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PROSTITUTING THE PUBLIC INTEREST IN THE 2012 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION:
A POLITICAL ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF SUPER PACS IN TELEVISION NEWS

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To Mom & Dad

In Loving Memory of:
Jane Anne Smock
(1935-2013)

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ABSTRACT

In light of the 2010 Supreme Court ruling in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, campaign finance law has been re-regulated to promote freedom of spending in elections. Previously, outside spending in elections was restricted to avoid corruption or the appearance of corruption in the democratic process. Corporations, unions, and individuals can now spend unlimitedly on political advertisements in an attempt to persuade voters. Unlike campaign advertisements, the newly christened Super PACs do not have to approve the message or disclose donors if the money was last received from a nonprofit organization. Super PACs must also pay top dollar for their ad space unlike campaign ads that receive the lowest rates. This has the possibility of creating a massive conflict of interest for the news media. Journalists are expected to serve as watchdogs on these ads so citizens may make informed decisions, but the concentrated media industry is making massive profits from airing them – can we trust them to report on the often misleading and negative ads?

This dissertation examines broadcast, cable, and public television news transcripts surrounding Super PAC ads in the 2012 primary and general presidential elections utilizing textual analysis and political economic theory. After exploring the economic structure and ownership of the news media and its coverage of this issue, I argue that we cannot trust the commercial news media to report critically or even accurately on Super PAC advertisers. This analysis attempts to explain how and why the commercial news media failed in its coverage and how it perpetuated problematic ideologies that support the status quo and ignore public opinion and protestation.

CHAPTER ONE

SUPER PACS: A NEW POLITICAL ERA

In January 2010, a Supreme Court decision opened the floodgates for the creation of a new political phenomenon –Super PACs. The decision, *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, centered around a controversial film made in opposition to Senator Hillary Clinton who was then the front-runner for the 2008 Democratic candidate for President of the United States. The film, *Hillary: The Movie*, referred to Clinton as a “Ruthless, vindictive, venal, sneaky, ideological, intolerant liar.” Five years later, *Hillary: The Movie* was deemed legal political speech. The Court’s ruling has allowed the creation of three Super PACs that are already gathering money in preparation to support, ironically, Hillary Clinton, in a 2016 bid for president. When Clinton was asked in January 2013 if she was planning to run, she stated, “It is up to me to make a decision on my own future. I right now am not inclined to do that” (Siegel, 2013, para. 6). Still, the three Super PACs, Ready for Hillary PAC, HillaryClintonSuperPAC, and Hillary For the Win, are being created in hopes that she will change her mind (Boschma, 2013). Ready for Hillary PAC was created by Clinton’s personal friend Allida Black and Clinton supporter Adam Parkhomenko (Rogin, 2013). HillaryClintonSuperPAC is registered to an estate sales business from Iowa, and Hillary For the Win was created by Clinton supporter and attorney Hector Pacheco (Afzali, 2013). While Super PACs are raising money to support her, news organizations are running polls that all seem to come to the conclusion not only that Clinton would win the Democratic nomination, but that she would beat any of the front running Republican candidates as well in the general election (see Blair, 2013; Edwards-Levy, 2013; Public Policy Polling, 2013). If three Super PACs have already collected millions of dollars

from Clinton's supporters years prior to the election or any announcements of candidacy, it may be increasingly difficult for Clinton to refuse to run. This is one example of how the existence of Super PACs are contributing to the democratic election dynamic in the United States. Currently, candidates are being selected by corporate donors and other wealthy groups, and the existence of Super PACs both legalize and legitimize the candidate selection process, leaving citizens with little power in selecting candidates (Domhoff, 1999). Once the selection process is complete, then citizens may vote between those few wealthy candidates.

Some may see the Democrats' success in a post-*Citizens United* country as evidence that what was once thought to be a Court ruling that would mostly benefit Republicans does not really affect voters' decision-making. However, even as President Obama critiqued the Court's decision, he ultimately benefitted from it. Both Democrats and Republicans raised unprecedented amounts of money through their campaigns and Super PACs. Rather than fight against the influences of big money in elections, Democrats and Republicans are both using it to their advantage, which suggests the two parties may not be as different as many Americans are lead to believe by the mass media (Kroll, 2014). The unregulated influx of money from corporations, unions, and wealthy individuals used to influence political decisions ought to be carefully examined, especially when one considers the expectations of the mass media in a democratic society: to inform the citizenry so they may govern themselves (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006). This dissertation will utilize political economy as both a methodological and theoretical framework to critically analyze news transcripts from the 2012 primary and general presidential elections. When one considers the concentrated ownership of television news, the question of how its journalists covered the Super PAC advertisements from which their owners were profiting becomes increasingly significant to electoral and public interest research. This

dissertation will analyze broadcast, cable, and public television and radio news to see if and how Super PACs may have been able to control the conversation surrounding the most expensive election to date (\$6-\$10 billion) – the 2012 general election (Hudson, 2012; Nichols & McChesney, 2013).

1.1 The Problem

The number is staggering: \$567,498,628. More than half a billion dollars was spent by the 266 registered Super PACs in the 2012 general election according to *The Wall Street Journal* (Singer-Vine, 2012). The largest chunk, more \$290 million, was spent opposing President Barack Obama (*Los Angeles Times*, 2012). In fact, 78% of all Super PAC advertisements and 86% of all interest group ads were negative (Fowler, 2012; *Los Angeles Times*, 2012). The large number of negative ads generated by Super PACs is alarming as they often use misinformation to make one candidate appear to be untrustworthy without placing any of the blame on that candidate's competitor if the truth about the ad is realized (Karr, 2012). It pays to have a Super PAC create negative advertisements and free up the candidate for more positive spots. And yet, the number reported by *The Wall Street Journal* is nowhere near as high as the numbers gathered by the Center for Responsive Politics. In *Dollarocracy*, Nichols and McChesney (2013) outline political spending in the 2012 election and claim that more than \$6 billion was spent on the federal election with \$400 million to \$1 billion of it coming from unknown sources. The vast majority of that money was spent on negative advertisements (Fowler, 2012).

Studies show that citizens are more likely to agree with a negative ad if it is created by an outside group rather than a candidate him/herself (Brooks & Murov, 2012). This enables Super PACs to make outrageous claims that then set the agenda for the news of the day without any responsibility to citizens or obligation to correct themselves. According to Dowling and

Wichowsky (2013), voters were less supportive of negative ads generated by outside groups when they were given information about donors in a table that resembles food labeling or after reading a news article concentrating on donor anonymity. News articles that simply named and gave information about donors had no effect on how participants assessed the ad (Dowling & Wichowsky, 2013). According to *Politico*, creating a Super PAC takes “about 20 minutes and a postage stamp” which becomes particularly problematic when one considers how much many candidates relied upon Super PACs to get their message out (Levinthal, 2012, para. 2).

According to Fowler (2012), Mitt Romney, Rick Santorum, Newt Gingrich, and Jon Huntsman all owe their Super PACs for the majority of their advertisements. Super PACs are currently under no requirements to research the claims made in their advertisements, and at least one study has concluded that the amount of minutes journalists spent fact-checking was greatly outweighed by the number of minutes ads actually played (Karr, 2012). The definition and role of Super PACs will be explained in detail in chapter two, but in simplified terms, a Super PAC is an independent expenditures-only organization that may raise unlimited funds from corporations, individuals, and unions to pay for political communications. Super PACs are expected to make the names of donors public quarterly and are not legally allowed to discuss Super PAC spending with the candidate or the campaign that it is supporting. Essentially, Super PACs are an extension of individual, corporate, and union free speech that equates speech with freedom of spending in elections. Most outside money was donated by individuals in the 2012 election followed by union spending and lastly, by corporate spending (Hansen, Rocca, & Ortiz, 2013; Spencer & Wood, 2014; Yeager, 2011). Spencer and Wood (2014) suggest the lower amount of corporate spending proves that many academics were incorrect in their concern over the “floodgates” of money that would surely come pouring into Super PACs. However, the vast

majority of money was donated by very wealthy Wall Street tycoons and business owners who own their own businesses, such as casino mogul Sheldon Adelson. It is possible that corporate donations were funneled through nonprofits before going into a Super PAC so as to avoid any disclosure requirements.

Hansen, Rocca, and Ortiz (2013) found in their analysis of Super PAC spending that corporate money did not increase post *Citizens United*: “*Citizens United* did not alter corporate campaign spending at the federal level. Further, we can confidently claim that the dramatic increase in independent expenditures in 2012 was not a result of corporate spending”(p. 23). The authors admit that it is not possible to test how much dark money came from corporations, but suggest that although it is now legal for corporations to give unlimited sums to candidates, it may still be considered risky for those whose only goal is profit (Hansen, Rocca & Ortiz, 2013). Further, as this dissertation will argue, it may be unnecessary for the corporations themselves to risk their reputation when the political candidates selected are often both pro-business and the top level individuals of corporations can give unlimitedly with less public knowledge of their corporate ties. Dark money possibilities also provide a safety net for anyone, including corporations, who wish to remain anonymous. No study can conclusively say whether or not that untraceable money came from corporations or from individuals, but it is unlikely that much came from unions as 81% of it went to favoring Republicans or attacking Democrats (Drutman, 2012a).

Artificial Differentiation

It has been suggested that the wealthiest Super PACs have questionable relationships with the campaigns that they align themselves with. Newt Gingrich accused Mitt Romney’s campaign of working too closely with a Super PAC. According to *The Nation*, “Gingrich

complained about the presumably unethical and potentially illegal level of coordination between the ‘principled’ Romney campaign and the thuggish Restore Our Future project. When Romney pled innocence and ignorance, Gingrich said: ‘He’s not truthful about his PAC, which has his staff running it and his millionaire friends donating to it, although in secret. And the PAC itself is not truthful in its ads’” (Nichols & McChesney, 2012, para. 9). Although Super PACs are required to report their donors quarterly in the name of transparency, bundling groups of checks from many donors and putting them under one donor’s name is common practice. It is still quite easy to donate to a Super PAC without one’s name ever appearing on the donor web page by first funneling that money through shell corporations or 501(c)4 organizations that do not have to publicly disclose donors. Others are quite proud to have their names associated with Super PACs. Casino mogul Sheldon Adelson and his wife both gave the legal maximum \$5,000 donations to Romney’s campaign and contributed more than \$30 million to his Super PAC, Restore Our Future (Lincoln, 2013).

Independent expenditures spent on elections have skyrocketed in the last few years. In the 2008 general election, \$146 million was spent independently of the official campaigns. After the 2010 *Citizens United* decision, billions were spent independently in the 2012 election (Center for Responsive Politics, 2012). Battleground states certainly felt the blow of Super PAC money. According to *The Atlantic Wire*, it would take 80 days to watch all of the political advertisements aired in Ohio between September 24, 2012 and October 24, 2012 (Zuckerman, 2012). Rather than helping to foster a more informed citizenry, these ads tend to lead viewers to tune out while the media that are profiting from the ads often fail to report on them:

To the extent that media outlets cover campaigns, they highlight the ‘charge and countercharge’ character of the fight as an asinine personality clash between candidates.

But the real clash is between money and democracy. And the media outlets that continue to play a critical role in defining our discourse are not objecting. They are cashing in.

Meanwhile, citizens are checking out. (Nichols & McChesney, 2012, para. 29)

A study by Free Press found that despite the millions that were spent by five Super PACs in Denver on misleading advertisements prior to the first presidential debate, Denver newscasters devoted less than eleven minutes to reporting on the ads by those five groups (Karr, 2012). Karr explains, “Meanwhile, they aired 29 hours of ads from these groups. That’s a ratio of one minute of news to every 162 minutes of ads” (2012, p. 3). Clearly, the news media’s fulfillment of their duty to inform the citizenry must be closely analyzed as the need to report on the claims made by those who pay the most money for advertisements generates a strong conflict of interest. Bill Mann (2010) writes for the *Huffington Post* about the first election post-*Citizens United*:

Want to know who the big winners will be next Tuesday on Election Day? That’s already been decided. The answer: Your local broadcasters...The people who are making most—over 90%, by most estimates—of the money from all the obnoxious and ubiquitous ads this fall have names unfamiliar to most people: Belo, Young Broadcasting, Cox, Fisher Broadcasting, Media general. And big names, of course, like ABC, Tribune, Gannett, NBC Universal. Why don’t we see any stories about the broadcasters feasting at the trough each election year? Simple: They own the stations that would air those stories. And they’re not about to assign them, either. (para.1)

Critics claim that there is no problem with electoral expenditures because the money ultimately results in more speech, which diversifies the messages provided to voters. For comparison’s sake, Americans spent about as much on plastic surgery in 2012 (\$10.4 billion) as the election and spent 50 times that (\$579 billion) on the Christmas holiday (Dicker 2012; National Retail

Federation, 2014). However, the \$10 billion spent on the election was not equally spread out among the majority of Americans. Eighty percent of Super PAC money came from just .00000062% of the population (Flock, 2012). Allowing money to stand in for speech is not democratic, especially when so few people participate. Even prior to *Citizens United*, Klein (2009) argued that political candidates have become brands:

Obama, in sharp contrast not just to social movements but to transformative presidents like FDR, follows the logic of marketing: create an appealing canvas on which all are invited to project their deepest desires but stay vague enough not to lose anyone but the committed wing nuts. (p. xxvii)

The flashy advertisements that billions of dollars can provide paints the picture of a candidate that will never be able to live up to the expectations created. The Supreme Court has allowed money to promote candidates the same way Americans choose their favorite soft drink. There is lots of money behind them, but little meaningful difference. The branding and marketing of candidates will likely only result in even more money being spent in future elections. Some (see “A Landslide Loss,” 2012; Blumenthal, 2012; Drutman, 2012b) argue that since the candidate with the most money did not win that elections are safe, but big money did win this election. Only those with big money were even considered to be in the running by the mainstream media.

The previous research discussed will be explained in more detail in chapter three, but it ought to be noted here that current academic studies leave much room for further research. Specifically, there has been little critical research of news coverage in elections, particularly in the case of the 2012 election. This issue is important to study because the new and problematic Super PAC funds and their advertisements call into question the legitimacy of elections and whether or not broadcasters can be trusted to report on the very groups that are helping them to

generate Super Bowl-like profits during each election. In order to understand how Super PACs may be affecting elections, one must first understand the history of campaign finance law and *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*.

1.2 Campaign Finance Law

According to the Federal Election Commission (2004), attempts to outlaw corporate money from interfering with elections began as early as 1903 during President Theodore Roosevelt's presidency when he feared that money might begin to sway the outcome of free elections. President Roosevelt said in a 1905 message to Congress that "contributions by corporations to any political committee or for any political purpose should be forbidden by law. If [legislators] are extorted by any kind of pressure or promise, express or implied, direct or indirect, in the way of favor or immunity, then the giving or receiving becomes not only improper but criminal" (Rudman, 2010, para. 2). In reaction, many laws were drafted within the next 50 years to limit the influence of the wealthy, to regulate campaign spending, and to force public disclosure of campaign finances (Federal Election Commission, 2004). The first law drafted to change campaign finance regulation, The Tillman Act of 1907, targeted corporations specifically. The Tillman Act made it illegal for candidates for Presidential, Congressional, or Senatorial offices to accept contributions from corporate donors (Sitkoff, 2002).

Roosevelt's first attempt at reform did have its flaws. The Tillman Act included a loophole that permitted corporations to simply repay employees in bonuses if they made political contributions that benefitted the corporation (Sitkoff, 2002). There were a few more attempts at controlling and limiting electoral corruption between 1910 and the 1940s. The Publicity Act of 1910, which is also known as The Federal Corrupt Practices Act, required that national parties publicly disclose their campaign spending. When unions were gaining momentum in the 1940s,

the Taft-Hartley Act made it illegal for labor unions to use their general funds to make political contributions (Slichter, 1949). These were the last attempts at campaign finance regulation until 1971.

Federal Election Campaign Act

In 1971, election laws were merged to create the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA). But it wasn't until 1974, after President Nixon's reelection and rumors of financial misconduct, that the Federal Election Commission was created to help enforce FECA (Federal Election Commission, 2004). FECA mandated that all candidates make their donors and contribution amounts to their campaigns public. It also put caps on how much individuals and groups could give to political candidates. Further, it outlawed donations from corporations, unions, federal government contractors, and foreigners. However, FECA allowed unlimited amounts of money to be spent independently promoting or protesting specific candidates so long as the creators of the communication identified themselves clearly within the advertisement (Federal Election Commission, 2004). Roosevelt's fear of elections becoming unfair due to corporate donations was taken seriously at this time, and his plan of federal election public funding began to develop (Federal Election Commission, 2004). The constitutionality of FECA was challenged in the Supreme Court case, *Buckley v. Valeo* (1976). Most parts of FECA were upheld, but it was ruled that freedom of spending on elections was a form of freedom of speech and that candidates could give unlimited amounts of money to their own campaigns legally.

Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act

In 2002, the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (BCRA) created the first major amendments to the Federal Election Campaign Act. The BCRA sought more severe restrictions on previously unchecked finances in elections. The BCRA changed FECA by banning "soft

money,” money given directly to a political party rather than a particular candidate, from being spent by local, state, and national parties. The BCRA also created a section on “electioneering communication,” which was defined as "any broadcast, cable, or satellite communication which promotes or supports a candidate for that office, or attacks or opposes a candidate for that office (regardless of whether the communication expressly advocates a vote for or against a candidate)" (Cornell University Law School, 2003). Corporations, labor unions, and nonprofit organizations were included in those outlawed from “electioneering communication.” New restrictions were also created for electioneering communications. If the advertisement was paid for by a candidate’s campaign, then that candidate was expected to appear in the advertisement approving the message. Advertisements by political committees were supposed to provide a disclaimer, and if not authorized by a candidate, they were required to provide their own contact information (Federal Election Commission, 2004). The law was intended to create a boundary line between campaign finances and special favors for special interests.

In 2003, much like *Buckley* sought to challenge FECA, *McConnell v. Federal Election Commission* challenged the constitutionality of the BCRA. In its decision, the Supreme Court upheld (5-4, along ideological lines) the BCRA’s ban on soft money contributions and its limits on electioneering communications made by corporations, unions, and nonprofits 30 days before a primary and 60 days before a general election. In *McConnell*’s case brief, he argued that spending restrictions were the same as speech restrictions: “Requiring a gardener to water a garden with a thimble rather than a pitcher plainly would burden the production of flowers and so too with contribution limits and the production of speech” (*McConnell v. FEC*, 2003, p. 7). The Opinion of the Court responded that it would defend the ideology that money can be used improperly to influence elections. “We abide by that conviction in considering Congress’ most

recent effort to confine the ill effects of aggregated wealth on our political system. We are under no illusion that BCRA will be the last congressional statement on the matter. Money, like water, will always find an outlet” (*McConnell v. FEC*, 2003, V para. 1). Indeed, the *McConnell* case was not the last challenge to campaign finance regulation in the name of freedom of speech.

The following year, in 2004, the nonprofit Wisconsin Right to Life (WRTL) created television ads that were intended to encourage voters to contact their Wisconsin senators and oppose a filibuster that could block federal judicial nominees. WRTL intended to run the advertisements within the month prior to the election. As previously discussed, the BCRA outlawed electioneering communications during the 30 days before a primary and 60 days before a general election. WRTL filed a suit against the FEC, arguing that its ads should not be illegal. The FEC argued in 2007 that WRTL’s chance to air its ads were long past and that there was no need to continue discussing the issue. WRTL appealed, and the Supreme Court ruled against the FEC. The Court decided 5-4, along ideological lines also, that the ads were actually issue ads because they did not directly campaign for or against a particular candidate. This decision created a new precedent and allowed space in the election conversation for issue ads. Although issue ads are often partisan, the decision in *WRTL* created a new loophole for outside spending to utilize so long as those groups do not actually say any candidate’s name in the advertisements.

Corporate Free Speech

In 1978, the First National Bank of Boston, among other banks and corporations, wanted to contribute money to oppose the authorization of the legislature for a graduated personal income tax, but under Massachusetts criminal statute, those contributions were illegal. The First National Bank of Boston argued that this was in violation of its freedom of speech. The district court upheld the Massachusetts law, but the Supreme Court concluded that the district court was

attempting to answer to what extent corporations have First Amendment rights when the question should be whether the Massachusetts law outlaws expression that the First Amendment was meant to protect. The Court decided 5-4 (with the four conservative Justices and the typically liberal-leaning Justice John Paul Stevens) that corporate expression is protected speech. Justice Lewis Powell stated in the Opinion of the Court that:

The overinclusiveness of the statute is demonstrated by the fact that § 8 would prohibit a corporation from supporting or opposing a referendum proposal even if its shareholders unanimously authorized the contribution or expenditure. Ultimately shareholders may decide, through the procedures of corporate democracy, whether their corporation should engage in debate on public issues. (*First National Bank of Boston v. Bellotti*, 1978, p. 794)

This 1978 change in corporate free speech regulations allowed for a change in ideology to take place more than 30 years later that would allow unlimited funds from outside groups and special interests to flood elections.

Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission

On January 21, 2010, the Supreme Court, along ideological lines, ruled 5-4 that the threat of outside money corrupting elections was not strong enough to continue limiting political speech. The case was brought by Citizens United, a 501(c)4 politically conservative organization that produced a documentary outlining the reasons why the organization believed that Senator Hillary Clinton would not make a desirable president. The film was titled, *Hillary: The Movie*, and made many jabs at the senator such as calling her sleezy and pointing out her penchant for pantsuits. The nonprofit organization intended to get the film shown to public audiences on cable television and in small theaters before the 2008 presidential primaries. As discussed, this was illegal under the BCRA. The film was obviously anti-Clinton and therefore

could not fall under the issue-ad loophole. Had Citizens United intended to show the film prior to the 30-day period leading up to the election, it would have been legal to do so. But because Citizens United wanted to show the film during that 30-day period, the organization sued the FEC. The organization claimed that outlawing the film was censorship and a violation of Citizens United's freedom of speech.

The United States District Court for the District of Columbia upheld prior legislation and ruled that the film was created as electioneering communication and therefore could not be shown within a month of the primary election as outlined by the BCRA. At the Supreme Court level, however, Citizens United won and the Court ruled that the film should be considered a legal expression of the organization's freedom of speech. Only the BCRA's disclosure requirements were upheld. Citizens United also challenged disclosure requirements in its lawsuit claiming that it was an unnecessary obstruction to freedom of speech because it added additional cost to political speech. It is an interesting concept that the organization wanted freedom to spend money in an attempt to sway elections, but considered taking responsibility for those messages an obstruction to speech.

Although the Court did uphold requirements on disclosure, chapter two will explain the many legal ways a corporation, union, or political group can avoid reporting major donors who wish to remain anonymous. It is also important to note that while the ruling is beneficial to those who wish to use money to sway elections, the ruling will also allow the news stations that house citizens' gatekeepers and watchdogs (who should be reporting and fact checking the advertisements) to enjoy even more profitability during elections as they can charge top dollar for the advertisements created by outside groups (Mann, 2010). Outside group advertisements are currently only limited by space and time as they have no regulatory limits on fundraising or

spending. This creates a clear conflict of interest between news organizations and their duty to inform the public so that they may govern themselves.

1.3 Corporate Free Speech Trumps Political Corruption

It is important to acknowledge that the current news media operate in an advertisement-reliant, capitalist system that benefits monetarily from neoliberal policies and regulation that supports corporate interests. Meanwhile, media ownership continues to get more and more concentrated. In the 1980s, Ben Bagdikian (2004) was outraged that the mass media were owned and controlled by only 50 people. Twenty years later, that number had dwindled to five owners of major media. Media are different from other capitalist industries because they serve a necessary and democratic purpose and were granted First Amendment rights so they may keep the public informed while serving as a watchdog of those in power both politically and in the corporate world. As many have said, the media do not tell us what to think, but they do set the agenda socially, politically, economically, and culturally by telling us what to think about (McChesney, 1998). It is important to remember that the media industry does not have to be so concentrated as excessive merging “...produce no real benefits to society, only to investors” (Bettig & Hall, 2012, p. 20). One of the reasons citizens so seldom hear about the concentration of media and its possible effects on the democratic process is because the mainstream media have control over what stories get covered, and typically, they choose not to cover themselves, especially if the story is negative (Herman, 1995).

When there is such little competition, and media conglomerates are often one another’s customers in selling programming, it seems clear that the current media environment is not necessarily producing what consumers want. According to Meehan (2005), the ratings system does not measure what the consumer wants to watch, but instead, measures what the consumer

does watch when given limited choices generated by a combination of advertiser and network designed programming. Further, media conglomerates are not necessarily concerned with overall ratings, but rather, ratings of the “right” kind of audience. As one problematic ABC advertiser-pamphlet explained, “Some people are more valuable than others” (Bagdikian, 2004, p. 229). Those valuable people could be those with the most money, or those who are the right demographic.

Currently, commercial enterprises are utilizing citizen airwaves and property at no cost while failing to serve the public interest. This is not the way that it must be, but rather, it is due to a series of poor political decisions that resulted in media monopolies that consistently fail at providing diverse and quality news programming (McChesney & Nichols, 2002). McChesney and Nichols (2002) call it a “Rotten system, as corrupt and destructive as the one the mobsters constructed and we – the citizens – must change it” (p. 33).

Americans must fight the pervading message that there is no alternative to the status quo. Nichols and McChesney (2005) remind citizens that there is nothing natural about the current system:

To make the journey from accepting the media status quo as inevitable to something we can and must change, we must demolish the one huge myth that has protected entrenched media power from the reckoning it so richly deserves: the notion that our media system is a free market system, a system ordained by the Founding Fathers (if not an even higher force), and protected from public intervention by the First Amendment to the Constitution. (p. 173)

In actuality, the current media system is not a free market system. The media were simply re-regulated to benefit media owners rather than U.S. citizens. Media conglomerates enjoy

government handouts, beneficial copyright laws, and protection for their monopoly power (Nichols & McChesney, 2005). Interestingly, after defeating Japan in World War II, the United States required that Japan create a public, noncommercial media because “the American occupying forces declared publicly that no modern democracy should be without one” (Bagdikian, 2004, p. 259). The United States, however, has yet to follow its own suggestions.

The current system is beneficial to many of those in power who have come to their elected or appointed positions by having the right amount of money or by knowing the right groups of people. Once these powerful positions are obtained, it can be quite easy to maintain the status quo. People tend not to resist the current system of rewards and power as the ideology of the American Dream assures them that if they work hard, then one day they too may be rich and powerful (Jhally, 1989). Jhally (1989) explains how capitalism can oppress society: “We should recognize that the marketplace does not automatically ensure diversity, but that (as in the example of the United States) the marketplace can also act as a serious constraint to freedom” (p. 81). Further, a news media system that benefits corporate or government interests over the interests of its people is a mainstay in authoritarian governments (Jhally, 1989). Large political donors and politicians too often benefit from the non-investigative and sometimes deficient commercial news media of today that is advertiser-friendly and largely inexpensive to produce.

As outside spending increased, voter faith in democratic elections decreased. A national survey by the Brennan Center in 2012 found that more than 70% of Americans think PAC spending leads to corruption and has undermined their own faith in democracy (Brennan Center for Justice, 2012). Further, one quarter of Americans, and even more among those with low-incomes and members of minorities, reported that they were less likely to vote because big donors have so much more power than one voter does (Brennan Center for Justice, 2012). Both

today's media and today's elections seem to be regulated in ways that support the best interests of corporations rather than those of citizens.

1.4 Research Goals and Questions

According to McChesney (2008), the expectations of the news media in a democracy are to serve as a “rigorous watchdog of those in power and who want to be in power, can ferret out truth from lies, and can present a wide range of informed positions on the important issues of the day” (p. 25). If one agrees that the media ought to live up to these expectations, then many questions arise about the coverage of Super PAC advertisements in the 2012 general election. In order to uncover what ideologies were perpetuated in television news coverage of Super PACs, this dissertation poses the following secondary questions:

- How did broadcast, public, and cable news media cover Super PAC advertisements and why were they considered newsworthy?
- What were the differences and/or similarities in coverage between broadcast, cable, and public news sources?
- Who was invited to speak by the news media when discussing the issue of Super PACs?
- What types of Super PAC advertisements were discussed? Did journalists fact-check the advertisements? How was the significance of Super PACs explained?

Chapter two will provide a review of the literature surrounding the normative role of journalism in elections, PACs and Super PACs and provide the rationale for the study. Chapter three will discuss the methodological and theoretical framework of political economy of communications that will inform this dissertation's textual analysis and explain how the texts were gathered. Chapter three will also situate this study within current literature about Super PACs and election news coverage. Chapter four will explore the ownership of the seven news

organizations chosen for this case study. Chapter five will provide an analysis of how ABC, CBS, NBC, and NPR covered Super PACs in both the primary and general elections. Chapter six will analyze MSNBC, CNN, and Fox News coverage of Super PACs and compare the findings to network and public coverage from chapter five. Chapter seven will provide a discussion of the analysis and media ownership and conclude the analysis with a discussion of democratic ideals and suggestions for moving forward.

CHAPTER TWO

SUPER PACS UNPACKED

In light of the 2010 Supreme Court decision, it is important to study the possible impact of the unchecked finances being pumped into presumably democratic elections. This chapter will provide an explanation of current campaign finance and First Amendment law in order to explain why the Super PAC money trail can be difficult to follow and how some donations can remain anonymous if the donor wishes.

2.1 Journalism and Democracy

When defining American democracy, three main pillars come to mind: free and fair elections, checks and balances in the form of the separation of powers, and guaranteed freedoms for citizens outlined by the Bill of Rights (Caraley, 2005). Elections are intended to protect citizens from oppressive regimes while ensuring that those elected were always working with the consent of the governed (Caraley, 2005). Citizens in a democracy rely on journalists to keep them informed so they may be knowledgeable enough to participate in the democratic process.

