Shaping Immigration News

This book offers a comprehensive portrait of French and American journalists in action as they grapple with how to report and comment on one of the most important issues of our era. Drawing on interviews with leading journalists and analyses of an extensive sample of newspaper and television coverage since the early 1970s, Rodney Benson shows how the immigration debate has become increasingly focused on the dramatic, emotion-laden frames of humanitarianism and public order. Yet, even in an era of global hypercommercialism, Benson also finds enduring French-American differences related to the distinctive societal positions, professional logics, and internal structures of each country’s journalistic fields. In both countries, less commercialized media tend to offer the most in-depth, multiperspectival, and critical news. Benson challenges classic liberalism’s assumptions about state intervention’s chilling effects on the press, suggests costs as well as benefits to the current vogue in personalized narrative news, and calls attention to journalistic practices that can help empower civil society. This book offers new theories and methods for sociologists and media scholars and fresh insights for journalists, policymakers, and concerned citizens.

Rodney Benson is associate professor in the Department of Media, Culture, and Communication and an affiliated faculty member in the Department of Sociology at New York University. Benson’s research lies at the intersection of the sociology of culture, comparative media systems, political communication, and journalism studies. His articles have appeared in the American Sociological Review, Journal of Communication, European Journal of Communication, Press/Politics, Political Communication, Le Monde Diplomatique, and many other publications. Benson is also co-editor of Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field (with Erik Neveu, 2005) and co-author of the Free Press policy report Public Media and Political Independence: Lessons for the Future of Journalism from Around the World (with Matthew Powers, 2011).
Communication, Society and Politics

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Politics and relations among individuals in societies across the world are being transformed by new technologies for targeting individuals and sophisticated methods for shaping personalized messages. The new technologies challenge boundaries of many kinds – between news, information, entertainment, and advertising; between media, with the arrival of the World Wide Web; and even between nations. Communication, Society and Politics probes the political and social impacts of these new communication systems in national, comparative, and global perspective.

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A French-American Comparison

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New York University
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In the process of researching and writing this book, I have benefited from the encouragement and comments of many esteemed colleagues and friends. I feel fortunate to be part of the growing and vibrant community of comparative media and culture researchers and to be able to engage with so many scholars whose work I admire, such as Dan Hallin, Paolo Mancini, Jay Blumler, James Curran, Michèle Lamont, Sonia Livingstone, Frank Esser, Silvio Waisbord, Toril Aalberg, Thomas Hanitzsch, Jesper Strömberg, Cyril Lemieux, Myra Marx Ferree, David Levy, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen. Cross-national comparative research is continually challenging the conventional wisdom based on single-nation studies and in so doing is revitalizing and transforming our disciplines. Even so, cross-national comparative projects face continuing epistemological, explanatory, and normative challenges in taking account of new technologies, transnational as well as cross-national dimensions of culture, and comparisons that go beyond North America and Western Europe. While this book is an ambitious attempt to paint a portrait of the French and U.S. journalistic fields and to offer a model for other cross-national studies, it certainly cannot fully transcend its temporal and spatial limitations; I can only hope that its shortcomings will be just as helpful in orienting and improving future research as its successes.

For generously taking the time to read through draft chapters and offer extremely helpful constructive critiques, I want to express my gratitude to Michael Schudson, Steve Reese, Mark Pedelty, Ron Jacobs, Marty Schain, Tim Dowd, Susanne Janssen, Bill Kunerth, Eric Klinenberg, Abby Saguy, Kjersti Thorbjornsrud, Elizabeth Hanauer, Max Benavidez, and two anonymous Cambridge reviewers. My thinking and writing have also been enriched by the productive dialogues about theories and methods that I have had with Hartmut Wessler, Nick Couldry, Aeron Davis, John Thompson, Herbert Gans, David Swartz, Tore Slaata, Ida Willig, Barbie Zelizer, Jay Rosen,
Sandrine Boudana, Michael Palmer, Sarah Stroup, Dalton Conley, Steven Lukes, David Folson, Ed Berenson, Herrick Chapman, Frédéric Viguier, and James Graff.

In France, I have been helped immeasurably in my understanding of French society and media (although I am still and always hope to be learning more) and of sociological theory and methodology in general (likewise) by my colleagues at the Centre de sociologie européenne established by Pierre Bourdieu, especially Dominique Marchetti, Julien Duval, Patrick Champagne, Julie Sedel, and Gisèle Sapiro. I also have benefited greatly from and enjoyed every minute of my ongoing intellectual collaborations with Erik Neveu in Rennes and Eric Darras and Olivier Baisnée in Toulouse. Philippe Juhem generously shared his own interview transcripts (for his excellent research on antiracism associations and the media), some of which I have cited in this book.

