of family newspapers elsewhere” (Geraldine Fabrikant, “Newspaper Properties, Hotter Than Ever,” *New York Times*, Aug. 17, 1986).

20. The Reagan administration strengthened the control of existing holders of television-station licenses by increasing their term from three to five years, and its FCC made renewals essentially automatic. The FCC also greatly facilitated speculation and trading in television properties by a rule change reducing the required holding period before sale of a newly acquired property from three years to one year.

The Reagan era FCC and Department of Justice also refused to challenge mergers and takeover bids that would significantly increase the concentration of power (GE-RCA) or media concentration (Capital Cities–ABC). Furthermore, beginning April 2, 1985, media owners could own as many as twelve television stations, as long as their total audience didn’t exceed 25 percent of the nation’s television households; and they could also hold twelve AM and twelve FM stations, as the 1953 “7-7-7 rule” was replaced with a “12-12-12 rule.” See Herbert H. Howard, “Group and Cross-Media Ownership of Television Stations: 1985” (Washington: National Association of Broadcasters, 1985).

21. This was justified by Reagan-era FCC chairman Mark Fowler on the grounds that market options are opening up and that the public should be free to choose. Criticized by Fred Friendly for doing away with the law’s public-