Graber (2004) writes that nearly 60% of television news coverage is devoted to political issues. From this perspective, it is the fault of citizens for not having enough interest in politics to keep themselves informed. Graber (2004) focuses on several quantitative studies that support the theory that citizens are largely monitorial. That is, they only follow the news that directly affects their own lives or the lives of their community, so there is little need to fret over the large amount of political coverage that tends to please rather than inform citizens. Graber (2004) writes, “The quantity and quality of news that various media venues supply collectively is adequate for citizenship needs” (p. 563) and goes on to call U.S. democracy “serviceable, if not ideal, democracy” (p. 564). A critical perspective would question Graber’s (2004) presumptions

regarding both political coverage and the assumption that the United States is a democracy that represents its people (Chomsky, 1999).

From the political economic perspective in particular, McChesney (2003) disagrees with Graber (2004) and writes that the current media system is in a state of crisis. “If we are serious about producing a journalism and political culture suitable to a self-governing society, it is mandatory that there be structural change in the media system. This means explicit and major changes in the public policies that have created and spawned the media *status quo*” (McChesney, 2003, p. 324). McChesney (2003) makes the argument that due to commercial pressures, media mergers, and the close relationships between those in political power and those in corporate power, American journalism today is a flurry of inexpensive, non-investigative infotainment that relies on celebrities and scandals to fill up news holes without upsetting the status quo. These non-investigative stories are beneficial to newsmakers because they allow them to maintain a close relationship with those in power and allow them to maintain an upbeat atmosphere that will not upset advertisers (McChesney, 2003). Caraley (2005) agrees that poor media coverage is a threat to elections. “The current television, radio, and print media frequently provide incomplete, inaccurate, and differential coverage of facts and analyses to inform the voters in election campaigns” (Caraley, 2005, p. 390). Graber (2004) fails to discuss that journalists were given First Amendment rights, long before corporations were, so that they may foster democracy by informing citizens and serving as a watchdog of those in power.

2.2 Normative Role of Journalism in Elections

The Supreme Court granted First Amendment rights to the press and claimed that those rights were to be used to improve democracy, not to make the highest profits possible. In *Associated Press v. United States* (1945), the Supreme Court stated that, “[The First]

Amendment rests on the assumption that the widest possible dissemination of information from diverse and antagonistic sources is essential to the welfare of the public, that a free press is a condition of a free society” (326 U.S. 1, 20, 1945). It has been widely understood that the press was granted freedom of speech to assist in democracy and enable citizens to use their own freedom of speech and right to vote to govern themselves. It is not until *Citizens United* that freedom of speech has been expanded to include non-media corporations and unions in the form of freedom of spending on elections.

Granting corporations freedom of speech in elections may be viewed as an inhibitor to democracy. Corporations have the resources to reach a massive audience with which the average citizen could not compete. Outside influences have attempted to sway public opinion in the past, but the freedom to unlimitedly spend on political speech was purposely outlawed for more than a century to preserve the integrity of elections. In 2010, the Supreme Court decided that there was not enough evidence to support the previous fear that corporate and union money interfering in elections would lead to corruption or the appearance of corruption.

The influx of outside money may not affect elections as much as opponents fear if the United States had a more democratic and diverse news media. According to political economic theory, concentrated ownership due to mass commercialization and profit-driven business goals are some of the main causes for poor news coverage.

Bettig and Hall (2012) write that although conglomerates often say merging will result in improved programming, they are really only trying to improve their bottom line. Herman (1992) writes, “as monopoly power increases both horizontally (among the providers of programming, for example) and vertically (such as through program producers merging with broadcasting networks), this will enhance their power to exclude rivals and impose higher prices on

consumers” (para. 8). Consumers are given the appearance of choice, but in actuality, nearly all of their choices are being created by the same few conglomerates who have similar interests. Croteau and Hoynes (2006) explain: “From a market perspective, industry mergers can be understood as the rational actions of media corporations attempting to maximize sales, create efficiencies in production, and position themselves strategically to face potential competitors” (p. 76). These “rational actions” have led media conglomerates to petition the Federal Communications Commission to deregulate in favor of a market-driven rather than public sphere-driven model of communication law. As a result, the media industry behemoths have successfully grown, integrated both vertically and horizontally, globalized, and concentrated their power further (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006). Although profitable for media conglomerates, the market-driven model often fails at the public interest and provides homogenized rather than diversified programming. According to Meehan (2005), the ratings system does not accurately measure what viewers want. In fact, the system never asks that question. Instead, Nielsen measures what the most desirable audiences (according to advertisers) most frequently choose between the programs that have already been selected for them by media owners and producers.

In recent years, the market has generally assumed that serious news does not sell its advertisers’ products as well as infotainment does. Critical and investigative reporting may lead to more critical citizens and consumers who ask questions and want answers from those in power rather than uninformed or apathetic audiences. Many critical media theorists argue that concentration in media and a narrow focus on profits have made the news media neglectful of their duty to inform the public and instead provide daily distractions to Americans (see Bettig & Hall, 2012; Herman, 1992; McChesney, 2008).

How News Ought to Operate

If one agrees that a free press is necessary to democracy, then one would expect to find a diverse range of voices and opinions to be amplified by the news media and a level of transparency provided about who is paying for these advertisements and who is profiting from them (Napoli, 2001). One would also anticipate a media that report on news that is relevant to citizens rather than the news that foremost serves the interests of corporate elites and politicians. The news of the day should include independent research and investigation by journalists as well so that they may serve as watchdogs on corporations and representatives of the people. Only with proper journalism can those in power be held accountable by citizens (McChesney, 2008). This is what the news media ought to be accomplishing, but many media scholars agree that the news media are not living up those expectations and commercialization is likely the reason (Bettig & Hall 2012; Chomsky 1999; McChesney 2008). Even if U.S. journalism were not in the midst of a self-created crisis, the extension of political speech to outside groups would still be problematic. According to Freeland (2012), it is widely accepted that the mainstream media have the ability to set the agenda for the news of the day. It is likely that Super PAC advertisements, particularly the most repugnant and least truthful ones, have the ability to set the agenda as well. Journalists will likely report on the claims made by advertisements that have gone viral and allow the voice of special interests that created the ads to take over the political conversation. In fulfillment of the public interest requirement, journalists should be fact checking advertisements and taking any misleading ads off of the air, but this does not appear to be happening. With the constant influx of corporate political advertisements to discuss, there will be even less time and space for the investigative and critical reporting of candidates that is so desperately needed.

From a political economic perspective, journalism is in a state of crisis for many reasons. Critical studies of newsgathering have demonstrated that mainstream news coverage tends to underrepresent women, depend on a few elites to provide the majority of commentary, boil complex issues down to two partisan sides, and rely on “beat” reporters who are then used repeatedly to cover the same types of stories, further lessening diversity of viewpoints (Bettig & Hall, 2012; Croteau & Hoynes, 2003). According to McChesney (2004), the first crisis of journalism was a result of the reliance on advertising revenue, which led to the sensational and sales increasing “yellow journalism” (p. 61). The current media crisis is a result of media owners aiming for nothing more than record profits and the media’s ability to promote, rather than question, the status quo (McChesney, 2004). The status quo of elections has dramatically changed and opinion polls show public outcry (see Eggen, 2010). This dissertation will seek to understand whether the mainstream news media will promote the new status quo or side with documented public anxiety in its coverage. But first, the next few sections will outline the specific regulations and deregulations regarding outside spending on political communications during elections.

2.3 PACs: The Starting Point

The first Political Action Committee (PAC) was created by the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in 1944. It was illegal under the Federal Corrupt Practices Act and the Taft-Hartley Act for unions or corporations to give directly to campaigns. Instead, the CIO collected voluntary donations from union members and created a PAC outside the union to keep the money. Money was transferred from the CIO treasury to the PAC treasury to eventually support the campaign efforts of President Franklin Roosevelt. This was the first year that unions were considered a major player in the political arena (Tanenhaus, 1954).

Today, PACs are used to represent unions, corporations, and special interests. A PAC can give \$5,000 a year to a candidate and \$15,000 a year to a political party; PACs can accept up to \$5,000 from individuals and from other PACs (Center for Responsive Politics, 2013). PACs are required to register with the Federal Election Commission and to disclose their donors (Center for Responsive Politics, 2013). While one candidate can only raise funds from his/her party, he/she could collect money from hundreds of different PACs. In Congressional races particularly, PACs are known to have quite a bit of power because they can legally donate as much to a candidate as the candidate's party can (Long, 1994).

Super PACs: The Rock that Obliterated the Glass House of Campaign Finance

Super PACs were made possible on July 22, 2010, after one Supreme Court ruling, one district court ruling, and two Federal Election Commission advisory opinions. In the January Supreme Court ruling, *Citizens United v. FEC*, the Federal Election Commission (FEC) ruled that paid political speech is a version of freedom of speech that should be extended to unions and corporations without limit so long as those groups do not coordinate with candidates or their campaigns. The Justices decided that there was not enough evidence to support the claim that outside money in elections leads to corruption (*Citizens United v. FEC*, 2010).

A few months later, in the District of Columbia District Court, the justices determined in *SpeechNow.Org v. FEC* that groups may collect general funds from individuals as well as from corporations and unions. In advisory opinions to *Club for Growth, Inc* and *Commonsense 10*, the FEC concluded that a political action committee could get money from people and groups outside of the corporation with whom it is affiliated without limit under a new title, an independent expenditures-only committee. Interestingly, the original PAC treasurer, who does coordinate with candidates and campaigns, can also be the treasurer of the expenditures-only

committee so long as the accounts are kept separate. These sorts of lax regulations and loopholes made it nearly impossible to prove coordination between a campaign and the Super PAC that supports it. Shortly after these decisions, independent expenditures-only committees became known as Super PACs by politicians and the media.

PACs & other “Spending Vehicles”

Prior to the invention of Super PACs, PACs could legally interact with campaigns and candidates and give money to those campaigns from PAC funds, but they were limited to collecting \$5,000 per year from each donor. PAC money came from individual donors, but they were allowed to use corporate or union money to pay for administrative costs only if that corporation or union started the PAC in the first place.

There are two other groups that have historically been a part of the campaign finance dilemma. They are referred to by their tax codes – 527s and 501(c) organizations. Rather than being regulated by the FEC, the two organizations are regulated by the Internal Revenue Service. 527s were pretty much replaced by Super PACs, but some may still exist for issue advocacy. They were groups that did not advocate for or against a candidate or a party, but rather, generated political speech about a particular issue such as abortion or healthcare. Donors to these groups were able to write off the amount of money that they donated. 527s were unpopular for those who did not want their names associated with the advocacy, however. Although there are no limits to the amount of money that can be donated to a 527, or where they get their money, the IRS enforced public disclosure of all donations that were over \$200 (Briffault, 2012).

For individuals or groups who wished to maintain their anonymity, 501(c) organizations were the best option for political spending. There are three types of 501(c)s. 501(c)(4)s are social welfare organizations, such as Citizens United, that are often the groups that those who

wish to remain anonymous donate to because they provide an additional layer of secrecy. 501(c)(5)s are labor union advocacy groups, and 501(c)(6)s are reserved for Chambers of Commerce and trade associations. 501(c)s can all spend their money on political communications, but they must prove that their political spending is less than half of the total amount of the organization's spending. The only disclosure requirement that limits 501(c) organizations is that they must disclose to the IRS all donors who give more than \$5000 a year, but that information is never made public by the IRS. Further, a group could create a shell corporation that would protect the original donors' names and list only the name of the fake corporation created only to give money (Bowie & Lioz, 2012b; Briffault, 2012).

The Supreme Court's reasoning that Super PACs would not lead to corruption heavily relied on the assumption that the disclosure requirements for Super PACs would be much stricter than they are for 501(c)s. However, one group could legally have a 501(c) that collects funds from anyone and only reports those to the IRS and then funnels that money directly into a PAC. That PAC money could then go through the treasurer and keepers of the PAC who do coordinate with campaigns and then move the money into a Super PAC headed by many of the same people without providing any disclosure and with a very real threat that the money had been discussed by the PAC's employees along with campaign managers or the candidates themselves and then set aside for specific Super PAC advertisements. If that same group felt the need, it could also form a 527 and have one of each of the types of political spending vehicles and form an entire "political network" of its own (Briffault, 2012, p. 1650).

In June 2011, the FEC further concluded that although Super PACs were not allowed to coordinate with campaigns or candidates, those candidates could go to Super PAC events and fundraisers so long as they did not request more than \$5000 from donors (Briffault, 2012; Skaggs

& Wertheimer, 2012). Karl Rove's Super PAC, American Crossroads, is the largest and wealthiest Super PAC to date. In the 2010 election, even though there were only four months between the invention of Super PACs and the election, 84 Super PACs were formed and raised about \$5 million a week (Briffault, 2012). American Crossroads spent one-third of all Super PAC money (Briffault, 2012). Even though coordinating with campaigns is illegal, American Crossroads' Karl Rove openly stated that the Super PAC works directly with the candidates it supports. Three of the seven FEC members responded that Super PACs should be allowed to coordinate with campaigns because, "there are many reasons why candidates can and should work with outside groups on important issues or legislation" (Briffault, 2012, p. 1670). This disagreement between Justices regarding what leads to corruption may be one reason why there is not stricter regulation of Super PAC activities in elections. Even if Super PACs do not directly coordinate as American Crossroads claim to, it is easy to share strategies online or by recycling top aides that have a shared understanding of campaign tactics (Briffault, 2012).

There is another way to shroud the real meaning behind a Super PAC advertisement. Bowie and Lioz (2012a) explain:

When an oil company wants to help elect a senator who supports policies that boost its bottom line (such as opening more federal lands or offshore sites to drilling) it will rarely sponsor an ad directly that says "Vote for Senator Smith...Paid for by ExxonMobil." More often, it will contribute to a Super PAC with an innocuous name such as "Americans for Energy Solutions" which will sponsor the ad. Or, to make its sponsorship of the ad completely invisible to voters, it can contribute to a 501(c)4 nonprofit corporation (which need not disclose its donors and can have a generic name such as "Americans for a Better Future") which can spend this money directly or in turn contribute to "Americans for

Energy Solutions” Super PAC. Voters viewing the ad have no way of knowing the profit motive behind the communication. (p. 3)

The threat of having elections bought by foreign oil companies and behemoth corporations whose only interest is higher profits are perhaps the biggest fears of those who oppose and hope to limit the power of Super PACs.

Attempts at limiting Super PAC spending power and loopholes that pave the way for nondisclosure failed in 2010 and 2011. Further, as Bartelt (2012) writes, there is one glaring loophole that will likely never be contained: the Internet. Even if corporate contributions were outlawed or more strictly regulated, YouTube broadcasts of advertisements are not subject to any regulation and do not have to abide by any disclosure requirements. If an organization’s political YouTube advertisement becomes popular on the web, it may even find itself on a news or cable channel free of charge. Bartelt (2012) explains, “Acting without any form of potential restraint and an intimate knowledge of viral marketing, corporations have the ability to influence elections with misleading Internet political advertisements” (p. 423). Bartelt (2012) suggests that only internal corporate policies that ban the funding and creation of Internet political advertisements could help close the glaring loophole without forcing Internet regulation. Misleading Super PAC advertisements are not reserved for the Internet, however. Online ads are often an extended version or precursor to broadcast buys, but once they make it to television and radio, the ads can bombard listeners and viewers by interrupting the news or other programming and may carry more weight with citizens than an online ad would. Although online ads are problematic as well, television and radio news stations should be reporting on false messages by outside groups, but are instead, “getting rich from misleading Super PAC ads” (Halonen, 2012). Television and radio ads are particularly problematic, because unlike the Internet, there is very little room for

citizen pushback to have a voice. The undemocratic mainstream media helps to promote the status quo and ensures that ads generated by the wealthiest outside groups will have a prime (noncritical) space to place their messages without the possibility of voters being able to simply scroll down to see what others may have to say about the ad. The next section will situate this dissertation within current literature.

2.4 Election Literature

There have been several studies of Super PACs and their ability to change public opinion. Brooks and Murov (2012) surveyed a representative sample of U.S. adults to measure both backlash against and the persuasiveness of Super PAC advertisements in the 2010 election. They tested three different types of ads: those without a sponsor, those with a candidate sponsor, and those sponsored by an unknown independent group. The findings supported exactly what candidates and Super PACs must have already known. Attack ads are accepted more favorably if they are created by an unknown group than they are if they are created and sponsored by the candidate him/herself. Brooks and Murov (2012) explain, “This study indicates that candidates have every reason to hope for an unofficial division of labor, in which independent groups that are unaccountable to voters will do the dirty work of running these kinds of harsh attack ads that the candidates would rather not do themselves” (p. 404). Further, the utilization of 501(c)s to protect the identity of certain groups has tripled since 2004, according to the Campaign Finance Institute, allowing groups to avoid backlash from consumers, members, and shareholders (Brooks & Murov, 2012). The authors go on to suggest that disclosure attempts may not matter:

Moreover, even if the [DISCLOSE Act]¹ legislation did pass, many individuals and some groups would be largely unaffected by disclosure. The present study shows that the variation in net ad effectiveness between sponsors is due to differences in backlash rather than differences in persuasive power. As such, even increased disclosure will not change the fact that harsh attack ads sponsored by outside entities will tend to be more effective than comparable ads sponsored by candidates, which will tend to enhance the relative power of ads sponsored by independent groups on the airwaves. (Brooks & Murov, 2012, p. 406)

However, at least one more recent study of Super PACs found that disclosure does matter. Dowling and Wichowsky (2013) conducted an online video and survey experiment that tested how citizens' opinion of the attacked candidate changed depending on the type of disclosure presented to them. The researchers found that the form of disclosure matters and that current laws regarding transparency leave much to be desired: "The current disclosure regime assumes that voters will search out campaign finance data on their own or that media investigations will make such information sufficiently available to the electorate" (p. 967). Media reports that identified and gave some background into donors had no effect on whether or not the participant supported the attacked candidate. The only forms of disclosure that showed notable changes in support were the names and amounts of the top five donors to the outside group shown in a table format resembling nutrition labeling or being shown news article that drew conclusions about anonymity in outside group ads.

¹ The DISCLOSE Act stands for Democracy is Strengthened by Casting Light on Spending in Elections Act. The Act would force disclosure of all donations to Super PACs and outside groups of over \$10,000. Those responsible for outside ads would also have to take credit for message similar to current campaign ad disclosure. The Act has been blocked in the Senate repeatedly since 2010.

According to Gottfried, Hardy, Winneg, and Jamieson's study (2013) on fact checking, only a few news organizations provided fact checks even though being given accurate information does change voters' understanding. "Long-form political fact-checking can increase the accuracy of voters' perceptions of both candidate stands on issues and the background facts of the presidential race" (Gottfried, Hardy, Winneg, & Jamieson, 2013, p 1565). Unfortunately, the researchers found that only FactCheck.org, PolitiFact, *The Washington Post*, and the Associated Press provided in depth fact checking during the 2012 presidential election. Most Super PAC research has focused on effects and is therefore quantitative. The same is true when it comes to studies of news coverage of political ads. Most studies that have been conducted on this phenomenon have been content analyses.

Network News Studies

Of particular interest to this dissertation is previous research of television news advertising and election coverage. Kaid, Gobetz, Garner, Leland, and Scott (1993) conducted a content analysis of news coverage that played political ads in the election years from 1972 to 1988. The researchers relied upon video abstracts for election years prior to 1988 and had six graduate students watch and code the video from the 1988 election year coverage using Vanderbilt University's television news archives. The stories were coded for date, time, type of story (routine, feature, profile, or issue story), and experts used as sources. The 1988 coverage had an additional layer of analysis focusing on slant, the length of the ad played, the type of ad played, and the total number of spots with political advertisements. The authors' main finding was "a startling increase in the coverage of television campaign advertising in the 1988 election" (Kaid, Gobetz, Garner, Leland, & Scott, 1993, p. 277). The study sought to understand how the playing of political advertisements during news may legitimize the messages therein. The most

important finding, according to the authors, was that the 1988 election had a dramatic increase in news ad playing than was seen in any of the previous years, from just 13 in the 1972 election to 79 in the 1988 election. This is largely attributed to the negative Bush-Dukakis ads during the 1988 election.

Gwiasda (2001) also utilized the Vanderbilt television news archives to analyze network news coverage of a pro-George Bush anti-Michael Dukakis attack ad in order to understand how news coverage of the ad may have changed voters' perceptions of Dukakis as being an out of touch candidate who was too liberal to represent the public. Even prior to the problem of Super PACs, Gwiasda wrote,

Today, campaign ads are themselves newsworthy events that often receive a host of media attention, and it is not uncommon for parties to announce the release of a new advertisement to increase publicity. Some advertisements become so controversial that they develop into news events themselves and may even be replayed in the evening news, such as the Horton ad in 1988 or the recent "rate²" ad by the Bush campaign in 2000. (p. 463)

The study concentrated on a Bush ad that suggested a Dukakis policy of furloughing some prisoners over the weekend to visit family resulted in a brutal attack on a married couple by convicted murderer Willie Horton. The ad was played in both commercials as well as on the evening news. In his study, Gwiasda (2001) separated participants into four groups based on a pretest: strong partisan, weak partisan, leaner, and independent and concluded that news

² The 2000 pro-Bush "Rate" ad insinuated that Clinton and Gore had failed school children in their eight years in office as reading scores did not improve. Bush promised to begin a Head Start program to improve reading because "there are no second-rate children, no second-rate dreams" (Rosenbaum, 2000).

coverage mediation of an advertisement does “notably” affect how citizens view candidates (p. 478). In particular, participants who were considered to be weaker or mid-aware partisans, leaners and independents were more likely to sway based on coverage than were strong partisans. Gwiasda (2001) notes that his and previous research of news coverage discussing ads suggests “that any television coverage of an advertisement primarily works to the benefit of its sponsor” whether or not that ad is accurate (p. 463). These studies’ findings are in line with previous research that news coverage of an ad is generally hoped for by an ad’s creators no matter how misleading or negative that ad may be.

Champlin and Knoedler (2006) analyzed television news messages about media ownership regulations, the 1988 presidential election, and the issue of whether or not there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq to have a better understanding of how the news industry is or is not operating in accordance with the Lippman and Dewey theories of the public interest. The authors concluded that in the age of conglomeration, television news fails the public interest and instead relies on infotainment and the maintenance of a master narrative that spans across ownership. The authors attribute this commonality to the ease of the master narrative,

Marketing the news also means not taking chances, not deviating from the middle-of-the-road, “accepted” way of reporting. Just as all mass-marketed Principles of Economics textbooks begin to look alike, the master narrative of the mass media ensures that news broadcasts also conform to one mediocre standard. (Champlin & Knoedler, 2006, p. 143)

The master narrative finding helped the authors to conclude that the public interest model of news reporting is not possible in the current media political economy with conglomeration that is forced to market itself in order to remain profitable. In the case of the master narrative of

political campaigns the authors write, “When the press reports on the color of Gore’s suits, the clothing and hairstyles of the candidates’ wives, Bush’s use of cute nicknames, and the latest ‘score’ in the polls, they are simply giving the public what it wants” (Champlin & Knoedler, 2006, p. 143). Champlin and Knoedler’s (2006) explanation of the master narrative helps to explain why so much news coverage seems to follow a similar theme rather than each news story giving citizens new information with a different take on news issues.

In 2001, a Pew study of more than 400 major print and television news stories found that only two concentrated on the previous records of the candidates. Most of the stories (more than 80%) focused on campaign strategies, fundraising, or the candidates’ corresponding political parties. As poor political reporting and a lack of fact checking are on the rise, so too has campaign reliance on negative advertisements. The *Wesleyan Media Project* studied and compared the negativity in presidential advertisements in 2008 and 2012. The study showed a dramatic increase in negativity between the two elections. In 2008, candidate ads (91.4%) and interest group ads (74.8%) were mostly positive. In 2012, candidate ads were 52.5% negative and interest group ads were 86% negative (Fowler, 2012). All the while, women and minorities continue to be drowned out by the voices of white Republican men in political coverage. A series of 4th Estate studies on the 2012 election are in line with previous research as they found that Romney was consistently given the highest voice share in all election coverage and that “Men are telling the stories of election 2012” with more than 70% of all anchors and reporters discussing the election coded as male (4th Estate, 2012d; 4th Estate, 2013).

In October 2012, Free Press studied how broadcasters dealt with the onslaught of Super PAC advertisements prior to and during the first Presidential debate in Denver, Colorado in August and September. Free Press concentrated its study on the five Super PACs that spent the

most in Denver: American Crossroads, Americans for Prosperity, Restore Our Future, House Majority PAC, and Priorities USA Action. Together, the groups spent more than \$6.5 million to purchase airtime for nearly 5,000 advertisements (Karr, 2012). Free Press was interested in finding out how well Denver broadcasters fact-checked the often misleading advertisements from which they were profiting. It found that for every one minute of news stories, there were 162 minutes of advertisements. In total, there were less than 11 minutes of news coverage devoted to the five Super PACs, compared to 29 hours of advertisements. Further, Free Press notes that “stations kept airing ads that their reporters found were false or misleading” (Karr, 2012, p. 3). Stations legally can and should reject advertisements that are misleading as research from public policy groups have found that fact checking stories leave viewers more informed about political issues (Karr, 2012). Free Press concludes, “There’s a clear pattern in Denver. And it matches what we have found in other battleground markets. Stations continue to air ads from organizations like those discussed here, even after their newsrooms expose the groups for spreading misinformation” (Karr, 2012, p. 8).

Critical studies of news coverage of Super PACs like the Free Press study discussed are currently quite rare; most studies are quantitative content analyses that explain the numbers, but do not explain the messages. This is likely because even though there are hundreds of Super PACs registered with the FEC today, they are a phenomenon that is only a few years old. Most academic studies of Super PACs to date are concerned with what a Super PAC is and what the future of elections might look like rather than focusing on the messages of the advertisements themselves and whether the news media are informing the public about them (see Bartlett, 2012; Briffault, 2012; Farrar-Myers & Skinner, 2012; Gordon, 2012).

Cable News Coverage

Perhaps due to a reliance on the Vanderbilt Network News archives, cable news coverage of political issues is currently quite understudied. Recent cable news analyses include Tea Party and climate change coverage. Both studies found that the cable channels' coverage was in line with their assumed ideological perspectives with MSNBC leaning to the Left while Fox News represented the Right (Feldman, Maibach, Rose-Renouf, & Leiserowitz, 2011; Weaver and Scacco, 2012). Weaver and Scacco (2012) compared Associated Press coverage with a content analysis of the two most popular shows from MSNBC, CNN, and Fox News to see if coverage of the conservative Tea Party was similar to previous research regarding the protest paradigm. Findings show that MSNBC tended to portray the movement as fake and its protestors as "idiots," utilizing a marginalization theme that was historically used against progressive protestors (Weaver & Scacco, 2012, p. 74). The authors also found that Fox News was more likely to present the Tea Party movement as mainstream and also defended the group against racist accusations. The study concluded that while both MSNBC and CNN marginalized the protestors, CNN provided the most coverage overall and was closest in quality to AP coverage.

A recent study regarding climate change messages and reception suggests that cable viewers' acceptance of climate change differs depending on the information provided in coverage (Feldman, Maibach, Rose-Renouf, & Leiserowitz, 2011). Even after controlling for political party, demographics, other news sources, and values, viewers' beliefs tended to follow the evidence most offered to them by their chosen cable outlet. In line with previous research (see Krosnick & MacInnis, 2010), this study found that more time spent watching Fox News meant the less likely viewers were to accept climate change. In addition, viewers who spent more time tuned into CNN and MSNBC programming were more accepting of climate change

research. The authors conclude, “The results are strongly suggestive of the power of cable news to shape and polarize public opinion” (Feldman, Maibach, Rose-Renouf, & Leiserowitz, 2011, p. 24). As many Fox viewers also watch CNN or MSNBC and vice versa, the reason for viewers’ differences in acceptance is likely due to exposure time rather than specific biases observed. Indeed, a recent Pew research study found that more than one third of all CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC primary viewers also tune into the other two cable networks. Less than one fourth of cable viewers are solely dedicated to just CNN, Fox News, or MSNBC (Olmstead, Jurkowitz, Mitchell, & Enda, 2013).

In a content and data analysis comparing network and cable news, York (2013) found that cable stations have remarkably more coverage of political incivility than network news shows do. The cable networks are no doubt attempting to keep audiences watching by sensationalizing political arguments. Because of this, cable news viewers were found to perceive politics as much less civil than viewers of network news (York, 2013). The authors suspect that this is due to cable producers having to fill long news holes even during slow news times. The more entertaining stories that are selected to eat up time and bring in viewers often focus on personal conflicts (York, 2013). Further, rather than attempting to appease a majority audience, cable networks attempt to find the most profitable news spot within the existing cable channels, which has led to the acceptance of programming created to fit within specific ideological frameworks. Much like Champlin and Knoedler’s (2006) study of network news, cable news literature suggests that it too follows a master narrative due to its need to market itself and remain profitable. Cable news may even follow an infotainment and master narrative model to a larger degree than does network news as it is under no FCC requirements to serve the public interest. While there have been few studies of Super PACs in network news and even less in

cable news, PACs existed prior to the 2010 Court ruling and existing studies of them will be explained next.

PAC-Mentality

While Super PACs are currently under-studied because of their relative newness, there have been many studies of the much older PAC advertisements. Much of the literature on political action committees (PACs) focuses on to what extent there is conflict between corporate donations to politicians. They question whether there is more solidarity between corporate PACs or union PACs using support to partisan candidates as a measure for quantitative analysis. There is little critical research of PACs.