A host of distinguished immigration scholars have helped me navigate the ins and outs of French and U.S. immigration history and policy, including Smaïn Laacher, Patrick Weil, Adrian Favell, Erik Bleich, Elaine Thomas, Virginie Guiraudon, Denis Lacorne, Michel Wieviorka, Farhad Khosrokhavar, Catherine Wihtol de Wenden, Gérard Noiriel, and my NYU colleague Marty Schain. Given its focus on news media, this book cannot fully capture the immense complexities of immigration in France and the United States so ably documented by these scholars. Building on their work, however, I hope that my research on the news media’s role in shaping the immigration debate can add an important new dimension to our understanding of contemporary immigration politics. For the insights that come from firsthand experiences of immigration politics and news media work, I am also immensely grateful to the many journalists and activists in France and the United States who took time from their busy schedules to share something of their professional worlds with me.

Colleagues at Yale, Erasmus University–Rotterdam, the University of Oslo, and the Toulouse Institut d’Études Politiques invited me to share my work-in-progress on this book and provided useful and cogent critical feedback. I also received helpful comments when I presented papers drawing on material from the book at conferences hosted by Connecticut College (on Undocumented Hispanic Immigration) and by the International Communication Association. In addition, I want to thank Thibault Chareton of the French-American Foundation, Ted Glasser of Stanford University’s Department of Communication, and Giovanna Dell’Orto of the University of Minnesota School of Journalism and Mass Communication (working with Vicki Birchfield of the Georgia Institute of Technology) for inviting me to present my research to diverse groups that included many journalists and activists as well as scholars.

Shaping Immigration News is substantially based on a large corpus of discourse and image data gathered and analyzed over the past few years; its theoretical and methodological framework draws not only on this study of immigration news, but also on additional comparative studies I have conducted, many of them collaborative, of other topics, regions, and dimensions of media. It
also builds upon earlier research conducted under the outstanding guidance of Loïc Wacquant, along with Neil Fligstein, Todd Gitlin, and Allan Pred, at the University of California–Berkeley. Loïc and Neil first sparked my interest in field theory and encouraged me to extend and develop it for cross-national research. Todd’s early writings on hegemony motivated me to pursue an academic career; I continue to try to emulate his open-minded exploration of new theories and methods. Michael Schudson was also an early and important supporter of this project. Whether or not I always provided sufficient responses to his devil’s advocate critiques, the effort to do so has made this a better book. The pioneering work of Dan Hallin and Paolo Mancini (in particular, their landmark 1984 essay in Theory and Society) inspired me to try to bring together critical theory with rigorous quantitative and qualitative discourse analysis. In some ways, this book is an attempt to elaborate, complicate, and update Dan and Paolo’s findings in their empirically condensed—but theoretically rich and methodologically generative—case study comparison of the Italian and U.S. public spheres.

A number of talented graduate students have worked closely with me on this project; this book could not have been completed without their assistance. Sarah Stonbely and Kathryn Kleppinger ably helped me conduct most of the content coding. Matt Powers, Burcu Baykurt, and Jane Mabe also provided crucial research support. In addition, the book benefited from research conducted by Luke Stark, Jason Stanley, Emily Nickerson, Ann Kosseff, Elly Hanauer, Jill Campaiola, Lin Zhang, and Beth Harris. In Paris, Nathalie Le Dinh Bao, Sara Dezalay, Nicolas Jaoul, and Gaia Fisher helped me construct complete newspaper and TV news samples. Tim Wood provided thorough and thoughtful help in the final stages of fact checking, copyediting, proofing, and indexing.

Throughout the research process, Frank Lopresti of the NYU Statistics Lab was my indispensable advisor for statistical analysis. In Paris, Christine Barbier-Bouvet guided me in making full use of the impressive French INA television archives; in Nashville, Marshall Breeding deftly managed my request for newscast DVDs from the Vanderbilt Television News Archives.

At New York University, I want to thank my department chairs Ted Magder and Marita Sturken for always going to bat to provide me with the time and resources that I needed for this project. As director of graduate studies of NYU’s Department of Media, Culture, and Communication over the past four years, I would never have been able to finish this book if it were not for Mary Taylor, the extremely capable and affable graduate advisor who made sure I stayed on top of all my responsibilities rather than being buried by them. Dove Pedlosky generously helped refine the design of the figures of the U.S. and French journalistic fields in Chapter 2. Alison Garforth ensured that all my copyright permissions were in order. Brett Gary, Victor Pickard, Charlton McIlwain, Mark Crispin Miller, and Helen Nissenbaum always helped me to see the bigger picture, in life as much as in scholarship. I am fortunate to work with so many talented colleagues in my department and across NYU. I am grateful for the financial
support I have received for this book from the New York University Challenge Grant, NYU Steinhardt Challenge Fund, and NYU Humanities Initiative Grants.

As editors of the Cambridge series on communication, society, and politics, Bob Entman and Lance Bennett championed this book from the start and encouraged me to think big; it goes without saying that their work as scholars has also been an inspiration to me. At Cambridge, it has been a pleasure to work with Lew Bateman, Shaun Vigil, Mark Fox, and Cherline Daniel.

My deepest and most heartfelt appreciation goes to Kelly Benson. As to the book, she was patient and knew how to balance no-nonsense critique with just the right amount of motivating encouragement. As to everything else, she and our two sons – Thomas and Peter – always gave me plenty of reasons to keep going and even more reasons to wrap it up.