

**Rena Bivens**

## **Media Coverage, Foreign Policy, and Public Opinion: The Current Political Climate is Creating New Opportunities for Media Reform**

Mainstream media organizations can appear very trustworthy in the eyes of an uncritical audience. The social representations they disseminate become reality for the majority of viewers. However, when one compares the reporting of an event like the 2003 Iraq war from one region of the world to another, competing narratives arise. If media sources can come up with competing narratives in their reporting of the same event, the production processes that led to the construction of their contrasting news stories are also likely to be dissimilar. An international comparison and analysis of production processes will reveal those practices that are unlikely to contribute to the promotion of global opinions, that is, the portrayal of many narratives of a single event, and therefore decrease the potential for citizens throughout the world to become better informed. I am currently undertaking this investigation through my PhD research in order to provide the basis for a media reform campaign that is effectively focused by directing itself towards specific changes in the production processes of mass media.

This paper takes the first step towards media reform by arguing that there is a growing concern with media and definitions of social representation, particularly when dealing with war and conflict, and this concern is overly evident in the flood of alternative, independent media sources emerging within this climate and directing their efforts towards media reform. Through an analysis of the history of media reform I will consider the basis for this growing concern while arguing that focused media reform campaigns have the capacity to pressure mainstream media organizations to become accountable for their content, and this pressure is absolutely essential in the struggle for human rights and social justice. The role of the media is increasingly scrutinized today; more and more films have addressed issues of media, representation, and foreign policy and audiences have flocked to the cinemas. My paper will highlight this climate and suggest that a unique opportunity has been presented wherein concerned groups and individuals can demand that mainstream media organizations alter their practices. This effort coincides with the goal of encouraging citizens to act on their potentially improved knowledge base and participate in society by choosing to influence the policy decisions of their government.

Since the largest anti-war demonstrations in the history of the UK have been recently staged against the war in Iraq without a resulting impact on Prime Minister Blair's foreign policy decisions, it is clear that even more of the public must get involved if they wish to utilize the potential inherent within democratic societies to actively help protect the lives of those caught up in such conflicts. I strongly believe that mainstream media have the capacity to better inform populations throughout the world by incorporating global opinions instead of relying on production processes to frame the news through editorial controls, gatekeeping, and the influence of public relations firms that often create questionable conditions under which information gets supplied to journalists.