While findings vary a bit, it is generally agreed that there is a high level of unity between corporate groups and also between unions when analyzing which candidates' PACs they have historically funded (See Banthin & Stelzer, 1986; Clawson & Su, 1990; Mizruchi, 1990; Jorgensen, 2010 & Neustadt, Scott & Clawson 1991). Generally, unions are a bit more unified than corporations. Although a rare occurrence, corporations have been found to be more likely to support a liberal incumbent that is expected to win than unions are likely to support a conservative incumbent no matter his or her chances of being elected (Clawson & Su, 1990). Clawson and Su (1990) conclude that in the 1980 and 1986 elections, "Corporations targeted donations appropriately in both elections, doing their best to promote pro-business candidates, given the character of the times. While plausible, this argument neglects the potential role of corporations in shaping the available options, rather than simply responding to those presented" (p. 384). Previous literature shows that even prior to Super PAC spending, there was concern about corporate power in elections and groups using that power to get pro-business candidates elected.

In 2007, Cebula used 40 variables to analyze voting behavior and how PAC contributions may have contributed to that behavior. The study found that contributions by PACs to Congressional campaigns appeared to reduce voter participation “significantly” (p. 411). Research today continues to show that the more saturation of unidentified negative advertisements, the more likely voters are to become apathetic. McChesney and Nichols (2012) write that “citizens are checking out” thanks to the excessive, and often negative, Super PAC advertising (para. 29). Both Republicans and Democrats are guilty of generating negative and misleading ads. Democratic leaning Super PAC, American Bridge 21st Century, has full time employees that follow Republican candidates around with cameras to build a stockpile of opposition footage (Homans, 2012). Republican Super PACs do not see the point in following around Democrats when they can often find the footage from the Internet or purchase it from a person who happened to be present during a gaff (Homans, 2012). American Bridge 21st Century claims, however, “For the most part we have found, if you let a Republican candidate talk for long enough, they’ll hang themselves,” which is probably why the organization does not ask questions; it just follows candidates and records raw footage (Homans, 2012, p. 7). The existence of opposition stockpiles suggests that Super PACs intend to continue the use of negative advertisements in future elections.

As demonstrated above, current literature leaves much room for qualitative and critical inquiry into network, cable, and public news coverage of Super PAC advertisements. As previous research has shown, news coverage of political ads does have effects on public opinion and fact checking as well as disclosure matters in their evaluation of the attacked candidate. This dissertation will build on Champlin & Knoedler’s (2006) master narrative, Gwiasda’s (2001) reinforcement of candidate messages, and Kaid, Gobetz, Garner, Leland, and Scott’s (1993)

analysis of news legitimization of political advertisements although from a critical political economic lens. Social science research has demonstrated that advertisements could change elections, but this dissertation is focused on what those messages are and how the news organizations that are profiting from selling commercial airtime to outside groups, at a much higher rate than they must give the campaigns, are also covering those ads. The next section will elaborate on the amount of money spent on the 2012 election and how Super PACs have changed the political game.

2.5 Super PACs in the 2012 Presidential Election

In the 2012 general election, conservative Super PACs spent 70% of all independent expenditures and still lost (Blumenthal, 2012). It is important to address, however, that massive outside spending was invested into Congressional races as well. The spending favored conservatives who were able to retain a House majority. Democrats had a monetary advantage in only eight of the 25 Congressional races considered to be the most “highly contested” by a Brennan Center (2012) study. Outside groups spent \$40 million more than the candidates in those 25 races (Iyer, 2012). In most of the 25 contested Congressional races, the candidate who had the most money to his or her advantage won (Drutman, 2012b). Those Super PACs also moved from generating issue-oriented ads to attaching themselves to specific congressional and presidential candidates (Briffault, 2012). Blumenthal (2012) writes, “As it turns out, you can’t buy a different electorate, or a better candidate, no matter how much money you throw at it” (para. 4). Reed (2012) disagrees: “Had these groups not been active, Obama would have been reelected by a much healthier margin, and he probably would have expanded his margin of victory in every swing state relative to 2008” (pp. 4-5). Overall, research shows more often than not that the connection between money and electability is a strong and important, if not deciding

factor. The amount of money donated to these Super PACs is quite staggering and often made by individuals. In fact, two-thirds of all Super PAC donations in the 2012 general election were for half a million dollars or more, and those who were on the losing side of the election were not thrilled about the failed return on investment (Briffault, 2012). Billionaire brothers Charles and David Koch spent millions on their Super PAC, Americans for Prosperity, in an attempt to get more Republicans in office. They are reportedly angry with the election turn out and have since fired most of their staffers and are now auditing the organization (Reeve, 2013). According to Reed (2012), Democratic Super PACs such as Priorities USA, Emily's List, and Planned Parenthood are already planning for the next election as well.

There are also some smaller groups taking advantage of the new campaign finance laws. According to Zwick (2012), Super PACs have been created by 17-year olds, comedians, and people who are against the use of Super PACs in elections. The 17-year olds, Damian Palmer and Jack Pilgrim, say they created the Damian C. Palmer and Jack C. Pilgrim for a Better America Super PAC to draw attention to how problematic money in elections has become. However, the teenagers say they are a bit concerned that they will incorrectly file Super PAC donations and find themselves in trouble with the FEC (Zwick, 2012). As the law stands now, those who cannot legally vote in the United States (such as those who are underage or foreign) may still donate to or start Super PACs.

Comedy Central's Stephen Colbert's Super PAC, Americans for a Better Tomorrow, Tomorrow, has received both media and academic attention. Garrett (2012) suggests that professors should use Colbert's Super PAC as a critical case study to teach students about campaign finance because Colbert is so much more transparent than other Super PACs with the goal of pointing out the glaring loopholes in current campaign finance law. Indeed, Colbert

announced a fake candidacy for President of South Carolina and then renamed his Super PAC the Definitely Not Coordinating with Stephen Colbert Super PAC (Bowie & Lioz, 2012a). *The Colbert Report* also granted attention to the little known method of creating a shell corporation to protect donors who wish to remain anonymous. He named his shell corporation Anonymous Shell Corporation (Briffault, 2012).

According to Boak (2011), for many smaller races, the only downside to Super PACs is not the threat of running out of money. Rather, strategists must deal with the reality that they can only jam so much mail in mailboxes and air so many commercials within the electoral time period (Boak, 2011). Time and space are now the largest hurdles for political campaigning in a new era in which unlimited spending and fundraising is typical, and likely, required to win.

Who's PAC-king?

Two recent studies shed light on the shadows cast by Super PAC fundraising. According to Skaggs and Wertheimer (2012), political funds from average citizens have decreased in the last ten years while funds from those in the top 1% have increased. In 2004, 80% of political contributions came from the 11% of the population that make more than \$100,000 per year (Skaggs & Wertheimer, 2012). In 2010, more than 66% of campaign funds came from the top 0.25% of wage earners (Skaggs & Wertheimer, 2012). By July 2012, 33 different billionaires had each given between \$50,000 and \$10 million to Mitt Romney's Super PAC, Restore Our Future (Skaggs & Wertheimer, 2012). After measuring the income disparities that exist between the average voter and the average campaign contributor, Skaggs and Wertheimer (2012) conclude, "The *Citizens United* decision is in the process of returning us to the system of legalized bribery that existed prior to the Watergate scandals" (p. 7). Bowie and Lioz (2012b) studied secret spending in the 2012 election and tend to agree with Skaggs and Wertheimer's

conclusion: “One might think of today’s outside spending groups as megaphones for moguls and millionaires. The more money they pump in, the louder they’re able to amplify their voices—until a relatively few wealthy individuals and interests are dominating our public square, drowning out the rest of us” (p. 3). Since 1996, most studies have shown that about 95% of political contributors are white and about 80% are male (Bowie & Lioz, 2012a). Interestingly, even though studies have shown that corporate political spending results in either no return or a negative return on investment (see Affarwal, Meschke, &, 2012), more than 500 for-profit businesses gave \$31 million to Super PACs in the 2012 election (Bowie & Lioz, 2012a). Target is one of the only corporations to date that has suffered consumer backlash after it gave money to an organization that supported a candidate for governor who was vocal about his disagreement with same-sex marriage rights (Bartelt, 2012; Bowie & Lioz, 2012b)

Bowie and Lioz (2012b) were surprised to find that only 7.6% of all outside spending reported was “untraceable” and only 2.8% of that money was funneled through Super PACs (p. 4). This may be due to the fact that most of the fundraising came from very wealthy individuals (73.8%) rather than corporations that may wish to keep their political involvement a secret. The spending of the super-rich to Super PACs is even clearer in Bowie and Lioz’s (2012b) study than it was in Skaggs and Wertheimer’s (2012) analysis. “Of all money Super PACs raised from individuals in the 2012 cycle, 94.1 percent came in contributions of at least \$10,000— from just 1082 individuals, or 0.00035 percent of the American population” (Bowie & Lioz, 2012b, p. 8). Both conservative and liberal groups are guilty of accepting massive amounts of money from the mega rich. Sheldon Adelson and his wife gave nearly \$40 million to conservative Super PACs, but that only equals about .15% of their net worth (Bowie & Lioz, 2012b). Similarly, Jeffrey Katzenberg gave more than \$2 million to liberal Super PACs, which totals about .2% of his net

worth (Bowie & Lioz, 2012b). This may not be so problematic if it were not for the research that shows how different the political priorities are for the wealthiest Americans when compared to the middle class citizen. Bowie and Lioz, (2012a) write that the wealthiest Americans are much more conservative and give most of their funding to campaigns devoted to tax cuts, spending cuts, deficit reduction, and deregulation of businesses. Bowie and Lioz (2012b) write, “A growing body of academic research, however, has demonstrated what common sense tells most of us already: very wealthy people don’t work, live, or think like the rest of us. This means that when their wealth gives their views and priorities greater weight, our elected officials focus differently and actual policy outcomes are affected” (p. 12). Because the Supreme Court has granted the wealthiest so much power in electioneering communications, it is important that the news media keep Americans informed about Super PACs and their advertisements so that they may understand this change in the political landscape that allows such a small percentage of the population to spend money attempting to persuade the masses. If citizens are informed, then they may be able to vote accordingly to their own interests rather than the donors’ interests that are being represented by Super PACs bombarding the airwaves with attack ads.

There has been much research conducted concentrating on media bias, sexism and racism in electoral news coverage, but little Super PAC coverage has been critically analyzed to date. This dissertation will analyze broadcast, cable, and public television news stories discussing Super PACs and their advertisements in the 2012 presidential election. It is important to study television news coverage because according to a 2012 Pew study, most citizens still get their news from television (Beaujon, 2012b). Even when researchers gave citizens the choice between television, radio, and Internet, all participants between the ages of 18-75 selected television as the medium they most heavily relied on to get the daily news (Beaujon, 2012b). In 2006, the Pew

Research Center polled citizens regarding which television news they watched on a typical day and found that 54% watch their local broadcast news, 34% watch syndicated cable news, 28% watch the national nightly news on their local broadcast network, and 23% watch the morning news on their local broadcast channels (Pew Center for the People, 2006). This chapter highlighted previous academic research, explained what Super PACs are, and defended the necessity for further critical inquiry of news coverage of political issues. The next chapter will explain the theoretical and methodological framework of political economy that will inform this study of Super PAC news coverage.

CHAPTER THREE

POLITICAL ECONOMY

As discussed in chapter two, social science research of news effects greatly outweighs the critical research of the messages that are effecting citizens. To help fill that gap and study a rather new and troubling stage in the political process, this dissertation will utilize political economy as both a theoretical and methodological framework in a textual and structural analysis of broadcast, cable, and public new transcripts acquired from the Lexis-Nexis search engine.

3.1 Political Economy as a Theory

According to Wasko (2005), political economy originated in the 1700s with thinkers such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo who centered their interest around the study of wealth and the allocation of resources. A century later, as capitalism became one of the chosen economic systems, thinkers such as Karl Marx and Frederick Engels used political economy to critique the new and materialistic system (Wasko, 2005). In 1834, industrial capitalism was underway in England, and according to Polanyi (1944), pauperism resulted. In the late 1800s, there was a strong movement toward individualism and away from collectivism, and what we now refer to as neoclassical economics was born (Wasko, 2005). Today, economists tend to study the current economic system as it is while political economists study the system from a critical, historical, and often, radical Marxist perspective (Wasko, 2005).

Gandy (1992) summarizes the seven most common critiques of neoclassical economics that the study of political economy seeks to address: First, preferences and tastes are delivered to citizens through the media rather than the media reacting to known preferences and tastes; second, markets are flawed; conglomeration has made the media market too concentrated and unpredictable; third, the creation and use of information produces costs and benefits outside of

the information marketplace; fourth, the power that exists within the political economy lies within institutions rather than individuals; fifth, competition is nearly impossible as market powers decide supply and demand; sixth, the market is so unstable that it is in a constant state of change with no middle ground; seventh, the government fails at objectivity as market interests are consistently favored. Essentially, the study of economics is not objective, but is often presented as such. In contrast, political economy comes from a critical perspective and does not claim objectivity. From the theory of political economy, the representation of a news source or study as unbiased is inaccurate. The acceptance of objectivity brings with it an understanding of the existence of a sole truth rather than many different interpretations of the truth as political economy would support.

Political economy can be used as both a theoretical lens and as a methodological framework for research in the media, as well as in other industries and institutions. According to Mosco (2009), political economy can be defined as: “The study of the *social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources*” (p. 24, italics in original). In the media, those resources could refer to magazines, books, films, newspapers, and even audiences that are produced by the industry (Mosco, 2009). In effect, political economy recognizes and seeks to understand how the mass media commodifies social culture, sterilizes that culture, and then sells it back to consumers for a profit. Gandy (1992) explains, “Political economy to the study of mass communication is uniformly critical of the status quo in theory as well as in the systems that the theory seeks to understand” (p. 24). By critically examining what often passes as invisible or the norm, political economists may uncover flaws and distortions that often go unnoticed and unquestioned. Further, political economists of media are interested in how “the dynamics of

capital accumulation and class power manifest themselves in the capitalist mode of production, particularly the institutional structure, organization, and production processes of the media industries” (Calabrese & Sparks, 2004, p. 2). Those dynamics may be uncovered by looking at the ownership and the owners’ interests who produce those messages for consumption and how those interests can problematize the messages produced. Further, political economy is concerned with the economic institutions and systems that the media system thrives within, such as capitalism in the case of the United States. Because political economy of media is interdisciplinary and draws on history, law, and cultural research, it attempts to bridge the gap between research and praxis. According to Wasko (2005), political economists are interested in examinations of social change and history, the relationships between society, commodities, and institutions, and the moral issues that are raised within the capitalist economic system.

Diversity and Ratings

It is important to note that the commercial media thrive within a capitalist economy and therefore have a stake in its success and continuation. However, capitalism often leads to concentration and conglomeration in most industries if it is not carefully regulated. Today, there are only five major owners of the media and that number could legally dwindle to four under current Federal Communications Commission (FCC) laws. When one considers the power that the commercial media have over citizen knowledge and the commodification of culture, it is extremely problematic that there is so little diversity in ownership of the mass media.

There are three main elements of diversity: source, content, and exposure (Napoli, 2001). Source diversity is expected to be composed of diverse and “antagonistic” sources exhibited in both ownership (content and outlet owners) diversity and workforce diversity (affirmative action and EEO requirements) (Napoli, 2001, p. 129). Although these policies exist, the FCC makes no

claims to be monitoring how they affect diversity of programming (Napoli, 2001). Herman (1995) writes that a democratic media would encourage diversity far better than commercial media do: “The commercial media serve minority constituencies badly, tending toward the repetition of homogenizing mainstream cultural market themes and ignoring the group entirely when it is really poor” (para. 13). There is little doubt that the reason for the mainstream media’s tendency to ignore minorities and the poor, in particular, is that there is not enough advertising revenue at stake for them to bother with targeting and providing the type of content that is crucial to those groups.

Content diversity suggests a need for inclusion of demographic and idea diversity. According to much academic research, the media consistently fail at demographic and idea diversity, most often sourcing older, white, conservative males (Bagdikian, 2004; Bettig & Hall, 2003; McChesney, 2008). The Fairness Doctrine was established in 1949 to ensure demographic and idea diversity during discussion of topics relating to public issues, but it was revoked in 1987, and the FCC has since given up on assessing this type of diversity because it is “virtually impossible to effectively measure” (Napoli, 2001, p. 145).

It may seem as if source and content diversity go widely unregulated, but Napoli (2001) refers to exposure diversity as the “neglected diversity dimension” even though it is “as central to communications policy (if not more so) as either source or content diversity” (p. 146). Exposure diversity is aimed at making sure that audiences are being sent and are receiving exposure to many different viewpoints, sources, and programs (Napoli, 2001). Interestingly, studies in exposure have shown that increasing content diversity does not necessarily increase exposure diversity. Napoli (2001) finds this imbalance between programming and consumption distressing and concludes that many more studies into exposure diversity ought to be done in

order to truly expand the marketplace of ideas and find better ways to assess how well media owners abide by current regulations. When there is little diversity of ownership, there is also little diversity of voices within media content and programming. In effect, a lack of diversity of owners has led to massive imitation in the media content most frequently promoted by owners.

According to Gandy (2004), the commercial media sell audiences to advertisers, effectively commodifying citizens. Certain commodities are also clearly valued over others in a capitalist economy. Gandy (2004) writes:

When we shift our attention to the newsroom, however, we have reason to be concerned when we learn that producers are selecting stories in order to supply audiences in the colors that their advertisers demand... “at the network level, producers are ‘carefully taught’ that white viewers (whom advertisers regard as having greater purchasing power) will tune out if blacks or Latinos are the principal characters in segments on their shows.” (p. 331)

It is extremely problematic that advertisers have the power to affect media content, especially news content, and marginalize people of color, when one considers the normative role of the news media in a democracy: to inform citizens for purposes of self-government. Instead of promoting the public interest, media conglomerates tend to provide imitative entertainment that promotes stereotypes under the guise that they are simply giving viewers what they want. Following the market-driven mindset that only networks that provide quality programming will survive, conglomerates who profit can claim that they *are* providing quality content because the numbers prove their success. Meehan (2005) and others have explained that the ratings system does not measure what citizens want to watch or how much they like current programming.

When there is such little competition, and media conglomerates are often one another's customers in selling programming, it seems clear that the current media environment is not necessarily producing what consumers want. As discussed, the ratings system is utilized because it favors network and advertiser interests rather than measuring what the public actually wants to watch (Meehan, 2005). Further, media conglomerates are not necessarily concerned with overall ratings, but rather, ratings of the "right" kind of audience. As one problematic ABC advertiser-pamphlet explained, "Some people are more valuable than others" (Bagdikian, 2004, p. 229). Those valuable people could be those with the most money, or those who are the right demographic. For example, university students, hospital patients, and prison inmates are excluded from current rating research as they are not defined as the "right" kinds of audiences most requested by advertisers (Meehan, 2005).

McChesney (1998) refers to the current media programming as an example of cheap, narrowly targeted hyper-commercialism. He writes:

The firms have enough market power to dictate the content that is most profitable for them. And the easy route to profit comes from increasing commercialism—larger numbers of ads, greater say for advertisers over non-advertising content, programming that lends itself to merchandising, and all sorts of cross promotions with non-media firms.

Consumers may not want such hyper-commercialism, but they have little say in the matter. (p. 2)

According to McChesney, after creating stricter antitrust laws to break up powerful conglomerates, the FCC should focus on shoring up public media and promoting the creation of nonprofit, noncommercial media to lessen the effects of hyper-commercialism on society. More media owners and a strengthening of public media may create a much more competitive

environment for broadcasting which would likely result in a more democratic media and a more informed citizenry because they would have access to diversified voices and programming. If public media had the funding it needed to compete with commercial media for viewers, commercial media would have little choice but to begin backtracking on its shift toward hyper-commercialism.

Capitalism: Oppressing Democracy

American citizens often think of competition and choice as being the hallmarks of a capitalist economy. This is one of the misconceptions that political economists attempt to point out. Rather than promote competition, capitalism naturally leads to concentration and barriers to entry. Successful businesses and corporations buy up those on the periphery in order to grow. Capitalism does not foster competition or diversity as it is often presented as doing by the few mainstream media players that thrive within it. As this economic system currently goes unchallenged, few report on the increasingly concentrated media industry that citizens must rely on for information (McChesney, 2008). Jhally (1989) contends that capitalism functions as a clear oppressor to societies: “We should recognize that the marketplace does not automatically ensure diversity, but that (as in the example of the United States) the marketplace can also act as a serious constraint to freedom” (p. 81). Further, the media exploit human emotions by commodifying them and then selling them back to audiences in an artificial and sanitized form that seems sexier and is more commercial-friendly (Jhally, 1989; McChesney, 2008). Jhally (1989) and Horkheimer and Adorno (1944) refer to this commodification of human emotions as the culture industry.

The Culture & Consciousness Industries

Horkheimer and Adorno (1944) first argued that what had previously been referred to as mass culture (culture rising from the masses) was actually the culture industry (a media industry creation). The authors argued that culture itself had become a marketplace within which profits overrode art and creativity. What was produced and sold to consumers as culture was not what society wanted, but rather, what producers discovered would be marketable and result in profit. Jhally (1989) explains, “culture then is not the product of genuine demands – its driving force is the need to sell itself as a commodity” (p. 71). The culture industry fails to challenge citizens to be critical or to think about the world in which they live and the messages they are consuming. Critical responses could upset the status quo and force the profitable media industry to change its programming to suit citizen rather than advertiser demands. The culture industry allows the consciousness industry to survive.

The media may reinforce the status quo and cyclical nature of capitalism through what Hans Magnus Enzensberger (1974) refers to as the consciousness industry. The consciousness industry allows a small group of people within the upper crust of the status quo to enjoy the power, wealth, and knowledge that culminates in societal control and protection for the way things are rather than interest in the way things ought to be. As Polanyi (1944) explains, “It was, however, generally agreed among eighteenth-century thinkers that pauperism and progress were inseparable. The greatest number of poor is not to be found in barren countries or amid barbarous nations, but in those which are the most fertile and the most civilized” (p. 108). According to Jhally (1989), control of the few over the many is achieved through one of two ways: through the use of police or military force or “through the *consent* of the dominated, by convincing the majority to identify and support the present system of rewards and power rather

than opposing it, in fact to live their own domination as freedom” (p. 67). In the case of the United States, institutions such as the media allow the perpetuation of certain myths, such as the American Dream, that keep the masses whom one may consider “dominated” from rising up against their own forces of domination.

Neoliberalism & The Propaganda Model

The media’s repetition of popular neoliberal ideals that are beneficial to those in power, such as deregulation and privatization, helps to ensure the continuance of the status quo (Harvey, 2005). The Neoliberal movement began in the Chicago School and generally supports privatization of government duties (Klein, 2007). Klein (2007) refers to this as a hollowing out of government services. Once those services are no longer provided by the government, but by independent contractors, there is little accountability to the public, whose tax money paid for the services in the first place. Famed neoliberal Friedman (1962/2002) fundamentally disagrees with the belief that free markets are unstable and blames government mismanagement of the Federal Reserve System for the Great Depression. He blames tariffs, taxing, regulatory commission, price regulations, and wage fixing for market instability as he see all of these regulations as unnecessary government intervention that the market would better solve on its own. However the suggestion of free market perfection becomes suspect when one considers its inevitable lead to further inequality:

Neoliberalism was always an ideological argument to justify shifting power to the wealthy and away from the poor; it was never an accurate description of what was taking place in the economy. Contrary to neoliberal dogma, governments were not shrinking; they were simply working assiduously to assist capital and providing far fewer services for everyone else, especially the poor and working class. The prison system was growing

as schools were in decline. This was especially true in the realm of media, where the entire system was based upon government-granted monopoly privileges and extraordinary direct and indirect subsidies. (McChesney, 2008, p. 16).

Although neoliberal policies are quite detrimental to the majority of citizens, they are often heralded as the best way to protect individual freedoms (Harvey, 2005). Of course, it is in the interests of the media to report fondly on neoliberal policies because they can be quite profitable for conglomerates and indeed, provided the owners favorable regulations to allow conglomeration in the first place. The neoliberal approach encourages free markets, which as discussed, leads to concentration rather than real competition and diversity. Within this framework, the media industry has grown substantially, but the number of owners has dwindled to only five major players.. McChesney (2008) argues, “The strength of the corporate status quo was not that it was so popular or democratic, but, rather, that it cultivated the notion that there was no alternative to the status quo; it had been mandated by the Founding Fathers, Adam Smith, or God, or some combination there of” (p. 497.) According to Polanyi (1944), laissez-faire policies were presented to the public as natural, but in actuality, they were invented and enforced by the state and backed up by quickly repealing many regulations.

After much research on the media’s failures, Herman and Chomsky (2001) have developed a “propaganda model” to explain the U.S. media system. They argue that the media create and distribute the news in a propagandistic way that serves the specific interests of the rich and the powerful, partly by interviewing only elites, politicians, and experts who reliably fall on different sides of the aisle in order to create a supposedly balanced story (Herman & Chomsky, 2001). Perhaps most problematic, “There are, by one count, 20,000 more public relations agents

working to doctor the news today than there are journalists writing it” (Herman & Chomsky, 2001, p. xvii). Jhally (1989) refers to the creation and success of the public relations industry as a huge misuse of the talent of many intelligent citizens. As a result, sellable entertainment has replaced hard-hitting news while evidence of dissent goes unreported. Advertisers prefer to buy ad space during softer news and entertainment programming when consumers are more likely to be in the right frame of mind to be sold products, and advertiser-compliance has made the mass media more profitable than ever before. “Advertisers don’t like the public sphere, where audiences are relatively small, upsetting controversy takes place, and the settings are not ideal for selling goods...But entertainment has the merit of not only selling goods; it is an effective vehicle for hidden ideological messages” (Herman & Chomsky, 2001, p. xviii). Entertainment is beneficial to advertisers, and therefore the media system, but is detrimental to citizens as it can be used as a tool to distract them from their own oppression. The Propaganda Model explains why the mainstream media programming and messages do not reflect what public opinion polls show citizens would prefer more of, such as news and documentaries, rather than even more sex and violence (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). U.S. citizens are familiar with the neoliberal belief that the market is the best solution to economic woes and may expect that the market will ferret out businesses that fail to provide what consumers want. Herman and Chomsky (1988) argue that it is much more difficult to see media messages as “systematic propaganda” when they are generated by private corporations who appear to be competitive with one another (p. 1). However, the current gap between access to knowledge, wealth, and power among citizens requires a Propaganda Model to survive. The Propaganda model takes advantage of five main filters that promote ideologies that result in inequality without giving any voice to those who recognize that inequality or problematize the pro-business messages. The Propaganda Model is a

tool that when used by those with the power, wealth, and knowledge can convince the masses that they ought to enjoy their own oppression and even refer to it as freedom. These five filters are: concentration of ownership, promotion of commercialization and advertising, reliance on elite experts from business and politics as news sources, utilization of flak to further control media by those with the power, and an insistence on anti-communism, which today is perhaps overridden by messages of giving up rights to support “anti-terrorism” efforts (Herman & Chomsky, (1988). For citizens who find it difficult to accept the media system as a Propaganda Model, they ought to consider the amount of power concentrated within it: “This gives each of the five corporations and their leaders more communications power than was exercised by any despot or dictatorship in history” (Bagdikian, 2004, p. 3).

It is important to remember that the media depend on commercial advertising revenue and are owned by only a handful of people, not because that is the only way an accessible media system can or ought to exist, but because of a series of political decisions that serve corporate interests rather than the public interest (McChesney, 2008). Informed consumers would have demands for their government, and they would be less likely to buy into the needs that advertisers try to create because they would be aware that antiperspirants and teeth whiteners do not really solve their problems. There is also evidence that many people would prefer news and documentaries to the presumably sellable sex and violence (Herman, 1996). In other words, the problem is not what citizens want. The problem is that the media present content as if it were what citizens wanted when content is actually a combination of what networks and advertisers find to be most profitable (Meehan, 2005). It is up to scholars and independent journalists to research and expose the myths that are too often perpetuated in capitalist economies. This

researcher finds political economy to be one of the most useful theories and methodologies to do just that, but for transparency, some critiques of the field must be addressed.

Critiques of Political Economy

As discussed previously, political economy is a critical tradition that does not claim to be neutral, objective, or generalizable. Instead, political economy provides a qualitative theoretical lens and methodological framework. The goal of a political economic analysis is to have a critical discussion and to provide insight into praxis. Political economy does not attempt to find correlations or to establish causal relationships. This often opens political economy to the critique that political economic studies are ignorant of audiences and audience reception. It is true that political economic analyses are often interpretive readings of media artifacts, but they are also interested in the institutions and current social climate that those artifacts are created in. A political economist could argue that those who study audience reactions are ignoring the larger institutions that the media texts were created within and the ideologies that were perpetuated. Rather than attempting to judge media effects, political economy analyzes the media text itself and traces its production and distribution to understand the possible motivations behind its creation. In addition to issues about generalizability and audience response, there are also feminist and industry critiques of political economic research.

While political economy concentrates on issues of power, wealth, and class, feminist political economy also looks at how race, sexuality, and gender come into play. Feminist political economy does not assume that any one factor defines how a person or how a group of people are treated in society. Thus, feminist political economy challenges the political economic idea that class is the sole determiner of domination (McLaughlin, 2002). Balka (2002) writes, “Political economy has been criticized for its failure to uncover ‘the ideological dimensions of

economics that present a male-controlled system of work as characteristic and natural.’ Women’s day-to-day experiences become invisible in many accounts of political economy” (p. 61).

Feminist political economists draw out an important point that in many political economic studies, the possibilities of multiple sources of oppression ought to be discussed in addition to class oppression. Of course, pro-market critiques of political economy also exist.

Jenkins (2006) writes that the Internet has created a new and powerful venue for fan culture to take some of the power back from the media industry. Perhaps due to his strong belief in the power of fandom, Jenkins (2006) concludes that media critics and political economists such as Noam Chomsky and Robert McChesney are pessimists that concentrate on victimization rather than on empowerment, often overestimating the problem. Jenkins (2006) also writes that popular culture is a lot more fun than “serious matters,” but when one considers the ideological prowess of entertainment media, it is clear that popular culture is a very serious matter that warrants careful analysis (Jenkins, 2006, p. 257). From a critical perspective, the Internet provides promise, but is not the answer to all media or political problems. McChesney (2013) refers to Internet “celebrants” such as Clay Shirky and Henry Jenkins and its “skeptics” such as Nicolas Carr as flawed theorists due to a failure to address the political economic concerns: “That flaw, simply put, is ignorance about really existing capitalism and an underappreciation of how capitalism dominates social life...the work tends to take capitalism for granted as part of the background scenery and elevate technology to ride roughshod over history” (p. 13). Both groups, McChesney argues in *Digital Disconnect*, ignore “the elephant in the digital room” – the fact that democracy has always been affected and shaped by capitalism no matter the technological advancements that occur.

Political Economic Research Today

Despite the major critiques, political economy of media is still a useful theoretical and methodological framework to communications and media scholars. It has recently been used to analyze News Corp, personal finance magazines, Facebook privacy, and financial television. The following are examples of how academic works from the political economic perspective are still important and necessary.

D'Arma (2011) completed a political economic comparative analysis of NewsCorp's business strategies in the United Kingdom and in Italy. D'Arma (2011) concluded that while much of NewsCorp's success in the United States and the United Kingdom was due to powerful political alliances, in Italy its success was mostly due to an ability to withstand capital losses for several years thanks to other profitable holdings. D'Arma (2011) viewed Rupert Murdoch's success in Italy as evidence that the international political economy of media is shifting towards powerful transnational actors with the most financial resources.

Davidson (2012) completed a political economic, thematic, and historical analysis of American personal finance magazines from post World War II to present day. Davidson (2012) found a clear change in messages when United States economics changed from liberal to neoliberal policies. The "common thread" woven through modern personal finance publications was that of individuality and the brushing off of collective action (Davidson, p. 14, 2012). Overall, the magazines suggest that individuals should only rely on themselves and their publications and that family, friends, and bankers are not to be trusted (Davidson, 2012).

Fuchs (2012) used political economy to understand the privacy policies of Facebook and how Facebook commodified its users and sold them to advertisers. Fuchs (2012) explored issues of exploitation, class, and surplus value in his analysis. Although Facebook creator Mark

Zuckerberg claims that he is not motivated by money, he maintains a commercial website with problematic privacy policies that allows targeted advertising that further increases market concentration (Fuchs, 2012).

Lee (2012) used a historical and political economic approach to analyze the advent of financial television shows in the United States. Lee (2012) found that the creation of financial television suggests that finance has become a spectacle in the neoliberal state and is successful due to its low production cost and high value to niche marketers. Given the broad list of the theoretical and methodological applications of political economy, future research into news coverage and political advertisements will also benefit from the political economic approach which will analyze both the messages put forth by the culture/knowledge industry of the news media as well as the ownership of those institutions. This study will examine what the advertisements produced by Super PACs suggest and how the news industry chose to reproduce those messages in its coverage. As Herman and Chomsky (2001) noted, who was permitted to speak on behalf of the experts and what ideologies were most promoted are also cornerstones to the political economic method that will shed light on how the Propaganda Model may persists today even as many have access to more voices via the Internet.

3.2 Textual Analysis

This dissertation will combine textual analysis with political economic theory. Performing a textual analysis relies on a researcher's abilities of interpretation. Utilizing other methodological frameworks along with the tool of textual analysis can add a layer of focus to a critical or cultural study. The more a researcher reads, watches, studies, and analyzes a text, the more that researcher will have the ability to make an educated guess about what sorts of interpretations readers, viewers, or listeners might make of that text. McKee (2001) writes that

textual analysis is particularly useful when studying media: “If we want to understand the role that the media play in our lives and precisely how its messages participate in the cultural construction of our view of the world, then we have to understand what meanings audiences are making of television programs, of films, of newspapers, magazines, and radio programs – in short, of ‘texts’” (McKee, 2001, p. 3). McKee (2001) goes on to explain that the goal is not to find the one correct reading of a text because there is an almost endless amount of ways to interpret a text; however, some interpretations may be more likely than others when one considers previous research and its findings.

Many qualitative research method books explain textual analysis as a method that can be coupled with a theoretical framework to produce a particular reading of a text (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Wolcott, 2009). McKee (2001), however, generated a much more in-depth nine-step guide to textual analysis.

First, McKee (2001) suggests that the researcher select a topic from either academic readings or personal experience. Second, a broad topic will likely need to be narrowed down and focused on a particular phenomenon. Third, McKee (2001) recommends making a list of texts that the researcher knows from personal experience are relevant to the study and then do research for more texts that may be useful to the study. Next, the researcher must gain access to the texts, whether they are newspaper articles, television recordings, or online message boards. The researcher should then observe and understand as many examples of a particular program or story to understand the details at work and then compare that with other stories within the same genre. After the researcher feels comfortable with the selected text, then s/he can delve into news stories about the text, images revolving around it, and even music inspired by it. After going through the above steps, the researcher will have a strong grasp of the artifact’s context

and will be better equipped to complete the final step: to analyze and interpret the most likely readings of that text (McKee, 2001).

McKee's (2001) nine-step process fits particularly well for a researcher studying political advertisements. As qualitative research is often critiqued for being too reliant on the researcher's own research goals, having a strong grasp of context can help to alleviate some of those issues. Although it is not possible for one to be completely objective, as the researcher is always making decisions, such as what to study and how to go about studying it, a strong commitment to understanding the context will help the researcher to make stronger connections between context and text and will be more likely to make an interpretation based on utilizing method and theory rather than personal biases. Textual analysis relies on a researcher's ability to understand and interpret the text within the given context, often through description, intuition, other research, and past experiences (Wolcott, 2009). Because a textual analysis relies on the researcher's interpretation and that researcher accepts that s/he is not creating the only, or best, interpretation of the text, it is open to some critique from the academic community.

Benefits of Textual Analyses

While some may argue that textual analysis gives the researcher too much leeway in interpretation, there are many benefits to textual analysis. For example, textual analyses utilize naturally occurring data, so researchers do not have to rely on themselves to take perfect notes or memorize responses. The recorded and naturally occurring data will always stay the same and may be studied repeatedly from different perspectives or by different researchers for many years. This is a clear benefit to qualitative textual analysis. As McKee (2001) writes, "Rigorous methodologies can limit research to a great extent: if you only ever ask the same questions in the same way, you will continue to get very similar answers. By contrast, by asking new questions,

and coming up with new ways of thinking about things, you can get different kinds of knowledge” (p. 3). There is a near endless supply of texts in media that attempt to represent or mimic culture and would be worthwhile academic studies. One textual analysis does not disprove another on the same topic if it comes to a different conclusion. Instead, the more work done on the same topic simply grows the base and diversity of knowledge.

Another benefit to textual analysis is that it can explore complex issues that cannot be measured in quantitative terms such as value issues and new fields of study that can result in the creation of new theories. Further, textual analysis does not assume objectivity. Any researcher may write on any topic as long as s/he is clear and honest up front about any conflicts of interest. As there is no one correct reading of a text, there is no reason for a researcher to impose any assumptions on a text. Textual analyses allow the researcher to provide a thick and detailed description of a phenomenon that can then be linked to theory for a greater and deeper understanding of a text.

Combining Textual Analysis and Political Economy

The addition of other methodologies can complement and reign in the focus of a textual analysis. Political economy of media is concerned with the interconnection between power, money and knowledge. That knowledge comes in the form of media and is produced, distributed and consumed by a handful of powerful conglomerates (Mosco, 2009). According to Gandy (1992), it is important to study media because it attempts to mesh private goals of profit with a public duty to inform the public. Gandy (1992) writes that this gives media an “ideological role” in society (p. 36). The media produced by conglomerates is a type of text. A political economic textual analysis can tell a researcher both more and less about that particular text than a textual

analysis would alone. The additional methodology will both narrow down and focus the study.

Fürsich (2009) explains his use of political economy in textual analyses:

Political and economic analysis can be used to elucidate the regulatory and economic scope of the media system. In my own work I developed a type of “textualization analysis” by integrating the macro level of political economy analysis with the micro level of institutional analysis for explaining the conditions of textual production. By combining textual analysis and institutional analysis I was able place a specific media text (in my case non-fiction entertainment) within its broader institutional setting (in my case, the global television market). (p 242)

When analyzing media products as texts, political economy ensures that the research will not overlook structural factors that may affect the final product. These factors could include professional constraints such as fear of flak (Fürsich, 2009).

Bettig and Hall (2012) also write on the importance of combining textual analysis and political economy for a deeper understanding of the media industry. They write, “Interpretive textual analysis examines how various levels of meaning are expressed – intentional meanings, but, more importantly, the hidden and often unintended meanings found in media content” (p. 11). They continue, “By treating the making of meaning in phases, we are able to concentrate on both the context of production and the messages we find in the texts. That is, we can examine how media ownership, media control, and the profit-making motive affect what we read, hear, and see” (p. 11). The lens of political economy helps to create a unique and focused, rather than broad and unfocused, interpretation of a text. Only the close reading of an interpretive textual analysis can uncover the hidden meanings that Bettig and Hall (2012) discuss.

A textual analysis of news allows a researcher to give a detailed description of the coverage. A political economic analysis of Super PACs and their advertisements examine structural issues such as what network the advertisements were aired on, who was associated with the production, and whether there were any ownership issues such as interlocking boards that might connect the creators of the advertisement to the politicians it supported or to the boards or owners of the media conglomerates that played the ads. Combining textual analysis with political economy creates a multi-pronged tool that explains much more about the phenomenon of Super PACs and news media coverage than one would on its own. A political economic textual analysis of the advertisements can answer all of the above questions while maintaining its focus on Super PACs. Fürsich (2009) explains the importance of combining methodologies:

Researchers are not interested in finding how reductionist or biased journalists represent the world (because that is a given). At best, this would only be the first step of a textual analysis. Instead, thorough textual analysis has the goal to explain which cultural sensibilities prevail that allow for such a text at this specific point in time. These cultural sensibilities can involve everything from seemingly calm states of agreed-upon dominant ideologies to active clashes between emerging new structures of feeling. (p. 247)

A textual analysis is how one phenomenon was interpreted by one researcher or group of researchers at a specific point in time. Research in the future looking back would likely be much different as would research in the past looking forward. The next section will explain how using textual analysis combined with political economy will be useful in a future study on Super PAC advertisements.

Using Political Economic Textual Analysis to Study Super PAC Coverage

When working on an interpretive political economic textual analysis, it is important to remember that there is no one correct answer, and the researcher should not go in to the research with the goal of proving something specific. No textual analysis or researcher or research attempt can be pure. It is all affected by current events, emotions, beliefs, intuition, and prior knowledge, but that does not make the research useless; it makes the research unique, and when completed meticulously, the resulting findings can add to the diversity of quality academic research. Further, strong critical research can provoke change where it may be needed and provide citizens with an outline of how to proceed to help policy makers make laws that benefit people rather than corporations.

3.3 Methodology

As noted, this dissertation uses a political economic textual analysis to analyze news coverage in broadcast, cable, and public news discourse surrounding Super PACs and Super PAC advertisements. From a political economic perspective, the first step in understanding news coverage requires an understanding of the ownership of the corporations that are producing the news. Chapter four will delve into the ownership of each of the news sources included in the study. Issues of overlapping ownership and similarities and differences in coverage will be explored and analyzed in more depth in the discussion section. Chapter four will utilize previous political economic and historic research of media ownership, news stories, press releases, and the corporate websites in order to draw conclusions about the supposedly competitive big five's connections to one another.

News transcripts were gathered for analysis using Lexis-Nexis. The search term Super PAC or Super PACs were used in the “News Search” – “TV and Radio Transcripts” column.

Sources selected were ABC News, CBS News, CNN, Fox News Network, MSNBC, National Public Radio, and NBC News. The search was selected for all news transcripts dated before the presidential Election Day, November 6, 2012. NPR rather than PBS had to be used for comparison to the television networks because no PBS transcripts were uploaded to Lexis-Nexis for the dates analyzed.

For cable entities, CNN returned 1,165 news transcripts. MSNBC returned 571 news transcripts and Fox News Network returned 495 transcripts. Out of the three broadcast networks, NBC news returned 158 transcripts. CBS News returned 137 transcripts and ABC News returned 61 transcripts. National Public Radio returned 76 transcripts.

These transcripts will be analyzed with layered questions in mind: What type of story – reporter package, interview, or mention in a roundtable or discussion? Reporter packages are often used for the most important news of the day while a mention in an interview or roundtable may suggest that Super PACs were discussed by the mainstream news as just another piece to the electoral game that did not require much analysis. Why were Super PACs deemed to be newsworthy in the first place? Who was allowed to speak in the stories? Were the sources mostly male as previous research suggests? Was there a reliance on expert sources as Herman and Chomsky (2001) have found in the past? How were sources identified in terms of their political parties? Did ownership matter? Were there notable differences in coverage and/or sourcing between cable, public, and network news? Finally, how were Super PACs represented and what ideologies about them were most promoted by the news media? The answers to these questions ought to provide a clearer picture of how the media handled the issue of Super PACs and explained their possible effects on the electoral process to voters.

Chapters five and six will include a textual analysis of the transcripts through a political economic lens. In addition to the layered questions discussed, the analysis will also look at emerging themes, levels of transparency and ideologies that were frequently discussed or debated. Each transcript will be analyzed individually for themes, content, newsworthiness, and sourcing. The genders and political parties (if known) of all speakers will be noted, including reporters and anchors to find out who was most represented (and least represented) in the coverage of Super PACs. McChesney and Nichols (2013) argue in *Dollarocracy* that the negative advertising technique often used by Super PACs is aimed at getting citizens to stay home on Election Day. For this reason, it will also be noted which Super PACs' advertisements received coverage and whether those advertisements were positive or negative.

Chapter seven will conclude the dissertation and examine the main findings in more detail. Ownership's effect on coverage will be explained and democracy and democratic media will be defined. Finally, suggestions for future regulation and social change will be examined.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCENTRATION OF NEWS OWNERSHIP

As discussed, this dissertation analyzes the news coverage of Super PACs in the 2012 presidential election by ABC, CBS, NBC, NPR, CNN, MSNBC, and Fox News from the political economic perspective. Because the theory of political economy of communication is concerned with issues of money, power and knowledge, the fundamental question of who is ultimately in charge of and responsible for these news networks must be answered. While all of the newsmakers listed above have corporate ties to some extent, they do not all have ties to serving the public interest. The cable networks CNN, MSNBC, and Fox News are only required to serve the public to the extent that ratings stay high, advertising sales remain profitable and shareholders are left happy. All of the commercial stations are owned by members of the Big Five media conglomerates that own multiple news outlets and supposedly compete all while entering joint ventures and investing in one another's companies. Bagdikian (2004), Bettig and Hall (2012), and Meehan (2005) have written in depth profiles of what the Big Five media conglomerates own, how they acquired so much, and with whom they do business. This chapter will differ slightly in that it will focus on what forms of news these very wealthy owners have added to their stockpiles rather than concentrating on their entertainment portfolios. This chapter utilized the company websites, previous political economic critiques, SEC reports, and news stories regarding the owners of the news outlets. *Bloomberg Businessweek's* board relationships website was utilized in finding interlocking board connections. *Forbes* was used as a secondary source for board members who did not have a *Businessweek* site devoted to them.

4.1 The Problem of Media Concentration & Conglomeration

Media ownership continues to get more and more concentrated. Over the last 30 years, media ownership shrank from 50 to only five major media owners (Bagdikian, 2004). Media are different from other capitalist industries because they serve a necessary and democratic purpose and were granted First Amendment rights so they may keep the public informed. As many have said, the media does not tell us what to think, but they do set the agenda socially, politically, economically, and culturally by telling us what to think about (McChesney, 1998). It is important to remember that the media industry does not have to be so concentrated as excessive merging is in the name of profits, not the public interest, and is the result of deregulation (Bettig & Hall, 2012). One of the reasons citizens so seldom hear about the concentration of media and its possible effects on the democratic process is because the mainstream media have control over what stories get covered and typically, they choose not to cover themselves, especially if the story is negative (Herman, 1995).

In order to maintain monopoly power, media conglomerates have horizontally and vertically integrated, allowing them to have control over both the channel and the messages within programming (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006). Horizontal integration results in the ownership of many different communication outlets such as newspapers, television, and film. Vertical integration allows the owners of the outlet to also own the means of production and distribution of the programs or articles such as the film studio and advertising firms used to promote the film. Mergers, acquisitions, and joint ventures with other conglomerates further confuse the supposedly competitive process. Rather than actually competing with one another, media monopolies reduce risks as they have the ability to take a loss in one area, assured that the other profitable ventures will keep them afloat while creating barriers to entry for other possible

players (McChesney, 2008). By owning a variety of outlets such as theme parks, news programs, cable networks, and film studios, media monopolies can use synergistic methods to pump and promote their newest products in a way that no startup or independent media could compete with. Utilizing synergy makes it much more likely that even if a film flops, investors and shareholders will get their returns through other means such as sales of merchandise associated with the movie.

One of the ways to correct the current monopoly power of the media is through antitrust laws that could break up the largest conglomerates (McChesney, 1998). On some levels, the big five media companies do compete, but mostly, they create barriers to entry so they do not have to compete with anyone else. Barriers to entry generally mean that diverse viewpoints are left out of the mainstream media. Antitrust laws would allow for new entrants and more diversity in television, radio, newspapers, and publishing. The big five operate more as an oligopoly than a complete monopoly, but this is because there are still a few antitrust laws that have not been deregulated. Further, oligopolies allow the joint ventures that produce higher profits than a monopoly market would on its own so media owners have little incentive to merge and acquire to the point of being a proper monopoly (McChesney, 2004). In this way, the oligopoly itself operates as a monopoly force. When one considers the extreme level of concentration in the television news industry, it becomes clear that research into their operations is necessary as citizens in a democracy are relying upon their news reporting for government to function and with such concentrated ownership, diversity of viewpoints and programming is sure to suffer. After all, if the concentrated industry was not being used successfully to promote the culture and consciousness industries, it is unlikely deregulation would have occurred in the first place. As

the Big Five own many other assets besides news, those possible conflicts of interest should also be exposed. Sumner Redstone's holdings will be analyzed first.

4.2 National Amusements

In 1999, Viacom, owned by Sumner Redstone of National Amusements, purchased CBS for \$37.3 billion. From 2002-2003 a series of political decisions by the Federal Communications Commission loosened and allowed the merger to maintain its two broadcast networks, CBS and UPN. Other changes included allowing networks to reach 39% of households (lifted from previous legislation allowing them to reach 35% of households) and legalizing the ownership of both a cable system and broadcast network. If it weren't for the loosening of ownership regulations, the new Viacom-CBS would have been forced to sell off some of its assets (Bettig & Hall, 2013). Prior to the merger, Viacom owned mostly cable networks. The acquisition of CBS's ownership of broadcast space allowed Viacom and CBS to practice synergy from the spectrum to the cord while they were joined. As Bettig and Hall (2012) explain, Sumner Redstone had viewers from "cradle to grave," reaching children on Nickelodeon and the elderly on Sunday morning broadcast programs (p. 18). The merger went relatively unquestioned by journalists and typically ran in the business section, ignoring the social and political significance of the consolidation (Bettig & Hall, 2012). After the initial boom in stock prices from the merger, Viacom-CBS began to drop steadily, and Redstone decided to split the companies in two, while maintaining ownership and after already benefitting from the pay off provided by the synergistic opportunities of the merger. "The separation of Viacom was like moving into separate bedrooms of the National Amusements mansion. Les Moonves of CBS would get one room, Tom Freston of Viacom would take another, while Redstone resided in the master suite" (Bettig & Hall, 2012, p. 24). Redstone's wealth has fluctuated by a few billion dollars over the

past decade. At age 90, he remains on *Forbes 400* as number 71, up from number 91 in 2012, with a net worth of \$5.8 billion (Forbes, 2013a).

Viacom owns massive amounts of entertainment media while Redstone's CBS focuses on news and broadcasting. In addition to the national CBS news programs, the broadcast network also owns a substantial number of local news outlets. According to Columbia Journalism Review (2013), CBS owns more than 100 broadcast television stations, local radio stations, and online news sources. CBS additionally owns entertainment and several local stations that do not provide news programming. Viacom's website boasts that its cable networks reach every continent with the exception of Antarctica. For the past several years, Viacom consistently makes over \$3 billion in revenues each quarter (Viacom, 2014a). In the first quarter 2014 Fiscal Year report Sumner Redstone was quoted, "Viacom continues to deliver on its proven strategy of creating the world's best entertainment content, and engaging audiences in new and powerful ways. We look forward to continuing to deliver for shareholders" (Viacom, 2014c). According to SEC reports, Viacom's most powerful shareholders are also its board members.

Viacom's international cable holdings include BET, CMT, Logo, Comedy Central, Nickelodeon, MTVU, TVLand, VH1, Nick at Nite, MTV2, Nick Jr., NickToons, TeenNick, Spike, and VH2 Classic (Viacom, 2014b). In addition, Viacom is the parent company of Paramount Pictures, which distributes films from Paramount, DreamWorks, Vantage, MTV Films, and Nickelodeon Movies (Viacom, 2014b).

CBS Corporation owns both broadcast and cable networks: CBS Television, CBS Entertainment, CBS News, CBS Sports, CBS Television Stations, CBS Television Studios, CBS Studios International, CBS Television Distribution, CBS DVD, CBS Consumer Products, CBS Films, the CW, ShowTime, Smithsonian Channel, CBS Sports Network, CBS Interactive, CBS

Radio, CBS Sports Radio, CBS Outdoor, Simon & Schuster, CBS Connections, CBS Scene Restaurant and Bar, Watch!, Eco Media, and the TV Guide Network (CBS Corporation, 2014). From the list of distributors, studios, broadcast, and cable networks, it is clear that both CBS and Viacom are horizontally and vertically integrated.

Viacom-CBS has also been involved in joint ventures with some of its most powerful and wealthy advertisers such as mobile carriers Sprint, Cingular, Verizon Wireless, Virgin Mobil and Amp'd Mobile as well as YouTube and Apple iTunes (Bettig & Hall, 2012). Bettig and Hall (2012) also noticed intriguing corporate interlocks with banks, universities and political powerhouses such as previous United States Senators, members of Congress, mayors, and secretaries of defense. McChesney (2008) explains why the corporate media's power continues to grow: "On the one hand, given the media control over news and communication, few politicians wish to antagonize the owners of the media. It is quite acceptable for politicians to bash the alleged liberalism of journalism, but it is political suicide to attack corporate control of the industry" (p. 238). Soon after the approved the merger of CBS and Viacom, AOL and Time Warner knocked on the FCC's door to form their own union. As questioning unlimited capitalism is "suicide" in the United States, many mergers are successful without much concern for their cultural or political effects.

Sumner Redstone and his daughter Shari Redstone are the Chair and Vice-Chair of both CBS and Viacom. Frederic V. Salerno, who previously served as the CFO for Verizon Wireless, also serves on the boards of both CBS and Viacom. Several of CBS's and Viacom's Board members have hopped back and forth between the two corporations. All salary information for board members is not available, but Viacom's CFO, Thomas E. Dooley, was listed by *CNN Money* as one of the 25 top paid men. Dooley earns a reported \$27 million a year for his Viacom

services (CNN Money, 2014). Viacom Board Member Robert Kraft is also CEO of the Kraft Group and owns the New England Patriots NFL team, the New England Revolution professional soccer team, and Gillette Stadium where both teams play their home games. With control over two sports teams and their stadiums, Kraft has a near monopoly over New England athletics and substantial sports advertising power.

CBS's President and CEO, Leslie Moonves was a topic of news concern after marrying a well-known CBS correspondent. Moonves married CBS reporter and talk show host Julie Chen in 2004, who reportedly used her husband's clout to intimidate fellow hosts on CBS's *The Talk* (THR Staff, 2011). CBS's horizontal integration has also come under fire due to its ownership of Simon & Schuster Publishing. The controversy revolved around a CBS *60 Minutes* special on the Benghazi attacks in September 2012. The special relied upon interviews with a man named Dylan Davies. Anchor Lara Logan claimed she was fooled by Davies' story that was later found to be full of inaccuracies. In actuality, Davies was selected for the interview because Simon & Schuster was publishing his accounts. Rather than acknowledge the conflict of interest, *60 Minutes* only apologized for a failure to double check Davies' story. Only a short clip in the much less popular CBS *This Morning* had any mention of the book deal and the corporation's failure to disclose the connection during *60 Minutes* (see Drum, 2013; Gertz, 2013; Stearns & Topper, 2013). Even after the conflict of interest story broke, CBS never addressed the issue in primetime, demonstrating that media often count on the original story receiving more press and attention than any recants that may draw their news values and business operations into question. Considering all of Redstone's holdings, news is just one small part of a much larger conglomerate. A few slip-ups are no doubt worth the massive profits that result from the numerous conflicts of interest involved in diversified ownership.

4.3 Time Warner, Inc.

In 2000, just after the Viacom-CBS merger, AOL made history when it purchased Time Warner for \$165 billion. It was the world's largest business merger, making the joined companies worth about \$350 billion (Bettig & Hall, 2012). Allowing the largest corporate merger to take place seems a bit lax even with the FCC's deregulating history, but when one considers AOL's board of directors during the merger, the political economy of the decision starts to make more sense. When AOL merged, its board of directors included, among others, President Ronald Reagan's former secretary of state, General Colin Powell, the chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff under President George H. W. Bush, and Fannie Mae's CEO (Bettig & Hall, 2012). Time Warner's board was also filled with members who came with strong business and political ties and interlocks including: the World Bank (and more than 10 other banks), Harvard, Johns Hopkins, Yale, AT&T Wireless, Coca Cola, the MLB, Disney, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Center for Global Development, the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, and the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission. Being connected to the right kind of people comes with favorable business results for the Big Five.

Friends With Benefits

As the owner of worldwide cable company CNN, Time Warner's news reaches more than two billion viewers around the world via the more than 1,000 affiliates that carry it (CNN, 2014). According to *Columbia Journalism Review* (2013), Time Warner also has 25 different print, television, online, and other news holdings. Time Warner also has holdings on all continents with the exception of Antarctica and owns the Cartoon Network, Headline News, Adult Swim, Turner Classic Movies, TBS, TNT, HBO, Turner Sports, Showtime (Europe, Middle East, and Asia only), and TruTV (Turner, 2014a). Time Warner also owns the vertically integrated

Warner Brothers brand, which includes Warner Brothers distribution, motion pictures, home video, television, and animation (Time Warner, 2014). Time Warner typically reports revenues between six and seven billion dollars quarterly. The largest chunk of revenues (\$3.5 billion) is attributed to the television holdings of HBO, CNN, TBS, and TNT (Carter, 2013).

Time Warner has the capability to reach people on nearly every continent in both television and print news. According to Bettig and Hall (2012), Time Warner has business partners in the top universities, corporations, and most powerful political positions in the United States, which helped it to form one of the largest media conglomerates in the world. With Time Warner's powerful lobbies, it is no wonder mergers and deregulation has become the FCC's norm rather than following a strict, public interest model of regulation that puts diversity before profit margins. When it comes to regulatory proceedings, those with the most powerful friends also seem to enjoy the best benefits.

Unfortunately, citizens are often left in the dark about what media mergers mean. Too often, news coverage of mergers, even when written by a "competitor," appear with little critique in the safety of the business pages. Reporters rely on their "golden rolodex" of experts and opinion leaders to provide the brunt of information for the story that often promises more diversity or improved programming at a lesser cost to consumers (Bettig & Hall, 2012, p. 19). Citizens are left with the message that deregulation and mergers are the only way to lessen our cable bills and improve our evening news and that is exactly what these behemoths are counting on. Bagdikian (2004) explains, "...the not-so-hidden meaning behind the slogan 'get government off our backs' eventually is 'let us have either a monopoly or cooperative arrangements with a small number of our companies in the same business'" (p. 54). No matter the spin, citizens must remember "such mergers produce no real benefits to society, only to investors" (Bettig & Hall,

2012, p. 20). It is no surprise that The Big Five have been referred to by media scholars as a cartel-like oligarchy, but it is extremely problematic when we consider how much of our daily news and cultural artifacts are funneled through these few very wealthy white men and carefully tweaked before they can make their way to citizens. They also tend to work together to maintain power rather than compete with one another.

According to Free Press, Benton, and the *LA Times*, consumers in California Verizon Wireless stores were surprised to see marketing ploys benefitting not Verizon phone, TV, and cable services, but those of its so-called competitors, Time Warner and Comcast cable. “The three telecom heavyweights involved call this a mere marketing partnership and say it has no relationship to Verizon Wireless’ pending \$3.6 billion purchase of wireless spectrum from the cable industry” (Lazarus, 2012). The “marketing partnership” shows just how non-competitive these conglomerates really are with one another. When the owners of these corporations market each other and have joint ventures together, it should call into question their pricing methods and ability to work together that allows them to keep barriers to entry high for anyone outside the Big Five. In 2013-2014 rumors circulated that Charter Communications, with assistance from Comcast, was looking to purchase Time Warner cable. No deals have been signed yet, but reports claim that Charter would sell pieces of Time Warner to Comcast so both may maintain monopoly power within specific districts rather than allowing consumer choice between the two (Crawford, 2014).

CNN

According to Turner Broadcasting, CNN is the number one leading English language news in the world (Turner, 2014b). As discussed, CNN reaches billions and also has its own set of mobile apps, airport networks, wire service, and websites (CNN, 2014). CNN was founded by

Ted Turner as the first 24-hour news network in 1980 (CNN Library, 2014). In 1996, Turner sold CNN and Turner Broadcasting Systems to conglomerate Time Warner (CNN Library, 2014). Although CNN's website boasts that it is the second most highly rated cable news network in the United States, according to the *Huffington Post* (2014), the network actually dropped to last place in 2013. According to *Breitbart*, CNN is reportedly changing its business model that previously relied upon breaking news:

CNN appears to be throwing in the towel, at least when it comes to being a cable news channel. With its ratings and reputation sinking, CNN announced Friday that the third-place network will be investing heavily in everything except serious news-gathering. This new focus will be towards “a variety of unscripted formats, including other travel shows, and ‘immersive’ nonfiction programs.” (Nolte, 2013)

Rather than improve ratings through investigative reporting that is not available on its cable competitors, CNN has apparently decided to join the crowd and move to a more opinion-punditry model for its news stories.

However, CNN tended to fail in many of the same areas as MSNBC and Fox News prior to its ratings drop. Josh Levy of Free Press wrote in 2009 that as social networks such as Twitter blew up with news of protests in Iran, CNN failed to report:

This used to be why we turned on the TV. Yet while the Twittering classes were bending over backward to find more information and connect to more people in Iran – going so far as to provide proxy servers for Iranians being blocked from the Internet – CNN and other cable news outlets were busy running evergreen documentaries and Larry King reruns. *The New York Times*' Brian Stelter, a dedicated tweeter himself, even reported

that folks weren't only using Twitter to report about Iran, but to complain about CNN's *failure* to report. (Levy, 2009)

According to 2013-2014 reports, it seems rather than improve, CNN has plans to spend less on news, re-market itself, and gain more in ad revenue (Faruk, 2014; Sterne Agee & Leach, 2014). As mentioned, Time Warner typically makes \$6-\$7 billion in revenues each quarter, but in the final quarter of 2013, revenues topped \$8.6 billion (MarketWatch, 2014). After beating estimates and perhaps due to expectations of higher future profits, Time Warner has bought back \$5 billion worth of its own shares (Isidore, 2014; Lee, 2014). Indeed, CNN President Jeff Zucker told *Capital* he's interested in targeting "viewers who are watching places like Discovery and History and Nat Geo and A&E" and to have "more shows and less newscasts" (Allen & Weprin, 2013). *New York Magazine* writer Caroline Bankoff (2013) points out that Zucker may be gaining some new audience members, but will ultimately lose out on "people who care about, you know, the news." Even though Meehan (2005) and others point out that the ratings system does not measure what viewers want, but rather, whether the viewers most desired by advertisers are watching, ratings continue to decide profits. The quest for a number one spot among cable news sources appears to have sent Zucker down a path that devalues public affairs and news programming because advertisers devalue it. The mainstream media is constantly there to remind us, lest we forget, that they are in the business of making profits for their shareholders, not in the business of generating quality or informative programming. Disney is a prime example of this inconvenient business model.

4.4 The Walt Disney Company

Walt Disney is best known for its extremely profitable children's entertainment holdings and theme parks. Disney also owns the broadcast network, ABC. In addition to ABC network

news, Disney has more than 20 radio stations and eight local television news stations. The radio stations do not include news programming as they are all Radio Disney that targets children and tweens with games, music, and other popular culture programming. According to *Forbes*, Disney is the 17th most valuable brand in the world employing more than 150,000 people and has yearly sales over \$42 billion (Forbes, 2013c). Disney is expected to have revenues over \$11 billion in 2014 (Zara, 2014).

The Walt Disney Company is led by longtime CEO Robert Iger (The Walt Disney Company, 2013). Iger alone has ties to 246 other board members in five organizations reaching eleven different industries and shares interlocking boards with CBS's Les Moonves (Bloomberg Businessweek, 2014). Both Moonves and Iger sit on the board of the American Film Institute. Disney's current Board of Directors includes Facebook CEO and ex-Google Vice President Sheryl Sandberg; Morgan Stanley head Robert Matshullat who has ties to The Seagram Company, Clorox, Morgan and Visa; Bank of America Director Monica Lozano who also sits on the board for U.S. Hispanic Media and publishes the largest Spanish language newspaper in the United States; as well as Washington Mutual Director Orin Smith who sits on the board of Nike and is the former CEO of Starbucks. In addition to these current interlocks, Disney has a plethora of past partnerships that include government officials, academic institutions, think tanks, advertisers and trade associations that has allowed them to gain and maintain massive amounts of political, cultural, and economic power (Bettig & Hall, 2012).

Disney has demonstrated with its ability to maintain strict copyright ownership of its mouse and anything else that comes out of its studios that it takes business seriously – and so does the Disney legal team. With its positive image and powerful ties listed above, Disney will likely continue to grow and merge without negative reaction from the FCC or the mainstream

media. For the time being, it seems to be growing its highly profitable entertainment industry rather than its news programming. ABC is likely just another tool in the Disney machine that can provide a synergistic complement on the broadcast spectrum for its cable and film holdings.

Of the big five, Disney is the best horizontally and vertically integrated in terms of opportunities for synergy. Disney has five operating arms: media networks, parks and resorts, Walt Disney Studios, Disney consumer products, and Disney Interactive (The Walt Disney Company, 2014). These arms include media networks such as ABC, ESPN, Disney; Walt Disney Resorts (44) and theme parks (11) on three continents; film, music, and theatre production studios such as Pixar, Marvel, Lucasfilm, and Touchstone Pictures, Walt Disney Records, and Disney on Ice; as well as online holdings and the title of the world's largest licensor of consumer products (The Walt Disney Company, 2014). Disney even owns its own branded town, Celebration, on its Disney ground in Florida where the lawns are perfect, the residents have to apply to be let in to the community, and the only brand viewable from the outside of homes is the Disney brand (Klein, 2009).

Disney takes great strides to appear apolitical. After helping to fund Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Disney refused to help fund the film's release from one of its production studios. The film was most critical of President Bush, whose brother Jeb was governor of Florida, where Disney World received beneficial tax breaks (Bettig & Hall, 2012). Bettig and Hall (2012) write, "The suggestion that Disney does not take sides masks the larger ideological influence held by this member of the Big Media" (p. 73). Disney's ownership of a news network has also caused controversy. In the 1990s, ABC News' Brian Ross' story on poor security and background check efforts at Disney theme parks that led to a high number of pedophiles being hired was shelved by the parent company (Mifflin, 1998). More recently, a content analysis by

The Tyndell Report claims that ABC's *World News with Diane Sawyer* proves that the "Disneyfication" of the network is complete (Robins, 2014). In comparison to ABC and CBS evening news programs, ABC tended to focus on "infotainment" and spent fewer minutes on harder hitting stories such as the bombing at the Boston Marathon, gun control, healthcare, NSA surveillance, and foreign policy issues (Robins, 2014; Scarry, 2014). Further, the reporters who had the most time on-camera were a features reporter and a weather reporter (Robins, 2014). Still, Disney's ABC News has about 22 million viewers who help it to maintain \$400-\$500 million in advertising revenue every year (Dunsmore, 2014). Research and news articles suggest that like CNN, ABC News is dropping out on traditional news programming in order to provide more entertaining stories, likely leaving viewers uninformed. While Disney is loved by many who enjoy its theme parks and children's programming, Comcast is largely hated by its customer base. Comcast and its purchase of NBC Universal from General Electric will be analyzed next.

4.5 Comcast – NBC Universal

In 2011, General Electric and Comcast followed in the footsteps of Viacom and AOL to get another enormous merger approved by the FCC. Comcast purchased a 51% stake in NBC Universal and General Electric continued to own the remaining 49%. In 2013, Comcast purchased General Electric's final stake in NBC Universal (Sherman, 2013). Now, the largest cable system in the world also owns NBC, MSNBC, Bravo, Chiller, E!, Oxygen, Style, Syfy, Sprout, Universal Sports, USA, the Weather Channel, Fandango, Hulu, Telemundo, Universal Pictures, Focus Features, and Universal Parks and Resorts (Comcast, 2014). The holdings range from production studios, to cable channels, to broadcast channels, as well as the cable itself. Much like the other members of the big five, Comcast is clearly horizontally and vertically integrated with plenty of room to purchase start-ups and take calculated risks without losing out

on possible profits. The conglomerate also owns more than 30 national and local news channels in addition to cable news networks MSNBC and CNBC (Columbia Journalism Review, 2013).

In the final quarter of 2013, Comcast reported revenue of nearly \$17 billion (Reuters, 2014).

Comcast's Board of Directors includes former AOL Time Warner CEO Joseph Collins, Pepsi CEO Jeffrey Honickman, ex-CBS president and Nike board member, Johnathan Rodgers, and Rockefeller Foundation President and Citigroup director Dr. Judith Rodin (Comcast, 2013).

Comcast's CEO, Brian Roberts, served as the chairman on the National Cable and

Telecommunication Association during the time of the 1996 Telecommunications Act became law and led to massive deregulation of the industry, which no doubt made him very popular to

the Big Five (Comcast, 2013). His father, Ralph Roberts, founded Comcast, gave his son his first job out of university, and also sits on the board of directors. Both Comcast's board members J.

Michael Cook and Gerald L. Hassell sit on the board of The Bank of New York Mellon

Corporation with Disney's Roger Iger. Comcast's Johnathon Rodgers and Disney's Orin Smith have an interlocking board connection as well. Both currently sit on Nike's board of directors.

Time Warner and Comcast are also tightly woven. Comcast's Judith Rodin and Time Warner's Carlos Gutierrez sit together on the board of Citigroup. Judith Rodin also shares an interlocking

board with Disney's Robert Iger; both are currently members of the National September 11

Memorial & Museum at the World Trade Center Foundation, Inc. Bagdikian (2004) explained why interlocking boards and directorates is cause for concern: "It is not unusual for strong

executives to select the directors who are supposed to monitor them, which guarantees sympathy and permissiveness. In most cases, the directors are identical as a class" (p. 51). Further, as

demonstrated previously in this chapter, board members are often family members, friends, and people whose names are immediately associated with well-known philanthropies (Bagdikian,

2004). It is illegal for the board members of Comcast to also sit on the board of Disney, but interlocks, although still raising conflicts of interest, are overlooked.

Comcast cable is in 39 states with more than 25 million subscribers to its services of cable, digital cable, voice, and Internet (Free Press, 2014). Comcast is the only member of the Big Five that owns two of the news sources analyzed in this dissertation: both NBC and MSNBC. NBC has a duty to the public interest, unlike MSNBC, but both are owned by Comcast. Comcast has a sour reputation when it comes to customer service and satisfaction. It's been named worst company in America by Consumerist.com, but in 2013 it won the prize of only the third worst company (Consumerist, 2013). Needless to say, it does not appear that NBC News, MSNBC or CNBC reported on their parent company's award online or on television. Interestingly, Comcast's move from the number one to number three most hated company is attributed to it improving "customer service by providing less of it" (Marks, 2013). Comcast customer services was considered so poor that providing information for self-installation actually improved its overall quality of service. According to Craig Aaron, in 2008 when Comcast won its first "poo" award, there were websites dedicated to how awful the company was such as ComcastMustDie.com, ComCraptic.com and ComcastSucks.org. Comcast has previously been linked to censoring certain online forums and sending users messages who attempt to download BitTorrents on peer-to-peer networks to sites like Amazon where they can purchase the content (Greenwald, 2008; Kowaliski, 2013). Comcast's expanding control over the production and distribution of messages will only help to promote the corporation's causes such as continuing to fight against net neutrality that would allow Comcast to further its control over Internet usage (Hiltzik, 2014). This is extremely problematic when one considers the massive number of Comcast Internet subscribers who may seek out alternative news sources online. Comcast could

make finding such sites much more difficult than accessing those owned by its largest advertisers, further devastating democratic ideals.

General Electric

During this study, General Electric still controlled 49% of NBC Universal. General Electric (GE) is one of largest and most diversified corporations in the world. GE produces and sells airplane parts, household appliances, medical products and until 2013, owned half of major media conglomerate NBC Universal (*Forbes*, 2013b). As GE is a major producer of appliances, the conglomerate utilized its NBC Universal ownership in 2007 to promote NBC Green Week twice a year with product placement of its own “green” appliances and with the goal of attracting other green advertisers (Chozick, 2010). As a multinational and diversified company, General Electric has historically been wrapped up in numerous court cases, many due to its environmental transgressions. Between 1988 and 2000, General Electric was fined and ordered to clean up environmental contaminations in twenty-three different cases in the United States and the United Kingdom (GE Misdeeds, 2012). The court cases ranged from Hudson River contaminations to those of public water supplies and asbestos pollution. The damages ranged from a few hundred thousand dollars up to two billion pounds (GE Misdeeds, 2012). The organization, “Clean Up GE” states, “GE has a lengthy record of criminal, civil, political and ethical transgressions” (GE Misdeeds, 2012, p. 1). In addition to its environmental failings, General Electric has also been under fire for worker safety violations, fraudulent charges, deceptive advertising, and illegal sales overseas (GE Misdeeds, 2012).

General Electric also procured a website about going green, ecomagination.com. Daniel Fisher of *Forbes* asked GE CEO, Jeffrey Immelt, “So is Ecomagination just a sales pitch? ‘It’s primarily that,’ confesses [GE Chief Executive] Immelt. ‘In its essence it’s a way to sell more

products and services” (Fisher, 2005, p. 2). Interestingly, the article was not a scathing indictment of General Electric’s new business plan. Instead, it was actually posted on GE’s website as evidence of the company’s greenness. *Forbes* helps to explain how a company can “join them [environmentalists]” and more importantly, profit from environmentalists and green businesses. *The Nation’s* Scott Klinger and Holly Sklar (2002) awarded GE its “Lifetime Achievement” Enny (for Enron-like behavior) for being a “highly defective corporation” and found GE guilty of more of its ten bad habits than even Enron itself (p. 2). GE’s ownership of NBC Universal also came under fire in 2010 when NBC journalists failed to cover several topics relating to its parent company. Despite earning profits in the billions, General Electric did not pay taxes in 2010 and NBC failed to cover the story even though the news organization had reported on similar stories about tax issues in the past (Farhi, 2011). Further, NBC also avoided stories pertaining to GE’s poor legal and environmental record. The failure of NBC News to provide reports on GE controversies could be due to direct censorship or self-censorship on the part of the journalists, but the examples certainly provide evidential support for the far-reaching implications and problems created by concentrated ownership in the news and media industry that ought to be informing citizens instead of protecting corporations. Another corporation with a reputation for attempting to control and alter news information is News Corp.

4.6 News Corporation

As its name suggests, News Corp primarily owns news outlets. Its Australian owner, Rupert Murdoch, is notoriously right wing with cable news pundits on the payroll to match, but he has traded favors with politicians from all sides of the political aisle to grow his media empire from Australia to Italy to the United Kingdom to the United States. News Corp owns more than 50 news outlets around the globe (Columbia Journalism Review, 2012). News Corp also owns

cable networks and production studios such as Fox Business Channel, FX, and National Geographic, Fox Searchlight Pictures, and 20th Century Fox. Like Viacom-CBS, News Corp is also involved in publishing with Harper Collins and Dow Jones (Free Press, 2014). News Corp enjoyed revenues in the \$7-\$8 billion range for the final quarter of 2013 with reports that its cable companies, including Fox News, rose over 13% for nearly \$3 billion in revenues (Zara, 2013).

Unlike the other members of the elite Big Five, Murdoch has a group working for him on News Corp's Board of Directors that interlocks less than the other four, perhaps due to some much publicized scandals outlined in the next section. Instead, Murdoch favors his sons and family members of corporations that he has acquired for his board members. Peter Barnes is News Corp's lead director who used to serve on the board of Philip Morris; Elaine Chao was Secretary of Labor under President G. W. Bush; Jose Aznar is a former President of Spain; John Elkann, the Italian heir to Fiat and newly acquired Chrysler sits on the board as well as Murdoch's two sons, CEO James and Lachlan and a Dow Jones heir, Natalie Bancroft (News Corp, 2013). Thanks to Peter Barnes, both News Corp and Time Warner currently share Philip Morris ties. In 2007, News Corp gained ownership of the Dow Jones and brought Bancroft to the News Corp board (Bettig & Hall, 2012).

Fox News

News Corp, while very successful in its profit margins, seems to constantly be involved in scandal. Although News Corp's owner is a well-known conservative, he "has demonstrated that opportunism overrides political loyalty" by supporting whichever candidate promises to be the most lax with media regulations (Bettig & Hall, 2012, p 80). Murdoch has also kowtowed to powerful advertisers. In 2000, Florida journalists for a local Fox affiliate planned to expose

chemical company Monsanto's lies about a growth hormone it used and the hormone's link to cancer. After a phone call from a Monsanto representative, the story was cancelled: "what was at stake was lots of Monsanto advertising dollars – for the Florida station, the entire Fox network, and Murdoch's ActMedia, a major advertising agency used by Monsanto" (Smith, 2009). The news media frequently pretend that advertisers have no effect on coverage, but clearly this is one example that made it out of the Fox newsroom to prove that advertising itself creates a conflict of interest and then is compounded by the vertical integration of media behemoths such as Fox's national news and advertising wings. Fox's ownership of publisher Harper Collins also provided a compelling case for Murdoch's censorship. After an author for a Harper Collins book had offended Chinese officials, Murdoch canceled the book to maintain his relationship with China after he had already made many past concessions such as dropping the BBC from Fox programming in Asia (Bettig & Hall, 2012).

Fox News was accused of misleading viewers prior to the Iraqi invasion by reporting that there was clear evidence of a link between Al-Qaeda and Iraq, that there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and that the majority of American citizens wanted to go to war (Bettig & Hall, 2012). According to Gallup, even after the Iraq invasion when no weapons of mass destruction were found, only 8% of Republicans and 31% of all citizens polled believed that Bush's Administration had misled the public on purpose (Newport, 2003). Indeed, even in 2012 the majority of Republicans claim that Iraq "definitely" had weapons of mass destruction (Fromkin, 2012). Fox's lies involving the war were so believable to those who watched the network that even today, "this latest poll result seems to indicate a refusal – unique to the modern Republican Party – to acknowledge facts" (Fromkin, 2012). Fox News' ability to convince its viewers that war was necessary and then ignore coverage of the actual war (see Bettig & Hall,

2012) has had grave effects on world opinion of U.S. citizens and on the media literacy of Fox viewers who continue to believe the lies they were first told.

More recently, News Corp has come under fire for a phone hacking scandal in the UK. As far back as 2005, British officials suspected their voice mails were being hacked by News Corp after well-kept secrets were released, but it wasn't until six years later when the investigation into the hacking was really underway by the Scotland Yard (Hume & Wilkinson, 2012). Murdoch claimed to have no knowledge of the hacking, promised to work with investigators, paid victims settlements, and pulled the newspaper responsible (Hume & Wilkinson, 2012). Murdoch's sons were voted off of the board of directors, although as discussed, they are currently back on the board. The scandal involved celebrities, royalty, and even a possible affair between a News Corp CEO and the Prime Minister (Hume & Wilkinson, 2012). Even under such controversy, News Corp continues to expand and profit from its news organizations. It owns Fox Broadcasting as well cable network Fox News, but the broadcast network does not have a news program at the national level or it, like Comcast, would own both a broadcast and cable national news network. Fox News currently holds the number one spot in cable ratings even after the long line of discretions and poor journalism (*Huffington Post*, 2014).

Fox News is also well-known for its use of opinion and punditry in place of traditional news gathering. In December 2013, one of Fox's anchors, Megyn Kelly made real news when she claimed that Jesus was white. Kelly stated, "You know, I mean, Jesus was a white man too. He was a historical figure; that's a verifiable fact – as is Santa, I want you kids watching to know that" (Zahr, 2013). Unfortunately, such punditry is often what replaces news and story telling on the Fox cable channel. Perhaps Fox News' popularity is more based on its entertainment factor than its news telling. According to Bagdikian (2004), Murdoch's empire relies upon "Bibles,

bottoms and bosoms” for its success (p. 42). Many sexist websites are dedicated to the ranking of female Fox News anchors’ attractiveness. Country singer and writer Austin Cunningham even wrote a song about the “Foxy” ladies:

Oh, I want a girl like the girls on Fox News
Everyone is beautiful, anyone you choose
Whoever does the hiring knows how to light my fuse
I want a girl like the girls on Fox News. (Kovacs, 2013)

The song, which refers to professional women as girls and never mentions anything other than their appearances, has received well over one million views on YouTube. A 2012 study found that Fox News viewers are less informed than Americans who claimed they don’t bother to follow the news. Or, as *Rolling Stone* put it: “Watching Fox News actually makes you stupid” (Rayfield, 2012). The study found that those who are the best informed are public media’s NPR listeners.

4.7 American Public Media

As Bettig and Hall (2012) write, “There are inherent problems in a system in which news is produced to sell audiences to advertisers and produce profits for their owners” (p. 45). Jhally (1989) has written similar words explaining that citizens simply cannot expect a private enterprise to perform a public good. After the market model beat out the public interest model of broadcasting, it was necessary to create a noncommercial space for news. In 1967, the Public Broadcasting Act created public broadcasting, but as technology evolved, some questioned the need for public news (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006). According to McChesney (2008), an entire reform movement was sparked with the intent to keep broadcasting publicly owned because they feared that “if a broadcast system is market-driven it will tend to serve the well-to-do and

downplay programming that might empower the disenfranchised or serve any public value not defined by its profitability” (p. 237). McChesney (2008) posits that the reform movement failed for three reasons: capitalism could not be successfully challenged, the media helped to perpetuate the idea that corporate media are more democratic, and politicians were too intimidated to get on the bad side of corporate media owners.

NPR

If the reform movement had not failed, the American Public Media system may look a lot more like Canada’s or the United Kingdom’s systems. McChesney (2008) argues that the public media today was set up for failure. The federal government only supplies about 15% (\$430 million) of its operating costs, forcing it to look for charity from wealthy citizens and corporate sponsors (Stearns, 2011). Out of the long list of trustees affiliated with NPR, only one member has an interlock with the Big Five. Both NPR’s Bradbury H. Anderson and Time Warner’s James Barksdale sit on the board of the Mayo Clinic. With so many interlocks, Time Warner is one of the most well connected Big Five members to its classmates.

Due to a lack of funds, PBS and NPR have a reputation of serving the affluent over working class citizens. Some politicians still think there is no need for a public media. Romney stated in a presidential debate: “I’m going to stop the subsidy to PBS. I like PBS. I love Big Bird,” but claimed that PBS was not worth having to “borrow from China” (Grim & Bendery, 2012). Romney was not the first to discount the importance of a public media: “Republicans state that the revolutionary expansion of channels produced by the communication revolution has rendered absurd the argument for government subsidized broadcasting” while massive subsidies continue to be given to commercial broadcasters in the form of free use of public airwaves

(McChesney, 2012, p. 242). According to Croteau and Hoynes (2006), there is still a need for publicly owned media:

Public broadcasting is uniquely positioned to contribute to democracy by providing an alternative to commercial broadcasting. An independent public broadcasting system can broaden the horizons of public discourse by serving as an electronic platform for perspectives, ideas, and cultural presentations that are largely unheard in commercial media. By providing citizens with access to a wide range of ideas, public broadcasting can help prepare citizens to become more active in other arenas of public life. (p. 247)

U.S. citizens tend to agree. A 2011 poll found that while citizens “radically overestimate the amount of federal funding that goes to NPR and PBS,” they “still have overwhelming support for that funding” (Stearns, 2011, para 1). Americans polled presumed that the United States spends about 5% of its budget on public broadcasting. In actuality, public broadcasting only receives about 1/100th of 1% of the federal budget (Stearns, 2011). This leaves public broadcasting in a precarious situation balancing between remaining publicly owned and accepting commercial funding such as political advertisements. In 2012, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals overturned a ban on political ads playing on public broadcasts (Clement, 2012). In December 2013, the same court reversed its decision. The dissenting judges stated, “the station didn’t get a fair shake because ‘judges like public radio and television, while pretty much nobody likes commercials’” (Overby, 2013, para 5). Without raising taxes on the public, forcing commercial time, or cutting funding for other public needs, there are possibilities for how to better fund public broadcasting.

The Need for Public and Nonprofit Media

Currently, public media are so underfunded by government (and often under attack by conservative politicians) that they have been forced to take commercial money to stay afloat. Even with public broadcasting's funding difficulties, Herman (1995) writes:

Public radio and television have been more open to dissent and minority voices than the commercial broadcasting media, partly as a result of original design, but also because, despite their ties to government, they have proven to be somewhat more independent of government and tolerant of controversy than the commercial broadcasters (which shows how awful the latter have been. (para 31)

As mentioned, after defeating Japan, U.S. forces insisted that a publicly funded broadcasting system was needed for a functioning democracy, but the U.S. is not properly funding its own public media system while the one created in Japan flourishes (Bagdikian, 2004). McChesney (1998) recommends taxing advertising and media sales and taking money from general tax revenues to cover the full cost of publicly owned radio and television stations. Further, Herman (1995) suggests charging commercial media a spectrum or satellite fee that could go directly to funding public media. He writes, "The funding of the public and civic sectors from general tax revenues and/or license fees on receiving sets is also easily defended, given the great importance of these sectors in educational, children's, minority group and public affairs programming" (Herman, 1995, para. 24).

To ensure that public media are responsible only to the people and not used as a pawn by government or politicians, McChesney (1998) suggests a "pluralistic" public media with multiple independent and possibly elected controllers at the local, state, and national levels (p. 5).

Without the threat of losing funding, grants, or advertisers, public media would be free to do the

kind of in-depth reporting that the current media system is missing. In turn, public media could serve as a type of competition that forces commercial media systems to stop overlooking complex stories in favor of advertiser-friendly infotainment. Currently, commercial news media have “an overwhelming advantage in technical quality and polish, price, publicity, and distribution” that make it more popular than public news media even if the information provided is lacking (Herman, 1995, para 23).

In addition to a strong and well-funded public media, tax rebates could help to foster independent, noncommercial, and nonprofit media. There is currently a small, but severely underfunded, set of nonprofit media that could be grown to fill some of the gaps created by the commercial news media. McChesney and Nichols (2002) write that federal tax write-offs for every American of up to \$200 if s/he donates to nonprofit media could help foster its growth and make it easier for all citizens, rather than just the wealthy, to contribute to and feel as though they have a stake in the success of their own favorite nonprofit news media group.

As discussed, NPR is not free from corporate influence, but is perhaps a bit less reliant on corporate friends as it is not advertising-reliant. NPR is the final news source that will be analyzed in this dissertation and will be compared with commercial news coverage. As NPR is the only news source in this study that did not take money directly from Super PACs for advertisements, it is important to this study’s concern with how the news reports on something it is directly profiting from. It is not expected that one of these seven news sources will be able to fulfill all the news values and goals of transparency, context, critique, and diversity, but all of them together are expected to meet these goals so citizens may be informed politically, socially, and culturally to fulfill democratic ideals.

Lots of Interests

The analysis of news ownership suggests that the Big Five are operating on the behalf of their many corporate and commercial interests rather than the public interest. News Corp censored stories about public safety in order to maintain advertising agreements with Monsanto, changed news providers to appease Chinese politicians, and misled viewers into supporting an unpopular war under false pretenses. NBC ignored a story about the prevalence of corporate welfare that its parent company was likely hoping to keep quiet. CBS refused to acknowledge a conflict of interest with its publishing company that resulted in a false *60 Minutes* special on Benghazi. Disney protected itself from stories about failure to screen and keep pedophiles from working in its theme parks and its evening news program is reportedly focusing less on news and more on weather and features. CNN has apparently decided to throw in the towel and stop marketing to people who actually watch the news. Instead, the “Cable News Network” plans to offer more entertaining shows and less breaking news coverage. Considering the examples of ownership affecting coverage discussed in this chapter, it is very important to see how journalists covered the Super PACs and outside spenders that paid billions to have their ads aired on cable and network television.

In order to ascertain the major media mergers of the last twenty years, the conglomerates kept their boards and interlocking boards full of important political figures, wealthy individuals, and family members who could be counted on to only have the interests of profit at heart. The revolving door continues to circle as the politicians and others who lobbied for deregulation enjoy high-paying jobs within the very same industries they were once supposed to regulate. All news media must operate within the confines of capitalist structure, but NPR news transcripts ought to provide some insight into how coverage may differ when produced outside the Big Five.

CHAPTER FIVE

NETWORK AND PUBLIC NEWS ANALYSIS

As mentioned, super political action committees were made possible after a Supreme Court ruling in January 2010. At that time, it was impossible to know just how this new and largely unregulated influx of money would affect elections. Much research has been published since the ruling explaining what a Super PAC is and how campaign finance law was impacted by the *Citizens United* ruling (see Bauerly & Hallstrom, 2012; Kang, 2012; Marziani, 2012). Spencer and Wood (2014) compared the amount of independent spending in federal elections pre- and post-*Citizens United* and found that those states whose laws had been invalidated by the Court's decision saw their spending more than double the spending of states that previously had no laws against outside money. The authors found that corporate spending did not rise significantly and concluded, "This is hardly a floodgate of spending by corporations and unions, as some pundits and scholars predicted" (Spencer & Wood, 2014, p. 346). The largest increase, however, was by nonprofit 501(c) organizations and 527s. As discussed in chapter two, these are the groups that those who wish to remain anonymous may send their donations.

There has also been some inquiry into what effect negative Super PAC ads have on individual political affect. Utilizing only negative Republican Primary Super PAC ads, Painter (2013) found that independent voters in the 2012 presidential election were so put off by negative Super PAC advertisements that their political affect for the Republican Party and its presidential nominee, Mitt Romney, declined while affectiveness for President Barack Obama and the Democratic party increased. Republican voters' affect for Mitt Romney and the Republican party remained the same, but Republican affectiveness for Barack Obama increased. Painter (2013) concluded that the onslaught of negative Super PAC advertisements during the

primary election continued to follow Romney into the general election. Negative advertisements have long been used in elections, but are particularly convenient for Super PACs because their creators can hide behind a pseudonym and do not have to approve the message or reveal themselves at the end of the advertisement.

Nichols and McChesney (2013) write in *Dollarocracy*, a critique of modern media and politics, that citizens will see a rise in negative advertising because the candidate who benefits from the ad will not be required to claim responsibility for its existence while the victim in the ad will be forced to respond to its salacious claims. Further, if it makes voters “less likely to vote for the opponent, maybe not vote at all, that is a victory” for those who create the negative advertisements (Nichols & McChesney, 2013, p. 118). In order to combat the excessive Super PAC money and their advertisements, citizens must have a news media they can rely on to bring to light the truths and misrepresentations in political messages that may be too laborious to investigate for themselves. Some previous research has shown that broadcast television news did a lackluster job of informing the public of the possible repercussions of the *Citizens United* decision in 2010 (see Smock, 2012). It is unlikely that the majority of citizens were prepared for the barrage of advertisements, negativity, and dark money that would unfold in the 2012 presidential primary and general election. It is urgent that the news media’s reporting of Super PACs be critically examined because what Nichols and McChesney (2013) refer to as the “money and media election complex” has profited in the billions by accepting Super PAC advertisements, and it is in the best interests of media owners and shareholders that outside investment in political advertising continues to grow.

5.1 Super PACkaged: How Broadcast Reporters Covered Super PACs

While chapter four explained the ownership and interlocking interests of news media firms, this chapter will explore the broadcast media text itself in the form of ABC, CBS, NBC, and NPR news transcripts covering “Super PACs.” Chapter six will interrogate cable transcripts. Since most citizens continue to get their news from television, studying transcripts will provide a snapshot of what messages were disseminated and what ideologies were perpetuated to the majority of voters about Super PACs in the first presidential election of their legality (Beaujon, 2012b). The analysis of these messages should help us to understand if, or to what extent, citizens can trust the news media operating within a market system to report informatively on some of its best advertisers.

To answer this question, this chapter analyzes the 361 stories that aired between January 2011 and November 8, 2012. The date was extended long before the primary was underway in late 2011 to ensure all Super PAC discussions relating to the presidential race were gathered. Teasers, repeated stories, and stories that were not about the presidential election were omitted to get to this final number. Of the 361 stories returned from the Lexis-Nexis search of “super pac*”, 60 were from ABC, 119 from CBS, 122 from NBC, and 60 from NPR. Methodologically, the stories were first saved under their networks’ names and then read in chronological order. Next, the search results were identified as one of three groups: 1) reporter stories, 2) mentions in a roundtable discussion or story on a different topic, and 3) mentions in a one-on-one interview. A traditional reporter story begins with an anchor introduction and is then thrown to a reporter on location or in the studio. A reporter story also often includes supers³ and sound bytes from sources. There were a total of 62 reporter stories and 45 interviews in the 361

³ Supers are the text or graphics spelled out on the screen for viewers during news coverage.

search returns. The remaining 254 were not stories about Super PACs, but merely stories or discussions that mentioned Super PACs. All 361 were analyzed and themes noted with special attention paid to the reporter stories. Reporter stories were saved and collected in their entirety in a separate document. Interviews discussing Super PACs and mentions within other stories were saved and analyzed as well. The main questions guiding analysis at the level of each individual story, interview, or mention include: What was considered newsworthy about Super PACs? Who or what was given airtime? How was the significance of Super PACs explained? After all of the stories were analyzed individually, themes and outliers among all of the coverage were analyzed to help answer the main research question: What ideologies were perpetuated in broadcast and public news coverage of Super PACs in the 2012 primary and general presidential elections?

Using a political economic framework to textually analyze news transcripts, this chapter finds that broadcast, and at times, public news, sold Super PACs to citizens as a new, but now natural part of the electoral process by repeatedly replaying clips from Super PAC advertisements while neglecting protests and backlash against money and corruption in electoral politics. This was by far the most pertinent, and most disturbing, ideology perpetuated. According to online alternative news source, *Truthout*, hundreds of groups around the country protested *Citizens United* at state and federal courthouses on the second anniversary of the decision, but only NPR covered the movement (Ludwig, 2012).

There were many other commonalities such as the coverage was mostly male, white, and Republican. This is likely because more than three-fourths of all broadcast and public Super PAC news coverage concentrated on the frenetic Republican primary. Coverage of Super PACs in the primary was rather disorganized as if reporters expected there to be trouble between

Democrats and Republicans, but were perhaps ill prepared to cover the viciousness between members of the same party. Rather than explaining Super PAC issues in a cohesive manner, broadcasters jumped back and forth between coverage of negative ads, disagreements between candidates, critiques of outside money, discussions of what Super PACs are, and promotions of the American Dream within donor interviews, almost as if the broadcasters themselves did not fully comprehend Super PACs or their role in the election and media. Coverage of the general election, in comparison, was short, streamlined, and easy to follow. This was one of the findings that supported another main ideology perpetuated in Super PAC coverage: that Republicans and Democrats are polar opposites on the political spectrum, with little in between, and certainly nothing to the left or the right of them. This is a particularly unsettling message during a presidential election in which all citizens should be able to identify a politician who represents their beliefs. Instead, citizens are left with just two candidates selected from just two parties after being forced to funnel through billions of dollars worth of negative advertisements. Citizens in a democracy rely upon the press for a diverse range of opinions, investigation, fact checking, and context to help them find their personal political footing (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006). To achieve these ideals, there should be far more than two political parties upheld by the mainstream media and made possible through the democratic process, especially during a presidential election.. The reporter packages are the stories that are expected to provide reporter analysis, diverse voices, and more investigation than the spots simply written by a producer or anchor and read live. These 62 stories will be analyzed first.

Unlimited Money = Limited Democracy

Commercial broadcast news and public broadcast news had more commonalities than differences. Generally, Super PACs were considered newsworthy for one of five reasons. The

most prominent rationale for a news story on Super PACs (was a general discussion of how much “money is rolling in” to cite CBS Evening News (Pelley et al., 2012). The word “billionaire” appeared 26 times in the 62 reporter stories. Anchors and reporters frequently recounted the Super PAC donations and expenditures as if they were scores in a sporting event. In the sport of elections, it was assumed, he who spends the most wins. For example, anchor Terrell Brown ended a discussion of Super PACs with the month’s final tally:

To campaign finances now. Mitt Romney has a growing cash advantage over the President’s campaign. Last month, campaign finance reports showed the Obama campaign raised just over \$49 million but spent about \$59 million. By contrast, Romney’s campaign reported taking in just over \$40 million last month and spending about \$33 million. Heading into next week’s GOP Convention, the Obama campaign has \$124 million in cash reserves, Romney has \$186 million. That’s a \$62 million cash advantage. (Brown, 2012b)

Five of the reporter stories ended with the promise that this would be the most expensive election in history and was anticipated to cost over \$1 billion. One reporter estimated the spending could reach \$3 billion (Rose, Hill, King, & Keteyian, 2012). This number was never problematized by the reporters or anchors themselves, but occasionally outside sources from places such as the Center for Responsive Politics made critiques of the excessive advertising budget of outside groups. There was some light critique provided by broadcasters such as CBS’s Wyatt Andrews comment, “The Make Us Great Again Super PAC and the Perry campaign, deny they’ve had any contact. But watchdog groups call the ads a red flag” (Mitchell et al., 2011). Andrews refers to other groups as watchdogs rather than himself and the journalists with which he works. Reports such as Andrews’ came across as disingenuous because broadcasters were profiting each time a

misleading Super PAC advertisements played, some of them no doubt aired during news commercial breaks. Andrews played several Super PAC clips in the package and finished his story with a conservative comment from Steven Law: “What is new is that Republicans have finally figured out ways to counter the massive counterweight that organized labor is on the other side.” (Mitchell et al., 2011). The allowance of Law to have the last word undercut any critical messages that could have been interpreted throughout the story and frames Republicans as the underdogs. The current state of labor regulations shows that union power is grossly exaggerated by conservatives, but what is more problematic is that the media allows the suggestion that wealthy individuals and corporate personhood should be able to act as a legal counterweight to organized laborers who are concerned with matters besides money such as workplace safety and discrimination. This was a common finding in the stories that allowed some critical voices, rather than being given prominence in the story, they were often undermined later. This theme likely emerged because journalists tended to dumb down the complexities of campaign finance to frame a story about Republicans versus Democrats even as public opinion showed bipartisan hatred for Super PACs and the *Citizens United* decision. If a broadcast story offered a critique questioning the power of money in elections, it also offered the voice of a campaign finance lawyer, such as James Bopp, or another conservative representative who insisted that Super PACs offer more voices and therefore more information for voters. For example, after CBS’s Nancy Cordes discussed the concentration of money from a small set of donors she asked, “Do you think it’s fair that basically a handful of millionaires can control the process like this?” Santorum’s Super PAC head responded, “In this particular situation, ironically in – in the eyes of a lot of people, you have had candidates who are now competitive who otherwise would not have been” (Nguyen, Tracy, Reid, Stahl, & Suitors, 2012). Cordes concluded the story after sourcing

Roy, “He says the money helps get the message out to a wider audience. But in Ohio, nearly ninety percent of all Super PAC ads were negative. So it’s debatable just how informative that message is” (Nguyen, Tracy, Reid, Stahl, & Suitors, 2012). Although Cordes ended the story with what could be perceived as a critique, she allowed Roy to change the topic. The question she asked had to do with control by a few wealthy individuals, but she allowed Roy to suggest that that control led to more competition. Cordes then went on to discuss whether or not Super PAC advertisements were informative, abandoning the original topic of electoral control at the hands of just five individuals. Journalists would suggest a critique, but never actually make the link that explained why Super PACs are so detrimental to elections.

Fat Checks Supersede Fact Checks

The second most popular rationale for Super PAC newsworthiness was the disagreement between candidates involving misleading and negative ads. One may expect that when covering a story on inaccurate Super PAC ads that a reporter, producer or intern, at the very least, would provide a thorough fact check of the advertisement in the story. However, this never happened in any of the broadcast coverage. Fact checking was mentioned and cited once or twice, but always by an outside group not associated with the network. For example, CBS’s Nancy Cordes reported on Romney’s claim that a pro-Obama Super PAC ad about a man’s wife who died of cancer had been discredited: “What Romney didn’t say is that fact checkers also panned his latest ad, about the President’s welfare policy” (Glor, King, Shaban, Cordes, & Jarvis, 2012). Rather than fact check on their own, reporters relied upon other groups. This phenomenon could be due to a number of reasons. Reporters may wish to stay out of researching the advertisements for fear of being considered biased in their judgment of the ad. It is also possible that there simply was not enough time (or resources) prior to the newscast to bother to complete an in

depth investigation. But when one considers the market model that journalists must operate within, it seems most likely that the reporters found it best to err on the side of caution and cite those who had already publicly commented on the ads or wait for the candidate himself to correct the misleading claims so as not to lose any current or future Super PAC profits by critiquing the ad and its creators.

One of the most divisive advertisements of the election came from Barack Obama's Super PAC Priorities USA. The ad made the claim that a farmer's wife died because Romney, while working for Bain Capital, closed a steel mill and the worker no longer had access to health care. CBS Morning News made a story of the Super PAC ad and rather than look into the claims independently, aired the advertisement and cited a newspaper. "A new ad from a pro-Obama Super PAC is drawing criticism from the Romney campaign and independent fact checkers... *The Washington Post* gives the ad Four Pinocchio, its highest rating for a false ad. Romney's spokesperson Andrea Saul calls the ad despicable" (Brown, 2012a). ABC handled the ad controversy in a similar manner on *World News with Diane Sawyer*. Reporter Jonathon Karl played several clips from the ad, stated that it had already been revealed publicly that the man's wife died several years after Romney was no longer working for Bain Capital. He then sourced an interview: "Spokesperson (Super PAC): What this ad does is it tells the story that one guy and the impact that Mitt Romney had... Reporter (CNN): But it's misleading to tell. Spokesperson (Super PAC): Well, this is your opinion" (Stephanopoulos, 2012). In reaction to the attack ad, Romney's campaign made some misleading claims of its own, and rather than look into the issue, Jonathon Karl simply cited the President. "The Obama campaign is calling that a bold-faced lie" (Stephanopoulos, 2012). What is perhaps most striking about what is passing for journalism in this coverage is that it required very little research and almost no time to generate.

A student could put together the three sound bytes that were already produced and easily accessible and write a script for the story in a matter of minutes without any investigation outside the studio. Further, claims left uninvestigated led to a he said – he said message, and voters are forced to go with their gut rather than know for sure if any of the claims are true.

On January 31, 2012, one of the few stories heralded as investigative aired on CBS. The reporter on the story, Armen Keteyian, was introduced by Charlie Rose as the “Chief investigative correspondent” (Rose, Hill, King, & Keteyian, 2012). After playing six Super PAC clips and framing them as a very expensive fight, Keteyian failed to show any investigation at all. After the story, Rose prompted Keteyian about Super PAC accountability. The reporter responded that Super PACs are not really held accountable for their lies and explained, “We looked at a lot of these campaign ads and they’re full of half truths – and distortions and flat-out lies” (Rose, Hill, King, & Keteyian, 2012). In Keteyian’s case it seems that there was time-consuming investigative journalism taking place, but his findings were not considered to be as newsworthy as the ads themselves, which received constant free publicity during the newscasts in place of a truth test. Only NPR’s Morning Edition found a source to fact-check a questionable pro-Newt Gingrich Super PAC ad for them. The ad made it sound as though Mitt Romney was pro-choice, but NARAL Pro-Choice America’s, Donna Crane, explained that the ad was far from accurate. “The idea that either of these candidates is in any way remotely pro-choice would be laughable, if it weren’t actually so dangerous for women” (Rovner, 2012). NPR reporter Julie Rovner also sought out pro-life groups for their opinion of the ads, but was refused an interview. One may expect that the main goal of reporting on negative advertisements paid for and produced by unknown money sources would be to check their claims so that voters would know the difference between a bold face lie, a half-truth, and a dirty candidate secret. It is quite clear

that fact-checking was not the priority of journalists in Super PAC coverage, but then again, it's in their best interests not to. Cashing in on the influx of political advertisements was certainly a more profitable venture for media owners.

It Sure Is Nasty

The third reason Super PACs were often found to be newsworthy was for the ads themselves. Their negativity, general malice, and even newness made them a topic for news coverage. Many reporters capitalized on attack ads by using it as a theme to frame fights between candidates. The word “fight” appeared frequently throughout the coverage, as did violent framing of the candidates’ campaigns. CBS represented Super PAC ads like a piece of weaponry: “The messages rattle off like machine gunfire, targeting political rivals morning, noon, and night” (Rose, Hill, King, & Keteyian, 2012). ABC News displayed graphics during its coverage that stated, “SHOWDOWN OVER ATTACK ADS” and “BATTLE FOR IOWA INTENSIFIES” (Elliott & Vargas, 2011). The reporter, Jonathon Karl, referred to the ads as “brutal” and concluded, “Let me tell you, there is bad blood in this campaign that will last after this campaign is over” (Elliott, & Vargas, 2011). NBC News reporter Chuck Todd recounted, “While Gingrich and Romney fought each other, the rest of the field attacked them both together as Rick Perry did in this new ad” (Curry & Quintella, 2011). NPR didn’t resist the chance for creative and violent wordplay either, “That image is far from the one Gingrich has publicly displayed, if not honed, most of his career: a gloves off, no holds barred fighter and rhetorical bomb thrower” (Naylor, 2011).

On CBS, Gayle King asked Nancy Cordes, “to show us why it’s getting so nasty on TV.” Nancy responded, “Gayle, it sure is nasty” (Glor, King, Shaban, Cordes, & Jarvis, 2012). Ted Koppel of NBC agreed during the primary while discussing the upcoming general election,

“[Super PACs] are going to have just as much money, they’re going to be just as nasty, and it’s going to be disgusting” (Koppel, 2012b). The reporters and anchors proved to be comfortable in their disapproval in the topical issue of the added negative advertising that resulted from the Court ruling, but are much less likely to express antipathy for the institution of campaign advertising. It is accepted that everyone resents negative ads, including the people whom the ad supports, but the news broadcasters have a simple explanation for their use. “People don’t like negative ads, but they work...they use them because they work” (Elving, 2012). It is unclear whether NPR’s Ron Elving meant that negative advertising encourages citizens to change their vote or if it encourages them to stay home because all the candidates seem too deceitful to support. As previously discussed, academics suggest that the goal of negative advertising is to discourage voting (Nichols & McChesney, 2013). In a true participatory democracy, it should be unlawful to interfere with a citizen’s right to vote. The right of a wealthy individual or group to spend money should never trump the right of a citizen to take part in the electoral process.

In an NPR story on how negative ads targeting Newt Gingrich were ruining his chances for a primary win, a man on the campaign trail at the Farm Toy museum in Iowa was asked for a comment on the attacks. He said, “We get phone calls and we get stuff in the mail. And the negative ads, I don’t really always believe them or pay a lot of attention, ‘cause I – they’re always – usually distorted, I think” (Allen, 2011). Due to the fact that the news media rarely report negatively on themselves, many citizens deny that being pummeled with ads has any effect on them other than annoyance. In an NPR news story that played eleven Super PAC clips, anchor Linda Werheimer claimed, “If Iowans feel they’ve been bombarded by political ads in recent weeks, that’s nothing compared to what the next eight days will be like” (Wells, 2011). Even public journalists fail to problematize the unprecedented amount of advertisements

targeting citizens about their democracy. As long as the media continue to promote the logic that these ads have little effect on us or on our democracy, then citizens will be less likely to demand change, and the status quo, which the media industry flourishes within, will remain protected. After all, there would not have been \$10 billion plus spent on the 2012 election if the ads were ineffective. In the case of the 2012 presidential election, big money won because both candidates had big money.

The Flip Flop

The fourth reason Super PAC advertisements found themselves in the news lineup is for the popular report that after publicly opposing the *Citizens United* ruling, President Obama began accepting Super PAC funds. He was largely presented as a flip flopper in most stories. A few stories stated that the rules had changed and the President was simply “playing by the rules of the game” (Koppel, 2012b). It is interesting how President Obama’s reluctant decision to take Super PAC money was met with so much criticism when both Mitt Romney and Newt Gingrich had also spoke out against outside spending. Romney stated, “I think it’s a disaster by the way. Campaign finance law has made a – a mockery of our – of our political campaign season. We really ought to let campaigns raise the money they need and just get rid of these Super PACs” (Lohr, 2011). While the President stated concern over special interest money interfering in elections, Romney suggests that the unlimited money coming from individuals, corporations, and unions is not corrupting, but rather the unlimited money going into an account that does not hold the candidate accountable is the issue. Many may say that giving the money straight to the candidate would create an even larger concern over the possibility of corruption since billionaires would no doubt expect a return on their investment. It would be wholly undemocratic for a candidate to be beholden to the wealthy few donors who completely funded

his or her campaign. This idea of allowing unlimited donations directly to the campaign remained unchallenged when advocated by Romney and Super PAC donor Foster Freiss. The notion that speech equals money repeatedly goes without criticism by the broadcast media no matter how undemocratic that equation is.

In fact, the broadcast news media seemed to have a bit of an obsession with the super wealthy donors to Super PACs. The Adelsons, Foster Freiss, the Koch Brothers, Harold Simmons, Jeffrey Katzenberg, Karl Rove, Steven Spielberg, Meg Whitman, Joe Ricketts, and Richard Marriott were frequently topics of conversation and even sources in the stories. Citizens may have a moderate interest in the lives of the other half. Or at least they are assumed to as they are bombarded with reality television and news features focusing on the lives of the rich and famous, but most citizens who don't have millions to spend on "political speech" have a pretty good idea of the type of policies those that do are after – the type that benefits the upper crust rather than the working poor whom they exploit for astronomical profits. There is also a notable hierarchical discussion of billionaire donors. It is no coincidence that the donors mentioned the most also have the most money. This perpetuates the neoliberal ideology that the media often promote: through hard work and sacrifice, we can all have the American Dream. Citizens United allows those who wish to be upheld as examples of the American Dream to do so while those who prefer to quietly purchase an election can stay out of the coverage while maintaining their power in the electoral process. Within a capitalist framework, money can buy power and support, which ultimately is what gets people elected.

CBS boasted about its coverage of a Super PAC donor. CBS Evening News interviewed Julian Robertson and teased the story with, "Super PAC donors in both parties have been shy about the role they play, but tonight, Wyatt Andrews has a rare interview with one of them"

(Pelley, Axelrod, Keteyian, & Blackstone, 2012). Robertson, who made his fortune in the hedge fund industry and has a vested interest in the repeal of the Dodd-Frank reforms that protect citizens from abuses, stated that his donation to Mitt Romney had nothing to do with Romney's support for repealing the law. Andrews' final question to Robertson was whether or not he would expect Romney to take his phone call if he is elected president. Robertson responded, "I would expect Mitt Romney to speak to me occasionally, because I think he respects me. I don't think he would ever say I owe Julian Robertson a call because he contributed to my PAC" (Pelley, Axelrod, Keteyian, & Blackstone, 2012 April 5). Most citizens cannot fathom having immediate access to their state representatives, but this donor expects that a future President Romney would want to answer his calls. Robertson has effectively purchased influence over a candidate while purchasing time to try to influence everyone else for the candidate. Robertson's expectation of phone calls from the president goes to show that those with the money, power, and knowledge are able to utilize those assets to maintain political control. American Democracy, it seems, is becoming increasingly undemocratic with the addition of Super PAC "speech" that allows money to have more power than votes.

A Better Tomorrow, Someday

Stephen Colbert's concern for the creation of Super PACs is the fifth most popular reason that the groups received coverage. Each of the five networks ran several stories either completely focusing on Colbert and his Super PAC or utilizing him as a source. Rather than provide much context to the outside spending groups, reporters frequently relied on Colbert clips to explain the current state of campaign finance. The interest in Colbert's Super PAC, Americans for a Better Tomorrow, Tomorrow, was so vast that coverage may have been cut in half if it hadn't been for his political expenditure scheme. Reporter Neda Ulaby noted, "That's

Stephen Colbert and the guy who runs his superPAC, Jon Stewart, on the phone together with a lawyer they share. Apparently, that's legal. They hired a super lawyer, Trevor Potter, who used to work for John McCain. Now he seems to relish illuminating the absurdly broad loopholes in coordination” (Ulaby & Overby, 2012). There were certainly other voices of dissent represented in the coverage, but none that addressed the full depth of how problematic outside spending can be to the legitimacy of elections. However, this should not come as a surprise because real dissent would call into question the current laws that are so beneficial for broadcasters’ bottom lines. As Bettig and Hall (2012) explain, “Although force and coercion have always been central to class domination, gaining the consent of the dominated has general proven more efficient in maintaining the status quo” (p. 41). After watching the coverage of Super PACs, viewers were likely just annoyed at the amount of money in politics and the excessive number of ads they were forced to be exposed to.

In fact, the word democracy was only mentioned three times in all of the reporter stories combined. The first was in the form of a reporter paraphrasing a statement by President Obama, “The president once called this super PAC spending a threat to our democracy, but now the president has personally signed off on this plan to allow these donations after he was convinced by his political advisors that they should not unilaterally disarm or else he could lose reelection” (Pelley, Blackstone, Ward, Andrews, & Phillips, 2012). Second, Stephen Colbert corrected Ted Koppel when Koppel referred to campaign finance as “classic Washington bureaucracy.” Colbert responded, “It’s democracy, I think is the word you’re looking for” (Koppel, 2012b). The last mention of our political system came from an organizing member of a protest on the second anniversary of the *Citizens United* decision. On NPR, Marge Barker of People for the American Way stated, “It’s just that we’re in a movement that, you know, you can’t look at Iowa, you can’t

look at South Carolina and not understand how much influence Citizens United has had on our elections and on our democracy” (Overby, 2012b). Protesters are often misrepresented by the media as unruly, irrational, angry, or even dangerous members of society and yet it is a protester who makes the most straightforward critique of the spectacle surrounding elections (Weaver & Scacco, 2012). Attorney Steve Simpson, who supports deregulating money in elections, commented to NPR, “People banding together in groups and exercising their right to free speech to protest a court decision that held that people should be able to band together in groups and exercise their right to free speech. That's a little bit ironic” (Overby, 2012b). Once again, the view that money and speech are the same goes unquestioned. Only NPR covered the protests of the Court’s decision. It will be discussed in further detail later in the chapter.

Without Colbert shedding light on campaign finance loopholes, there might not have been coverage of the investigation into campaign-Super PAC coordination. Once the issue of coordination was brought into the light, broadcasters began connecting the dots between political relationships. Norah O’Donnell informed CBS viewers that “Former White House official Bill Burton now leads a pro-Obama Super PAC. A pro-Gingrich Super PAC was set up by his former spokesman Rick Tyler and a pro-Romney Super PAC is run by his former political director Carl Forti” (Pelley, Blackstone, Ward, Andrews, & Phillips, 2012). Many stories suggested that the line between where a campaign ends and a Super PAC begins is entirely too thin, but in reality, coordination isn’t as strictly monitored as Mitt Romney suggested in interviews when he said he’d be “sent to the big house” for talking to his Super PAC. As Peter Overby (2012a) pointed out, “It’s a long reach back in time, years actually, to the last case of coordination in which the FEC assessed a penalty.” And even if a candidate were found guilty, the highest penalty is

\$300,000, which could be considered loose change in an election of unlimited spending (Koppel, 2012a).

Some of the most critical remarks in the coverage came from John McCain (whose McCain-Feingold Act was overturned in the decision) and Stephen Colbert. It is a pity that the most progressive voices allowed often come from a place of jest. Those who call for radical social change and participatory democracy are only tolerated if they come with a laugh that suggests we need not worry – even though the critique is on point – Colbert is just kidding. After all, he’s still a member of the mainstream media institution profiting from the production and manipulation of audiences. Political economic theory begs the question of how much one can really critique the industry while being a part of some of its most problematic components⁴. In this research, Colbert’s push back had a greater effect, and likely resulted in the education of more citizens about Super PACs, than anything or anyone else. The Colbert example could add teeth to the argument that there are ways to change an institution from the inside – if the coverage had resulted in enough outrage for larger groups of people to mobilize in defense of democracy. So far, there have been no lasting demonstrations resulting in a limiting of outside spending on elections. One potential reason that so many citizens are largely uninformed is that we are force fed a massive amount of media coming from a very homogenized set of voices. This section analyzed the general coverage of Super PACs by broadcast media. The next section outlines which perspectives were privileged by news broadcasters.

5.2 Super Sourced: What’s 2¢ Worth in a Billionaire’s World?

As a part of their requirement to serve the public interest, broadcasters are expected to provide a wide range of diversity in both perspective and programming. Due to a series of

⁴ Comedy Central is owned by Sumner Redstone’s Viacom conglomerate.

deregulations by the Federal Communications Commission, the media industry is concentrated to the point that diversity as originally intended to be achieved in both programming produced and opinions provided is all but impossible. This section will provide evidence of the dire situation of the broadcast media's lack of diversity.

For starters, of the 152 sources quoted in the reporter stories, only twelve were women. Less than 8% of the professional, expert, and political sources were supposed to represent more than 50% of the population. Politically, the coverage was also skewed. Of the 152 sources, 50 were represented as nonpartisan, 82 were Republican and only 20 were Democrats. Women fared slightly better as reporters and anchors in the coverage. About 30% of anchors and 23% of reporters were women.

Much of the coverage focused on the primary election. Many different Republican candidates were available to be sourced, but there was only one Democratic candidate. With the exception of Michele Bachmann, who exited the primary quickly in January 2012, all of the presidential candidates were men (Montopoli, 2012). The excessive sourcing of presidential candidates is one reason why women were underrepresented. When political candidates are excluded, women make up about 18% of the professionals sourced throughout the coverage. This is consistent with recent studies on gender representation in the news media. According to 4th Estate, women were sourced about 16% of the time on major news television shows during coverage of the 2012 election (4th Estate, 2012b). When it comes to face to face interviews, the number of women involved dwindles even further. Of the 45 interviews analyzed, only two were with women. In the primary interviews, there were zero interviews with women. ABC aired an Interview with Eva Longoria regarding her support for President Obama and also aired an interview with President Obama's campaign manager Stephanie Cutter.

Most of the women sourced in the 361 stories were Democrats working for their respective party. For more women to be sourced by the media, more women need to run for office and more women need to be decision makers in the newsroom. Then, they can begin hiring a more diverse and representative group of colleagues that will be available to the news media so young women and people of color may see themselves represented as something outside the stereotypic roles too often perpetuated by mainstream television. The mainstream media have a long history of relying upon “powerful people and institutions” that “generally reflects established interests” as sources (Croteau & Hoynes, 2003, p. 169). Those powerful people are rarely women. And even if there were more female voices, the news industry is still made up mostly of men who will likely promote and source other men. “In broadcast news, women made up 40 percent of the workforce in 2001 but only 20 percent of news directors. Similarly in radio, women made up 37 percent of the workforce but only 22 percent of news directors (Croteau & Hoynes, 2003, p. 212). It is impossible to know how more female voices would have or would not have changed the mainstream media’s coverage of Super PACs, but previous research suggests that the lack of female representation in news, as well as other media, depicts a symbolic annihilation of women that both promotes patriarchy and denies female power (see Tuchman, 1979). Media sourcing has as much to do with representation as it does with diversity of voices. The underrepresentation of the majority of the population suggests that women are not trustworthy or knowledgeable sources on the topic of campaign finances or elections.

This problem is compounded by the way the media represent the few women who do gain positions of power such as Hillary Clinton. According to media activist and critic Jennifer Pozner (2012), the media often concentrate on Clinton’s wardrobe and hair choices rather than

policy. The unbalanced reporting that results “when media treat women like ladies first and leaders a distant second (if ever), it deters women from seeking office in the first place, dissuades citizens from voting for women when they do run, and lessens their efficacy in office once they are elected (Pozner, 2012). According to the Women’s Media Center (2014), knowledge is the most powerful tool that can be used to fight sexism in the media. The Center’s Name It Change It campaign provides “rapid response and educational campaigns intended to significantly raise awareness and dramatically reduce media sexism directed at women running for and serving in elected office” will help to “remove one of the most serious barriers to America’s representative democracy and ensure unbiased coverage of all women candidates” (Women’s Media Center, 2014). While there is still a long way to go in the fight for gender equality, the Name It Change It (2014) campaign has had success in getting columnists to stop discussing the fashion of political women, convincing Ann Coulter to recant statements, and in pointing out media sexism on its website and on Facebook. Exposing the continued symbolic annihilation of women is a necessary step in promoting media literacy and pressuring mainstream media to change.

Ads With a Side of Extra Ads

The most troubling finding to surface in the sourcing analysis is the amount of Super PAC ad play. More than 100 Super PAC ad clips were used as sources in reporter packages. Many were repeated ad nauseam. The first attack ad aimed at Newt Gingrich from Restore Our Future and Stephen Colbert’s Mitt the Ripper ad aired more than five times. Rather than produce original content or at the very least, paraphrase the attack ads, journalists just allowed the Super PAC ads to set the agenda for election coverage through constant repetition and discussion of them. NPR provided some criticism from people concerned about the impact of Super PACs such as the Center for Responsive Politics, the Institute for Civic Discourse, the Federal Election

Commission Council, Kantar Media Analysis, as well as lawyers, professors and a Dean. For example, the executive director for the Center for Responsive Politics Sheila Krumholz was interviewed on NPR and discussed the possibility of illegal coordination:

These are an extension of the campaign. They're run by the former top lieutenants of the campaigns. Some of them have just stepped off the campaign months before to lead these organizations. So – in fact they might have even been the architects of the campaign strategy. So it's hard to say that these are really as uncoordinated and independent as they technically ostensibly are. (Rudin, 2012)

The fine charged for coordination by the FEC is a pittance compared to the amount of money Super PACs bring in. On *Talk of the Nation*, Ted Koppel explained that most fines levied have topped off at \$100,000. Rick Perry's Super PAC's campaign finance attorney Cleta Mitchell corrected him, "I'm sorry, your commitment to accuracy is not true. The Media Fund paid a \$580,000 fine" (Koppel, 2012a). Either way, the fines are likely considered "the cost of doing business" for the super-rich Super PACs (Koppel, 2012a).

However, independent and critical voices that pointed out these flaws in campaign finance were easily drowned out by the ads that continuously followed citizens on computers, radios, televisions, billboards, magazines, and mailers. Then, they were given free air time on our morning and evening news. When a Super PAC ad was full of lies, no one was in trouble except for the candidate the ad targeted with its false claims. The media took no responsibility. Rather than fact check, journalists waited for a candidate or independent group to come forward with evidence that the attack was untrue.

Research discussed in chapter two found that news stories discussing the donors did nothing to help voters discount the false claims in Super PAC ads, but this is what the news

media are doing (Dowling & Wichowsky, 2013). Only critical investigations and tables that simplify the process proved successful in aiding citizens in their quest for facts about who to believe. Rather than providing critical discussions or fact checks, the news media replayed the Super PAC ads, reinforcing their messages and relying on them to provide video content. This is an extremely problematic chain of events that is portrayed in the broadcast and public news transcripts and the findings do not bode well for journalism or democracy. Without reliable fact checking from news organizations and clear disclosures from the Super PACs themselves, citizens cannot make the informed decisions necessary for self-government.

Operating Outside the PAC: Outliers

Context is particularly important to the Super PAC story. Although expectations for what qualified as context was quite low, about half of the news stories provided some explanation or insight into the definition of what a Super PAC is and a few provided a brief history or cited a legal expert. An example of a story that gave some context comes from ABC: “Following a Supreme Court decision two years ago, ‘Super PACs’ can receive and spend unlimited amounts of money” (Mason, Strassman, Phillips, Palmer, & Reynolds, 2012). NPR provides an example of more in-depth and longer context gained from an expert:

The Citizens United decision at the Supreme Court in January of 2010 paved the way for unlimited money coming from any source, including directly from corporations, trade associations, unions, being spent on express advocacy - expressly advocating the defeat or election of a candidate. Shortly after that, in late March of that year, the Speech Now decision paved the way for super PACs, and these are independent expenditure-only committees. They do have to disclose where the money is coming from, unlike their nonprofit counterparts. So what's happening is that these organizations are popping up.

Many of them, right now, that are spending big are supporting a specific candidate for the presidency, but they have - many of them have two arms. They have the nonprofit arm that does not disclose their donors and then the super PAC arm, which does but sometimes takes money from those nonprofits that don't disclose. So secrecy abounds.

(Rudin, 2012)

The detailed explanation of Super PACs came from Sheila Krumholz who is the executive director of The Center for Responsive Politics. When journalists put in the effort to source people who are not on the payroll or desperate for free campaign time, the critiques and information provided have a much more trustworthy quality.

For the thirty-some news stories that provided absolutely no context, this was typical: “These attack ads are not paid for by the candidates, rather so-called Super PACs” (Rose, Hill, King, & Keteyian, 2012). Interestingly, 13 news stories referred to the phenomena of outside spending as “so-called Super PACs.” All four broadcast stations used this language at some point to stand in for context. Judging by the quality of information produced by the broadcast stories analyzed, it is very likely that only political and law junkies would be able to explain why Super PACs exist despite having listened to possibly thousands of hours of advertisements generated by the outside groups. But this is all too common with a media system that puts profit over people and fails to cover itself (Herman, 1995). Citizens wind up being very familiar with the people, places, and terms popularized by the media, but know very little about those who make the production decisions that result in our news and entertainment. Pop culture can be used to distract from a variety of unsavory issues. Even within this broadcast coverage, the last name “Kardashian” appeared five times because Romney used the family’s name for some political zingers. Pew Studies (2001) have concluded that this is all too common as journalists

have historically focused on the zingers and campaign tactics rather than the issues effecting voters.

For the few who saw past the distractions and were willing to spend their own free time to fight back, hundreds of demonstrations occurred across the country outside federal courthouses on January 20, 2012, to mark the second anniversary of the decision that made Super PACs and dark money fueled politics possible. Marge Baker of People for the American Way, David Cobb of the Move to Amend, environmentalist Bill McKibben, chairman of Common Cause Robert Rice, and Occupy the Corporation were a few of the groups represented at the protests according to NPR. The group gathered to demand a constitutional amendment that would allow for regulation of political spending. Even the protesters displayed some of the defeatist attitude that pervaded much of the coverage. Robert Rice commented, “We’re under no illusion here – the fight is going to take a very long time to win because we are fed up. They need a way to make their voices heard and we need to start right now” (Overby, 2012). Nevertheless, it is refreshing to hear the voice of someone who wants difficult change and is prepared to stick it out. Too many comments by sources and journalists implied that meaningful campaign finance reform was a lost cause.

Sheila Krumholz (Center for Responsive Politics) stated in the same NPR roundtable discussed earlier:

Until the courts reverse that decision or some of the other decisions that have come before, even, and after, that have really focused on the First Amendment rights, freedom of speech, money equals speech, until that all shifts at the judicial level, I think, there's very little that any of us can do short of maybe encouraging Congress to at least let us see where the money is coming from, focusing on the disclosure, getting access to the

information about which donors are ponying up the money for these independent expenditures to campaign. (Neary, 2012)

A similar message was echoed by Brian Williams and Ted Koppel. Williams asked, “And so for good-hearted people who are fearful that our election process has been changed and damaged forever, is there anything to hope?” To which Koppel responded, “I think, in the final analysis, the American public, I suppose, could do something about it if they became disgusted enough by the tenor of these ads and showed it and just refused to go along with it. But you know, I like to believe in the Easter Bunny, too” (Koppel, 2012b). It seems the journalists and experts are dismissing the idea of political change because they doubt the likelihood of a social movement and Supreme Court cooperation. They should note that this country has a long history of social movements causing lasting political and economic change. The need to fight injustice should not be discounted just because it won’t be easy. Of course, the mainstream media also have a vested interest in making sure that there isn’t meaningful social change in campaign finance. In the case of Super PAC spending, broadcast owners are making massive profits and their reporters have a flurry of free video content they can play and comment on without having to go outside the newsroom for a story. Super PAC ad generation helps profits to rise while the cost of news production goes down. Rich media, poor democracy, indeed (McChesney, 1999).

5.3 Ownership

As discussed in chapter four, the three broadcast networks are owned by three different media conglomerates and NPR is publicly owned, but still relies on some commercialization to fill funding gaps. The most obvious effect ownership had on public versus conglomerate ownership was in the diversity of voices provided. Unlike the networks, NPR had at least one source, often several, from The Center for Responsive Politics, the Campaign Legal Center,

Common Cause, Kantar Media Campaign Media Analysis Group, the Institute for Justice, the Institute for Civic Justice, the Institute for Civic Discourse and Democracy, the Sunlight Foundation, NARAL Pro-Choice America, PolitiFact, university deans, professors, and protestors. It is not apparent how much more informative NPR reports are until they are compared with commercial coverage. Judging by the amount of coverage and diversity of voices provided, public media outperformed ABC, CBS, and NBC altogether. However, public media also followed the same tropes and narratives provided by the networks such as questioning whether or not money mattered, relying upon Super PAC commercials to provide content, and promoting the ideology that Republicans and Democrats are as different as two political parties could be. Still, as previous research suggests, the more in-depth context provided by a much more diverse group of sources and longer discussions of the issue made NPR's coverage stand out from the commercial stations.

Between the three broadcast networks, NBC provided two stories that gave more context and time to the issue than ABC or CBS did. This is likely because NBC has easier access to MSNBC clips, which were played five times in reporter packages alone, and the ease of inserting those clips and attributing them elsewhere allowed for slightly more critical, although still supportive of the status quo, reporting. For example, on NBC's *Nightly News*, Chuck Todd reported on the overexposure to advertisements that was forced upon some states:

And Brian, consider this, during last month's South Carolina primary, there was so much super PAC money coming in that TV stations actually ran out of room to air the ads.

That was one race and only some \$10 million. Imagine the saturation point come October in the Orlandos and Clevelands when it's hundreds of millions of dollars and multiple campaigns for office. (B. Williams, 2012)

In another, much longer package on *Rock Center*, Ted Koppel played several Super PAC ads and sourced the primary contenders, but also spoke with a radio owner and advertising CEO. The advertiser explained, “We have to go through the FTC, you have to go through the networks, you have to prove a claim. It is more difficult to sell somebody a loaf of white bread than it is to sell a president getting into the White House because political advertising is protected by the First Amendment” (Koppel, 2012b). Koppel went on to discuss Colbert’s Super PAC and “how ridiculous the system has become,” but finished with his already quoted Easter Bunny comment that suggests there is little Americans can do to change policy. NBC is owned by Comcast, which is triply profiting from the Court’s ruling. Comcast can sell Super PAC airtime on its cable, its cable networks (including MSNBC) and its broadcast network, NBC. Although NBC provided a longer story on its *Rock Center*, the only voices allowed were those from the industry, a radio station owner and an advertiser, an FEC Commissioner, and the candidates and ads themselves. Commercial media relied upon sources that represent institutional interests as others have found in news research (Croteau & Hoynes, 2003).

CBS, owned by Sumner Redstone, tended to follow the master narrative outlined in the next chapter much like cable coverage did. Its coverage was formulaic in that it was mostly about the Romney-Gingrich disagreement, Colbert, donors, the Obama flip-flop, or the Obama-Romney attack ads. Only CBS had a package that sourced nonpartisan group, the Center for Public Integrity. Reporter packages for CBS ceased four months before the election. Nearly all of the coverage was focused on the primary. ABC, owned by Disney, provided the least amount of Super PAC coverage and ended its package coverage two months earlier than CBS and largely relied upon the ads themselves to provide content. As this study only looked at the coverage of one issue, it cannot be determined whether or not ABC is “Disneyfied” in compared to the other

two networks, but the findings are in line with Scarry (2014) about ABC's tendency to provide less coverage on complex issues than NBC or CBS.

PAC-Up

This chapter finds that of the 361 mentions, stories, and interviews that discuss Super PACs, there were more commonalities than there were differences in coverage. All tended to focus on one or several of the following: Money, Political Controversy, Negative ads, Donors, and/or Stephen Colbert. NBC (50%), ABC (38%), and NPR's (28%) reporter coverage mostly focused on the conflict between Romney and Gingrich over their Super PACs. CBS's coverage (30%) mostly focused on the discussion and airing of a new Super PAC ad. Although NPR did have most of its stories about the fight between Gringrich and Romney, it also had the largest diversity of stories. NPR also discussed accuracy, super PACs as a new political issue, coordination, and the Move to Amend Protest which were almost completely ignored by commercial media. Sources were overall astoundingly masculine and conservative and every broadcast network made constant use of the clips available from the plethora of attack ads.

By using the sensational attack ads to frame the primary and general election as a fight between candidates, the news media perpetuated the myth that Democrats and Republicans are like cats and dogs. The coverage of the primary disagreements between candidates were largely attributed to personality issues and disagreements over the method of campaign selected, not over actual political issues. Once the primary was over, Republicans were presented as having come back together to defeat the real bad guy. The media's insistence that Democrats and Republicans are polar opposites is actually quite beneficial to those in power. If citizens began to see the two parties as two slightly different pro-business groups, then they would be less likely to vote every four years and otherwise go about their personal lives. The candidate selection

process helps to uphold the current political, economic, and media systems that are so profitable for the ruling class of business owners (Domhoff, 1999). Thus, the cat and dog fight is the trope favored by media makers.

It is no surprise then that in the general election, only two candidates from two parties were discussed by broadcasters, but in the 2012 election there were actually 28 candidates who ran for president and 53 political parties registered with the Federal Election Commission (State Elections Offices, 2013). This study finds that broadcast news represented a public of affluent consumers that are 80% professional white Republican men. Those that are represented in the highest concentrations also happen to be the same people that benefit from current policies the most. When citizens see evidence that the person with the most political power in the country is against Super PACs, but can do nothing to change them, they may think there is nothing they can possibly do. The lack of coverage of the January protests and other forms of organized opposition leaves even the most avid follower of current events unsure of what they can do to promote change. The coverage makes it clear that if citizens want to end billionaire influence on elections, then we will have to do it ourselves. Politicians, journalists, and political professionals all bemoaned having to sit through attack ads, but we must remember that at the same time, those people were benefitting from the “money and media election complex.” In the end, even if a politician loses, he wins. Super PAC money allows candidates who may only have one supporter to join the race and stay in as long as their supporters will pay. This will only further the downward spiral American democracy is already on: only the well-connected and the independently wealthy can successfully run for public office. Broadcast news coverage clearly left much to be desired. The next chapter explains how the cable industry handled Super PACs.

CHAPTER SIX

CABLE “NEWS”

As that last chapter focused on network and public news sources made available through broadcasting, this chapter concentrates on the coverage of cable networks. Unlike the broadcast networks that operate utilizing free public airwaves, CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC are networks made available through paid cable television subscriptions. These networks call themselves 24-hour news channels and are often referred to as “news” by the media. However, because cable is delivered privately rather than using public airwaves, it differs greatly from broadcast news. As discussed, broadcast news is under legal requirement by the Federal Communications Commission to serve the public interest, which includes news, current affairs, and children’s programming. Cable is largely self-regulated because along with the new technology came the possibility for more “leeway” in public interest expectations (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006, p. 113). CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC are under no legal requirement to inform the public. According to this dissertation’s findings, what they sell as “news” may be more accurately described as entertainment, infotainment, or opinion-punditry. The cable networks’ presentation of themselves as news channels is really more of a branding decision than it is an accurate portrayal of their programming assessed here. CNN was originally visualized by Ted Turner as a 24-hour news outlet that would provide constant up to date information, but that idealized space is no longer operated by Turner (CNN Library, 2014). As this research shows, CNN currently follows the profitable opinion and entertainment, or even political reality model, used by Fox News and MSNBC more often than it follows the traditional broadcast model of one or two anchors with several reporters who produce broadcast packages outside of the studio. Instead, most cable coverage of Super PACs was produced in studio with a few anchors, a roundtable of journalists,

or an elite interview. Rather than reporters interviewing sources in the field, most sourcing came from politicians' quotes at campaign rallies or debates and pre-recorded interview pieces from the networks' own station or a competing station.

Although most Americans report that they get their news from local and network programs, cable messages are important to study as well. According to the Pew Research Center, viewers of cable sit down and watch for twice as long on average as viewers of broadcast news do. This is largely attributed to the different type of programming at important points during the day. "In prime time – when the audience is the largest – cable talk shows tend to hammer away at a somewhat narrow news agenda that magnifies the day's more polarizing and ideological issues" (Olmstead, Jurkowitz, Mitchell, & Enda, 2013, para. 6). Pew correctly refers to cable's primetime programming as "talk shows" rather than news shows. The purveyors of these talk shows are often quite polarizing to researchers and viewers alike. The next section will provide information about what previous researchers have concluded about the 24-hour channel phenomenon. As discussed in chapter two, there have been recent cable news analyses that found CNN to be overall more informative than the opinion filled cable networks of MSNBC and Fox News (Weaver & Scacco, 2012). This dissertation supports that finding, but asserts that CNN does not provide as many traditional news packages as broadcasters or the variety of sources provided by public news.

6.1 Who Cares about Cable?

While many have quantitatively looked at cable programming and its effects, there has been less critical analysis of the actual messages presented. A 2012 survey by PublicMind found that when it comes to informing viewers, Fox News fares the worst. In fact, those polled who reported that they were not exposed to news were actually more informed than those who watch

just Fox News. Further, viewers of John Stewart’s “The Daily Show” on Comedy Central were more informed than listeners and viewers of talk radio, CNN, MSNBC, and Fox News.

Listeners of NPR were found to be the most informed (Beaujon, 2012a). When a comedian and simply word of mouth are keeping citizens better informed than cable “news” networks, critical research into the messages produced is needed. We know as media critics and consumers that television is educational. In the case of Super PACs, what are we learning from CNN, MSNBC, and Fox News? This chapter will use similar methods in analyzing cable coverage as was used in chapter five to dissect network and public coverage. A preliminary search of cable coverage in Lexis-Nexis produced more than 2,000 cable transcripts. To filter out any one-liners or teasers about a future story, a second search selected only stories mentioning Super PAC in the subject, headline, or lead. After the filters were applied, the number of stories returned was drastically reduced. CNN transcripts fell from 1,165 to 74. MSNBC went from 571 to 28 and Fox News reduced from 495 to 52 for a total of 154 cable transcripts.

This chapter will continue to use political economy as both the theoretical and methodological framework to analyze the text of cable transcripts. The guiding questions used in chapter five will be extended to this chapter as well with the addition of a few new questions for comparative reasons. Repeated questions for each individual story include: Why were Super PACs considered newsworthy? Who or what was given airtime? How was the significance of Super PACs explained? And overall, what ideologies were perpetuated throughout cable coverage as a whole? Cable-specific questions added were: How did cable coverage compare to broadcast and public news coverage of Super PACs? As cable “news” is largely unregulated, to what extent was cable coverage informative?

From the political economic perspective, this chapter finds that cable news was more likely to follow the “master narrative” discussed in chapter two than public or network broadcasting (Champlin & Knoedler, 2006). Cable concentrated on a few key conflicts and replayed commentary about them ad nauseam, shaping Super PAC coverage to only apply to a disagreement between Mitt Romney and Newt Gingrich about negative Super PAC ads, a flip flop on the part of President Obama about taking Super PAC money, and a disagreement between President Obama and Mitt Romney about negative and inaccurate Super PAC ads. Perhaps due to extended time with expert campaign finance journalists, cable stories provided context to the Super PAC problem in at least half of its stories, much like broadcast and public networks did, but the responsibility of providing the information was left to the guests rather than taken on by cable reporters, anchors, or correspondents. Cable sourcing altogether continued to be mostly white, male, and Republican by even larger margins than the last chapter found. Like broadcasters, cable anchors and correspondents sourced Super PAC ads more than any other institution or person in its coverage.

Major ideologies perpetuated in cable coverage were similar to broadcast coverage. It was often suggested that even though millionaires and billionaires were attempting to purchase the election, there is little citizens or politicians can do to change campaign finance laws. Republicans and Democrats continued to be presented as polar opposites on the political spectrum, and those who did not follow in party lines were portrayed as being on the fringe. Historically, media critics have found that election coverage tends to concentrate on horserace-like polling and campaign strategies rather than issues (Pew Research Journalism Project, 2001; 4th Estate, 2012c). In the case of Super PAC election coverage, polls were rarely mentioned. Instead, reporters concentrated on fundraising numbers and cash on hand for both the Super

PACs and the campaigns they were supporting. One case study is certainly not enough to determine whether or not cable coverage can be accurately referred to as news, but a critical eye on the text itself suggests that it may not matter. Whether or not cable correspondents and anchors report factually and informatively, the often blatantly biased and pundit-driven entertainment style of delivery leaves the message tainted. Much like the question of Super PACs themselves (does big money cause corruption or the appearance of corruption), cable news coverage, in its quest for higher profits, certainly has the appearance of dishonesty whether or not the coverage has journalistic integrity.

In the last chapter, special attention was paid to reporter packages. Cable networks operate quite differently. Less than 20 reporter packages played on CNN and Fox News. MSNBC produced no reporter packages. All three cable networks favor expert correspondents over more traditional in the field reporters. Methodologically, the cable transcripts were downloaded as one document in reverse chronological order. First, they were categorized as reporter packages, interviews, or roundtable/conversations between journalists. Many had to be omitted because of how the transcripts are loaded into Lexis-Nexis. Often, a long newscast was broken into pieces and uploaded. The three to five pieces that made up the newscast all had the same subject line, but only one of the transcripts included the story about Super PACs. Those headline-only, teasers, and repeated stories were omitted from the analysis of sources, advertisements played, et cetera so as not to skew the sourcing results. After the categorization process was complete, a total of 96 cable transcripts remained. Since reporter packages were such a small percentage of the total coverage, and MSNBC had zero packages, all of the coverage together was analyzed with equal importance. The next section demonstrates how

cable transcripts as a whole provided a clear master narrative of how Super PACs were covered in the mainstream media.

6.2 Cable Masters the Elite Narrative

To answer the first question, why were Super PACs considered newsworthy in the first place, each story, mention, roundtable, and interview was read carefully to determine the main reason for its airing. While many discussed several themes such as money, donors, or negative advertisements, each of the 96 transcripts were narrowed down to one main reason for its newsworthiness. The main reasons found were: a fight between candidates, a new ad, information about donors, or recounts of money involved in the election. The three cable networks had slightly different focuses when looked at individually. Most of CNN's coverage concentrated on donors (16% of coverage), money (14% of coverage), or Obama's decision to accept Super PAC funding (14% of coverage). Fox News mostly concentrated on a Priorities USA ad accusing Romney's business decisions as leading to a woman's death (27% of coverage). Other popular Fox News topics were a new Super PAC ad being released (10% of coverage), a disagreement between Newt Gingrich and Mitt Romney on negative advertising (10% of coverage), Obama's acceptance of Super PAC funding (10% of coverage), and the report that Restore Our Future had considered running an ad about President Obama's connection with Jeremiah Wright (10% of coverage). MSNBC's only news theme that was repeated was the disagreement between Newt Gingrich and Mitt Romney (30% of coverage). When the cable networks were analyzed as a whole, the five main stories were: the Priorities USA death ad (13% of all coverage), President Obama's change of heart on accepting Super PAC money (11% of all coverage), Newt Gingrich's disagreement with Mitt Romney (11% of all coverage), information

on Super PAC donors (10% of coverage), and the reporting of donation fund numbers (9% of all coverage). Those five themes saturated more than half of the total coverage. A smaller number of stories revolved around Stephen Colbert’s Super PAC, the supposed Jeremiah Wright ad, and questions of coordination and disclosure.

The Death Ad: Romney Hood and Obamabaloney

Mostly due to its horribly misleading message that Mitt Romney was responsible for a woman’s death, a Priorities USA ad titled, Understands, received the most cable coverage. More than half of that coverage came from Fox News on “Fox Hannity,” “Your World with Neil Cavuto,” “The O’Reilly Factor,” and “Fox Special Report with Bret Baier.” Fox News played the ad in its entirety several times before the ad was even released from the web to television. Sean Hannity referred to the ad as “tasteless,” “disgusting,” and “despicable.” Before playing the ad in its entirety, Hannity stated, “We begin with the review of what has been among the darkest days in American politics. Today, two very disturbing examples have emerged, indicating just how low the left is willing to stoop in order to win this election” (Hannity, 2012c). The other example Hannity referred to is a comment by Nancy Pelosi about Republicans’ unwillingness to allocate funds to ensure food and water safety. Hannity never explained how Nancy Pelosi was wrong, but instead moved onto an interview with former Governor John Sununu who echoed similar arguments to Hannity, “I think he’s losing by having this discourse, point out how dishonest he is, by having the public understand that he has no civility and no ethics in campaigning [sic]” (Hannity, 2012c).

Hannity referred to the ad as a “downright disgraceful line of attack being used by the Left” as if a Super PAC funded by the wealthiest Americans could possibly represent all Left-

leaning voters. Both MSNBC and Fox News tended to support their respective candidates' Super PAC ads no matter how atrocious they were while reminding viewers that the candidate himself was not responsible and had no connection with the ad. As one may expect, MSNBC's take on the ad about Mill worker Joe Soptic's wife's death was quite different from Fox's. On "The Ed Show with Ed Schultz," after stating that the ad had "Mitt Romney whining," Schultz began, "The debate over the Joe Soptic ad hits fever pitch. Mitt Romney is crying foul in a stunning display of hypocrisy" (Schultz & Alter, 2012). Several inaccurate Restore Our Future ads were then played before an interview with journalist Michael Kinsley. Schultz and Kinsley then discussed that when it's a pro-Romney ad that is inaccurate, he makes no attempt to have it shut down, but demanded that Obama publicly comment and repudiate the Soptic ad. Schultz commented, "No doubt, Mitt Romney has a double standard about campaign ads, but what really bothers me and I think a lot of other Americans is Romney calling Joe Soptic's ad inaccurate" (Schultz & Alter, 2012). The two agreed that because the ad is about a worker's opinion, it cannot be inaccurate and went on to claim that the Romney campaign's real issue with the ad is that it forces them to discuss affordable healthcare and the middle class. Schultz sourced Ann Coulter during a Fox News interview during Hannity. Both Fox and MSNBC tended to source the other frequently. Bias in coverage was most obvious when MSNBC and Fox News were focusing on misleading attack ads. Unlike CNN, MSNBC and Fox News always defended and opposed the most negative ads along ideological lines.

Fox News stuck with the Joe Soptic attack ad narrative for three days because Hannity found a recording of an Obama campaign telephone call with Soptic before the ad was created. Obama's campaign manager, Stephanie Cutter, had claimed in interviews that she had nothing to do with the ad and was unaware of Soptic's story. The phone call proved that she had, in fact,

known about his story and used him in a previous advertisement that was shot with him wearing the same shirt as he wore in the Super PAC ad. Hannity did not elaborate on where the recording came from, but interestingly, very few news stories reported on the possible coordination. Perhaps if the story had been presented in a more even handed way on a show with a reputation of reporting accurate news, it would have reached a wider audience. The Obama campaign denied any coordination; MSNBC and CNN never covered the issue and the story seemingly died.

Laura Ingraham of “The O’Reilly Factor” was another Fox host with colorful remarks about the ad. On August 10, she commented, “After so many unfair and vicious attack ads against Mitt Romney, the President now says it's the conservative Super PACs that are going crazy. We'll examine the outrageous hypocrisy.” She went on during a page-long monologue to lament Romney’s failure to be as mean-spirited as Obama:

The Obama team throws a knife and Romney's team tosses a pillow. An effective rapid response team would have nailed Obama on the Super PAC cancer ad. I would have said something like this, we're all getting sick, sick of this poisonous style of campaigning and sick of politicians like President Obama who blame others for their broken promises and failed policies. Instead, Romney's spokeswoman responded by lauding universal healthcare in Massachusetts. Terrible. And when Obama scored with that Romney Hood line, the best Romney's communications team could come up with is Obamaloney. Really? (Ingraham, 2012).

Both MSNBC and Fox News take clearly biased sides even as all other television media simply explained that Romney had left Bain Capital years before the woman died and that she had her own medical insurance through work. Such ads should be viewed as a threat to democracy, not

blindly supported in order to remain within an increasingly shrinking ideological perspective aimed at promoting polarization even while Democrats and Republicans become more alike. Both Romney and Obama accepted Wall Street money and utilized their Super PACs to produce negative and inaccurate ads.

CNN interviewed Obama campaign press secretary Jennifer Psaki about the ad. She refused to say anything negative about the ad and instead said, “Well, as you know, we have about as much to do with the priorities ads, the super PAC ads, as Michael -- as we do with Michael Phelps winning gold medals last week. I can’t speak to the ad” (Wedeman et al., 2012). CNN also played the ad in its entirety, but referred to it as “what may be the harshest political ad so far.” In a later story, CNN compared the Joe Soptic ad and Restore Our Future’s economic ad and concluded, “We’ve done our own CNN fact check. Both of these ads are both totally wrong. They’re both misleading at best. False is probably a more accurate description” (Blitzer et al., 2012a). Both CNN’s Anderson Cooper and Fox News’ Ed Henry sourced *The Washington Post* fact checkers. Much like broadcasters, cable reporters rarely did any investigation into whether or not an ad was true. Instead, they relied on other sources or the candidates themselves to correct the falsehoods. One CNN reporter made a phone call to Joe Soptic, and the network referred to that phone call as a “fact check.” Anderson Cooper admitted that it is the media’s responsibility to provide such fact checks: “I mean, there’s always factual inaccuracies in ads, and that’s part of our job to point them out” (Gergen, Cooper, Wedeman, Sesay, & Rowlands, 2012). Cooper went on to ask political analyst David Gergen if it matters if the claims in an ad are false. Gergen responded by perpetuating the media-made ideology that negative ads work: “I think actually right now it is generally speaking working in Obama’s favor. He’s discrediting Mitt Romney in a way that -- people say, I really don’t like what Obama is doing, but I can’t vote

for Romney, I guess I have got to vote for Obama” (Gergen, Cooper, Wedeman, Sesay, & Rowlands, 2012). Monica Crowley of Fox News made a similar claim: “We hear the American public doesn’t want to see negative ads. And a lot of us really believe that. But you know what? Negative ads work” (Crowley, 2011). During the stories that concentrated on fact checking Super PAC ads, the legitimacy and existence of Super PACs was never questioned. The most critical discussions against outside spending occurred during only four of 96 cable stories that attempted to explain and provide in-depth context to Super PACs, often using elite sources. These will be discussed later in the chapter. The second most repeated narrative in cable coverage will be analyzed next: Gingrich versus Romney on the use of these negative ads.

“It’s an Air War”

The most popular primary story was an angry Newt Gingrich calling out Mitt Romney about his use of negative ads by his Super PAC. Gingrich repeatedly claimed that he was going to maintain an honest campaign until his Super PAC released a 27-minute smear web video aimed at Romney. CNN’s Jim Acosta began the coverage of the disagreement in December: “It’s an air war, Wolf, and it is heating up. Among the top contenders in the GOP field, Mitt Romney can safely be dubbed super pac man with all of the resources necessary to gobble up Newt Gingrich” (Coren et al., 2011). Much of the coverage utilized the same violent vocabulary apparent in broadcast coverage of the issue. The word “fight” appeared more than a dozen times in relation to this conflict. The obsessive coverage about Gingrich’s hurt feelings led to another media ideology. Originally stated by Mitt Romney, the assumption that the general election would be much nastier than the primary permeated the coverage. In reaction to Gingrich’s charge of negativity, Romney said, “There are limits as to what you can tell a PAC obviously. These coordination rules you’re not allowed to coordinate. But I’m sure I could go out and say,

hey, please, don't do anything negative. But you know this is politics. And if you can't stand the heat in this little kitchen, wait until the Obama hell's kitchen turns up the heat" (Crowley, 2011). The comment suggests that if Republicans are being this hard on one another during the primary, the general election will certainly be worse because Democrats and Republicans are in absolute opposition on every issue and Obama will use every advantage he has. Those advantages also apparently make Obama comparative to Satan. Rather than questioning Romney's reasoning, the cable outlets ran with it and frequently discussed how the primary was just a warm up to the spending and negativity that would surely arise in the general election.

It was suggested by CNN's Erin Burnett that since voters are could be turned off by the negativity, it's "time for a third party...you can always have hope" (Burnett, et al, 2012). After reporting the month's Super PAC donations, CNN's Jonathon Mann claimed, "That means a potential third party would need a huge bank roll to even think about running against Democrats and Republicans, including congressional races [sic]" (Banfield et al, 2012). The legitimacy of only two political parties is reiterated throughout all of the coverage analyzed here even though, as mentioned in chapter five, there were more than 50 political parties registered with the Federal Election Commission in 2012. However, from the conservative perspective, Super PACs are great news for unknown candidates. As CNN's Ted Rowlands reported: "[Citizens United Attorney James] Bopp argues the super PACs actually allow the little guy to get involved. BOPP: They don't have the money themselves. So how are they going to participate? They have to join a group, pool their resources with other like-minded people, and then they can participate actively" (Baldwin, Yellin, Travis, Rowlands, & Foreman, 2012). This problematic sentiment was echoed by Fox News. During a roundtable on "Journal Editorial Report," two journalists argued that Super PACs provided the possibility of future diversification of candidates:

GIGOT: Collin, all the campaigns have the ability to marshal these PACs if they want. Does it increase political competition by making it easier for a few backers to get behind somebody who otherwise would not be able to make 4,000 phone calls, say, to get \$2500 from each individual donor, which are the limits you have -- that candidates can raise money on?

LEVY: Right. There is no question here, it made the race more competitive. Let's not forget, without these super PACs -- a lot of these candidates were running bare-bones operations and the PACs, in some cases, pulled them out of the mud.

Something else to note too, Paul, is everyone talk about the negative ads coming out of these super PACs, but the amount of money that super PACs have spent supporting candidates is twice what they've spent opposing candidates. This isn't a net negative influence. This is also something they are looking at that voters are getting more information [sic]. (Gigot et al., 2012)

Collin Levy not only claimed that negative ads produce more knowledge without mentioning the issue of accuracy, but also suggested that Super PACs fulfill the neoliberal dream of fostering competition. None of the coverage discussed what the future would look like if every viable candidate must first kowtow to the world's richest individuals or groups to get funding. The need for a "sugar daddy" to run for state and local elections is a perfect illustration of what Domhoff (1999) referred to as the corrupt candidate selection process more than thirty years ago (Cooper et al., 2012). Making a donation to a candidate who was not going to look after the donor's interests would not be a very smart investment. In the future, billionaires could hold auditions for the best-looking, cleanest cut candidate to represent his or her interests. Donors were often brought up in news coverage of Super PACs. The next section will explain how

Super PAC donor wealth was sensationalized and even applauded by cable networks which both legitimized their political spending and promoted the myth of the American Dream.

“Sugar Daddies” and “Fat Cat Donors”

Most of CNN’s coverage of Super PACs revolved around money and donations. The network repeatedly asked, “Who’s giving these checks” (Whitfield et al., 2012). The answer was a lot of wealthy old white men: J.W. and Richard Marriott, Frank Vandersloot, John Polson, Sheldon Adelson, Bill Maher, Julian Robertson, Harold Simmons, and Steven Spielberg. Several of these donors were granted interviews on cable channels, and money experts from *Fortune Magazine* were invited to discuss how rich the Super PAC funders were. CNN reported, “We did the math; \$10 million to Sheldon Adelson is the same as \$45 to the average American family. No joke, just a regular campaign contribution for Sheldon Adelson” (Burnett, Wedeman, Callan, & Cooper, 2012). Support from such wealthy individuals for Romney was presented as evidence of approving of Romney’s business knowledge. *Fortune’s* editor Andy Serwer stated in a CNN roundtable:

You know it's interesting because I think business people love Mitt Romney, especially big business people. I have here an invitation to a fund-raiser Mitt did on Wall Street about two weeks ago and you can see here, Woody Johnson from the New York Jets, Jimmy Lee from JPMorgan Chase, Julian Robertson you mentioned, Steve Schwarzman from Blackstone. Some business people especially on Wall Street, Erin, are switching over from Obama to Mitt Romney. Stephen Ross, who is the CEO of Related Companies, a big New York City real estate concern was characterized as an independent. Now, he's saying he's supporting Mitt Romney. He also owns the Miami Dolphins, so big money there as well. (Burnett, Wedeman, Callan, & Cooper, 2012))

Erin Burnett continued the discussion, “A lot of these Wall Street types who had given to Democrats in the past just aren’t enamored with President Obama and aren’t responding to the pitches from these Democratic Super PACs” (Burnett, Wedeman, Callan, & Cooper, 2012)). It was quite rare in the coverage that journalists questioned the motivations behind these generous donations.

In February, CNN interviewed Foster Freiss who, at the time, was supporting Rick Santorum. When asked why, Freiss said that he liked Santorum and was impressed by his accomplishments. He also agreed with Santorum theologically, “I think what's happened in the sexual revolution, the drug revolution there's been an attack on Christianity. People don’t realize how important those values are to the underpinning of our country. And as Rick says, the Constitution is the how of America. The Declaration of Independence is the why of America” (Burnett, Townsend, Avlon, Callan, & Hosten, 2012). Freiss went on to defend the purity of Santorum’s Super PAC, “I’m not allowed to coordinate any of the Super PAC and it’s pretty cut and dry. It's pretty simple. You just don't talk about the Super PAC” (Burnett, Townsend, Avlon, Callan, & Hosten, 2012). Piers Morgan also interviewed well-known comedian and atheist, Bill Maher, who donated to Barack Obama’s Super PAC. Maher defended Obama’s decision to take the funding because “almost all the billionaires are on the side of the Republicans. So the common everyday millionaire has to step forward for the Democrats” (Morgan & Savidge, 2012). Fox News also interviewed a Super PAC donor, although with a different slant. Frank Vandersloot donated to Romney’s Super PAC and then claimed the Obama campaign started “digging into his divorce records” (Cavuto, 2012a). Fox News cited its corporate parent’s newspaper, *The Wall Street Journal*, in the story, but the other media outlets studied in this dissertation did not pick the story up. One may surmise, however, that million dollar public

donations to electoral races would result in some people wanting more information about the donor – which is likely why so many funnel their money through nonprofits first (Briffault, 2012).

Obama’s Super PAC founder Bill Burton pointed out one reason why many of these wealthy individuals support Romney. In one of the many Bill Burton interviews aired, Soledad O’Brien stated, “Let’s talk money. When you actually compare dollars, the Romney campaign is killing the Obama campaign by a lot.” Burton responded:

There’s no doubt the Romney campaign is raising a great deal of money. Now if you look at how Republicans raise money, there is no doubt that they are going to be able to have a huge financial advantage. You know if you go to the -- if you go to Wall Street, if you go to the oil companies, and those people who work in those places, they know that a President Romney would deregulate those industries and they would be able to make a lot more money at the expense of the middle class. So I think that they have a lot more avenues to raise money because they know exactly what they’re going to get from a Romney administration. (O’Brien & Brownstein, 2012)

Burton said that he and other Obama campaigners expected to raise less money than Romney and planned to spend more wisely. Burton did not go so far as to suggest the Super PAC donations led to corruption, but a few other interview sources did make the connection. John McCain told Wolf Blitzer that the current “system under which we operate, which leads to this kind of campaigning will lead to corruption and scandals, I guarantee it” (Hamby et al., 2012). Paul Ryan of the Campaign Legal Center compared current law to pre-Watergate. Even with interviews from disapproving voices, cable networks followed broadcasters in perpetuating the idea that there was nothing that could be done and no one standing up for change.

Out of all the 96 stories, not one mentioned the Move to Amend protest on the second anniversary of Citizens United, nor were any people involved in the movement ever interviewed. This shows a complete lack of balance as Citizens United attorney James Bopp was sourced in two stories. CNN's Erick Erickson even spoke for an entire state about citizens' feelings on Super PACs: "I really think the issue of money and politics is overwrought by a lot of people. And most of the voters in South Carolina don't care. These ads are going to come one way or the other. I think about the only thing sillier than trying to get the money out of politics is assuming we're going to have peace in the Middle East" (Cooper et al., 2011). Unfortunately, the "who cares" attitude about money in politics was only counterbalanced by a defeatist attitude in cable coverage. Erin Burnett stated on CNN, "You may hate them, but you have to play" (Burnett, Damon, & Gupta, 2011). *Politico's* Ken Vogel stated in a roundtable on CNN, "As to whether it's going to be shut down, I just don't see any political will on Capitol Hill for any type of significant campaign finance reform, certainly none that would be in effect in time to influence the type of money flooding into the 2012 presidential election" (Burnett, Wedeman, Callan, & Cooper, 2012). After being asked what citizens can do, Federal Election Commissioner McGahn answered, "I would say, go see the folks in the white dome, your elected representatives, and complain to them about whether or not the penalties are high enough, not the FEC" (Sesay et al., 2012a). Former FEC Chairman Robert Lenhard had a similar message: "I think that Super Pacs are here to stay. They're raising a lot of money right now and they're going to have a big impact on 2012 [sic]" (Blitzer, 2011). As the message that Super PACs are here to stay is forced upon viewers, sources such as James Bopp argue that their existence is really a positive for voters. "We just have more voices, more information. People are free to disregard whatever they don't want to consider. They're free to turn off the TV whenever they want,"

Bopp argued on CNN (Baldwin, Yellin, Travis, Rowlands, & Foreman, 2012). As money is considered speech, the burden of recognizing truth from lies falls on citizens who now are expected to take responsibility regarding when to turn off or disregard an ad while many of the organization's donors and motivation remain a mystery. Journalistic failures on campaign finance issues help to ensure that the citizenry stays uninformed. Uninformed citizens are much less likely to speak out against political corruption so media decisions not to spend the time or money on fact checking comes with the added bonus of helping to promote the status quo and keep Super PAC and candidate money rolling in to the networks. The next section explains how the money given by donors and collected by Super PACs was reported.

Show Us the Money Trail

While election coverage often focuses on polling, in the case of Super PAC coverage, the horse-race reporting was replaced. Reporters focused instead on the amount of money spent by the owners of the horse in order to win the race. CNN reported the numbers much like they were reported by broadcasters:

All right, take a look here. We've got some numbers for you. The biggest spending Super PACs so far, restore our future which supports Mitt Romney. It has spent in total \$11.4 million in this election season; that's according to the nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics which tracks all this at OpenSecrets.org. All right, the next one is the group, Winning Our Future, which supports Newt Gingrich, has spent \$4.6 million. Here's another one, Endorse Liberty and a group supporting Ron Paul, they've spent \$3.1 million. And I'll show you one more here Red, White, and Blue which supports Rick Santorum, has spent \$1.8 million. (Chance et al., 2012)

The summarization of money spent during the primary often led to the reporter or anchor insisting that it was “just a scratch” on the surface of what ad buying would look like during the general election (Burnett, Borger, Avlon, Cooper, & Gupta, 2012). This was often repeated even though another reporter trope that was used by broadcasters and cable channels worked in opposition to it. Historically, candidates were forced to drop out when their funding dried up, but with Super PACs, a candidate can stay in the race as long as his or her funders continue to write checks. Bill Allison of the Sunlight Foundation explained, “What we’re seeing this time is a very few well-heeled donors by giving money to Super PACs can really fuel a candidate and keep them going long before they would have had to drop out in the past” (Crowley et al., 2012). The realization that primaries would be extended by Super PACs no doubt excited media owners who would be able to sell advertising time to both campaigns and PACs for much longer than in previous elections. And still, some commentary questioned whether all the money they were constantly discussing had any effect. Anchor Fredricka Whitfield claimed, “It will be very interesting to watch how it folds out. Because you know if I step back real quickly, Perry’s Super PACs on behalf of Perry spent a lot of money in Iowa but it didn’t do very much good, did it? So there you go” (Whitfield et al., 2012). Bill Maher responded to a question by Piers Morgan about Romney’s spending not getting him as far as one would think, “Well that’s true. Money does not always win elections. Mostly it does, however” (Morgan & Savidge, 2012).

In what was no doubt pleasing to their owners, journalists tended to sensationalize the expense of elections while simultaneously downplaying their effect on the process. Typically, only Obama staff and other Democrats pointed out that money does have the power to change an election. In a capitalist economy, money is always considered a good thing so long as connections to corruption are not pointed out. The media were quite careful to not allow

protestors to speak or to publicize opinion polls that showed outrage over all the money pouring into the election. Once again, citizens cannot forget that the news industry is a business and its main goal is to profit. Super PACs allow extra money to go to media owners through the ads themselves and the responses that the opposing Super PACs and campaigns must generate to combat the damage. Campaigns get special rates in political advertising, but the networks can charge Super PACs top dollar for space.

The reporters and anchors paid by mainstream media owners promoted the expensive Super PAC ads continuously. More than one-third of cable stories contained at least one Super PAC ad clip, many of them had two or three clips. When a new ad was released, instead of a fact check, the horse-money reporting followed. On CNN, Jessica Yellin played an entire anti-Obama attack ad and then commented, “Crossroads GPS spent \$1 million on two of those ads. That’s the powerhouse GOP group advised by Karl Rove. The Koch brothers- backed Americans for Prosperity spent \$8.4 million on the other two” (Blitzer et al., 2012b). As was the rule rather than the exception, commentary on Super PACs ceased for the day after the reporter or anchor read the numbers. The repetition of the ads not only legitimized them to viewers, but it also often provided the Super PAC ads, which were sometimes only web ads, with a much larger audience and reach. Some reports were critical, but once again, the critique comes off as disingenuous when it is flanked by ads played during “news” programming as well as played uninterrupted during the commercial breaks. All three of the cable channels profited off of the legality of Super PACs. CNN and Fox News had another commonality. They both reported ferociously on what came to be called the Obama flip-flop.

Flipping Them Off

When Obama publicly stated in February 2012 that he would accept Super PAC money to help his campaign even though he had criticized the *Citizens United* Supreme Court ruling, he caused a flurry of cable coverage. That coverage had a favored trope. Obama was represented in most of the cable shows as a flip flopper. In fact, he was directly called a flip flopper 23 times. The cable headlines were similar: “Obama Flips on Super PACs,” “Obama Super PAC Flip-Flop,” “Super PAC Switch” and “Presidential Flip Flops?” Sean Hannity didn’t hold anything back in his commentary:

Now earlier this month, President Obama broke yet another campaign promise by announcing that we would embrace "Super PACs" despite the fact that he had demonized such groups for years now. While he obviously can't be taken at his word, the president has bigger problems to worry about. Why? Because the main "Super PAC" that supported his re-election bid apparently cannot raise any cash. (Hannity, 2012a)

After Bill Burton defended the decision by claiming Obama was “playing by the new set of rules,” CNN contributor Ari Fleischer disagreed:

If you recall back then he said he would accept public financing for the campaign just as John McCain did and as soon as he figured out he could actually raise more money than public financing would get him, he flip-flopped on that issue. He took unlimited money to fund his campaign... This is a super flip-flop. But worse than that, it's a president who has to act as if he is smarter, better, more moralistic than all his opponents and everybody else while his pattern of behavior is to have words that are wind but his actions are just like everybody else's in Washington. There's nothing reformist. Nothing change orientated about Barack Obama when you get to the heart of it. (Sesay et al., 2012b)

One may expect the commentary to slightly steer away from the myth that the two political parties are so different after the Obama flip flop story, but it was actually used to reiterate that ideology by journalists and political sources. Roll Call's Eliza Carney said Obama was wrong to accept the money: "If you talk to watchdog groups, they will tell you, point blank, they are disappointed. They thought this was going to be a president who endorsed reforms and hasn't come forward to do that in a big way" (Van Susteren, 2012). But Stephanie Cutter claimed that the Obama campaign made the decision to accept Super PAC money "to ensure that the voices of small donors don't get washed out as a result of Citizens United" because "after Citizens United we saw a huge wave of money...going to the Republican super PACs" (O'Brien, 2012 Feb 10).

Bill Burton also suggested that Obama taking Super PAC funds was completely different from Mitt Romney's taking of Super PAC funds:

President Obama has also established some rules of the road neither he, unlike Mitt Romney and the other presidential candidates on the Republican side, neither he nor the first ladies, vice president nor Dr. Biden will participate in any of the fundraising for those "Super PACs". It will be surrogates that will be involved in that. So there is distance between the actual "Super PACs" and the president. (O'Brien & Romans, 2012)

It is notable that MSNBC did not have a news headline devoted to Obama's Super PAC decision. Much of MSNBC's coverage came in the form of interviews. The cable channel interviewed Bill Burton three times, two of which were after the Super PAC decision, but never mentioned the flip flop in its questions. MSNBC and Fox both seemed to be determined to deliver the cheapest news coverage without critiquing the side they typically support. Rather than going about news gathering to answer questions brought on by current events, MSNBC and Fox commentators tended to try to create their own news by inviting pundits to their shows and

making outlandish claims that would then be sourced and discussed on the opposing cable network. In this way, Fox and MSNBC keep each other in business and their viewers uninformed enough to continue tuning in. This section focused on what most determined the newsworthiness of Super PACs in cable coverage. The next section will answer the question of who was allowed to speak.

6.3 Sexism in Sourcing

In cable coverage, women were the biggest losers of the election. Out of the 20 reporter packages, there were only four female anchors and six female reporters. Roundtable discussions included six women and 25 men. Cable interviews were with nine women and 37 men. In expert sources, women fared the worst by far. Only six women were sourced by cable shows in comparison to 71 men. Fox News and MSNBC were the most skewed. Out of seven reporter packages, all of the anchors or reporters on Super PACs were men. MSNBC conducted nine interviews with ten people, all of which were male. When it came to sourcing, each network's diversity was abysmal. Six out of MSNBC's seven sources were male, 27 of Fox's 30, and 37 out of CNN's 40 were male. Overall, interviews were split between 16 Democrats and 18 Republicans. Expert sources favored Republicans. The cable networks cited 35 Republicans, 27 Democrats and 16 bipartisan or unknown sources (mostly journalists). Much like broadcasters, cable network coverage was mostly white, male, and Republican. The sources and ads played by broadcasters, cable, and public news are provided in appendices at the end of this document.

In line with a 4th Estate (2012a) study focusing on the 2012 election, Fox News and MSNBC were more likely to source the opposing viewpoint. That is, Fox News sourced only eight Republicans in comparison to 27 Democrats. MSNBC sourced six Republicans and only one Democrat. The 4th Estate (2012) study used only quantitative methods and titled their

findings, “MSNBC and FOX Coverage – Not What You’d Expect,” and explained, “In what might seem a little-counter-intuitive, MSNBC is amplifying Romney more than Obama while FOX News is amplifying Obama more than Romney” (para. 1). After studying the messages resulting in these findings, this dissertation finds that MSNBC and Fox tend to source the other side, and even one another, only to prove to viewers how incorrect the other side is. For example, Sean Hannity played a clip of a presidential news conference to illustrate that “President Obama blatantly ignored a question by a ‘Daily Caller’ reporter about Bill Maher” (Hannity, 2012b). Multiple Fox News channels also sourced President Obama and Stephanie Cutter in the flip flop narrative stories in an attempt to show the administration’s hypocritical decision to begin accepting Super PAC funding. A recorded phone call between Joe Sopic and Obama campaign manager Stephanie Cutter was replayed several times as well as evidence that Obama’s campaign and Super PAC were coordinating. Most of MSNBC’s coverage of Super PACs occurred in the primary, which skewed its sourcing statistics, but it participated in similar tactics to Fox News. In August, Ed Schultz played a clip of Romney stating that Obama should have been embarrassed by the inaccurate Joe Sopic Super PAC ad. Schultz used the clip to paint Romney as a hypocrite for also having a false ad about Obama’s welfare reforms. In the traditional and informative news format, one would expect that the number of sources amplified on each side would show whom the network favored. In the case of political reality-style news, this does not hold true. From 1949-1987, it was considered best for the public interest that each party receive equal time in coverage on current affairs issues. In 1987, during a period of further media deregulation, the Fairness Doctrine was abolished and media conglomerates are no longer required to cover all sides of an issue (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006). If the Fairness Doctrine were still intact and applied to cable “news” programs, pundits would not be able to obsess over one

candidate for an entire show without discussing others or allowing the critiqued candidate to have his or her side of the issue discussed as well.

Although CNN's coverage was much more even-handed in its coverage of Republicans and Democrats, the network still sourced Republicans three times as much as it sourced Democrats. Once again, concentrated coverage on the primary likely skewed these results, but they are skewed a bit too much for that to be the only cause. CNN's coverage was evenly split between the primary and the general election, but out of the 40 sources, only seven were Democrats, 21 were Republicans, and 12 were quotes by unknown or bipartisan groups. Chapter five had similar results and suggests that an updated version of the Fairness Doctrine would improve balance in coverage. Although under current FCC regulations, even if the Fairness Doctrine was reinstated, cable news would be exempt. This could be remedied by FCC regulation of the word news in television network naming and television program naming. Regulating the use of the word news could protect democracy and promote the public interest because broadcasters may work harder to provide in-depth news coverage if they knew their content was being monitored and evaluated. Then, only networks that proved to have most of their programming dedicated to news rather than opinion and followed FCC public interest requirements could use News in their network's name.

This regulation could help to remedy, for example, the large number of Americans who still believe there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. If people were aware that what they were watching was deemed not news by a regulatory body devoted to media, they would likely watch in a different frame of mind, taking in the information provided critically without the assumption that facts rather than opinions were being reported. Further, any shows appearing on a network deemed to be news that were actually opinion would have to be labeled accordingly so

as not to confuse viewers of the channel. This regulation would give some power back to citizens over news coverage. Networks that were evaluated and deemed news would have to continue to provide news content or risk having news in their title ripped away by the FCC. Particularly when it comes to informing citizens in a democracy, the word news should not be a branding decision; it should mean that the network or show is dedicated to reporting about current affairs and its dedication had been verified by a regulatory body with the public interest in mind. Another observation about cable news sourcing that should not exist in real news reporting was its reliance on Super PAC ads themselves to provide content.

24-hour Commercial Networks

A total of 53 Super PAC advertisements played during 33 stories. In many of the stories, more than one ad was played. If these ads were played in order to warn the public about their existence and explain who funded them and how accurate or inaccurate they were, this number may not be so concerning. Unfortunately, these ads were most often played as coverage of a conflict between political opponents. Only four cable stories mentioned evidence of their own network's or independent fact checking results. Cable fact checking was reduced to a phone call to Joe Soptic and Bain Capital over the Obama death ad to find out what year Soptic's wife died and compare it to the year Romney left Bain. No matter the dates, the ad was horribly misleading as the woman had health insurance and did not get cancer or die until years after Romney no longer made decisions for Bain. Soptic's main point that Bain Capital's purchase and closure of a steel mill made life more difficult was misrepresented by Priorities USA to look as if Romney was responsible for the death of a woman who was not even reliant on her husband's employment at the steel mill for health insurance. The Soptic ad was likely played the

most of all of the Super PAC ads (the numbers cannot be determined absolutely because every ad's language was not printed in all transcripts).

Even though CNN had the most coverage examined in this study, Fox News played more Super PAC ads. Most of those ads were from Priorities USA attacking Mitt Romney. Only one of the 16 Fox stories that played Super PAC ads mentioned a fact check. Rather than completing one at the network's expense, Reporter Ed Henry stated that *The Washington Post* gave the ad "four Pinocchio's" (Roberts et al., 2012). MSNBC had similar results. Out of the seven ads played in two MSNBC stories, one sourced *The Washington Post* fact check of Newt Gingrich's web video, "King of Bain." Like the death ad, Gingrich's Super PAC video received four Pinocchios. Out of CNN's 17 stories that played Super PAC ads, two discussed fact checking. The first concentrated on the death ad and referred to the phone calls made by a reporter as a fact check, claiming, "it's full of falsehoods" (Wedeman et al., 2012). In a second story, CNN's Anderson Cooper claims, "Tonight, 'Keeping Them Honest,' we will confront the defenders of these dubious ads. As always, we're not taking political sides. We're simply trying to report facts" (Gergen, Cooper, Wedeman, Sesay, & Rowlands, 2012). The story focused on the Romney welfare reform attack ad first and claimed, "a string of fact-checkers have blasted the ad," but only named the *Washington Post* and PolitiFact as evidence. In Cooper's second analysis, he focused on the death ad, citing CNN reporter's Brianna Keiler's phone call to Soptic and once again, *The Washington Post* fact check. It is notable that even though cable television networks operate on much higher profit margins, they fail to provide investigation even when it is called for by obviously questionable ad claims. Although newspapers are suffering from conglomeration leaving one-newspaper towns (see McChesney, 2008), when it comes to checking Super PAC claims, they provided superior coverage to cable news outlets.

Even though more than one-third of the cable news stories played clips from Super PAC ads, only a handful mentioned their truthfulness, or in this case, dishonesty. More often, the clips were played as part of a discussion between journalists about how negative the campaigns were or as evidence of a breaking new Super PAC ad that was released. Occasionally, Super PAC ads were also played during an interview to get a reaction from the guest. This was a particularly problematic finding because the journalists allowed the messages of the Super PACs to determine the news of the day and the conversation about the election. The clips took the focus away from issues relevant to voters and instead forced further discussion on conflicts created by outside spending and unaccountable groups.

Super PAC Product Placement

Between the three cable networks, there were 46 interviews that discussed Super PACs. Overall, they nearly evened out to 16 Democrats, 18 Republicans, and 10 who were unknown or bipartisan. MSNBC's interviews were equally split between Republicans and Democrats at five each. CNN interviewed 12 Democrats, four Republicans, and eight bipartisans. Fox News did not interview any Democrats. Out of 10 interviews, eight were Republican and two were bipartisan. Fox News interviewed two journalists, four conservative Super PAC founders, two Republican politicians and Ann Coulter and Sarah Palin. As Fox News coverage was quite different from CNN and MSNBC, its specifics will be discussed in more detail in the next section. Between MSNBC and CNN, Pro-Obama Priorities USA Super PAC founder Bill Burton was the most popular guest. He was interviewed seven times by the two networks. Obama's campaign manager Stephanie Cutter was interviewed three times by CNN. Pro-Gingrich Super PAC founder Rick Tyler was interviewed twice by MSNBC as was Romney

campaign manager Tim Pawlenty. Several journalists, Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, John McCain, Newt Gingrich, and Bill Maher were also interviewed on CNN.

An interesting theme emerged in regard to which interviews contained Super PAC ad placement and which did not. Fourteen interviews played ads at some point. Ads were only played when the guest was another journalist, a pundit, a Super PAC founder, or a politician who was not in the race. Interviews with campaign managers, Super PAC funders, Supreme Court Justices, comedians, and candidates still in the primary may have been more difficult to obtain and resulted in less demanding questions. Journalists were much more to the point in their questions to Super PAC founders than they were to anyone else. Other journalists and pundits were only invited as either experts in campaign expenditures or as a reliable source to discuss and agree on specific issues such as a new advertisement. There were also two interviews with Karl Rove and one with Bill Burton that had to be omitted. They matched the search terms solely because of their titles as Super PAC founders, but Super PACs were never actually discussed in the interviews, suggesting that the PAC founders were viewed as not just a resource on their organization, but as newsworthy themselves for their knowledge of campaign finance and desire to represent outside spenders instead of the candidates directly.

As an example of how differently guest interviews were handled depending on whether they were a star guest or just another journalist, Piers Morgan was particularly gentle with Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia. Rather than asking difficult questions and following up, Morgan asked very short questions and allowed Scalia's responses to go largely unquestioned. After discussing the problem of unlimited spending Morgan asked, "I do think it's been abused, don't you?" When Scalia responds that he thinks the more speech the better and that speech and money can't be separated, Morgan asks, "Can't you?" After expressing that elections are

important he asks, “And it shouldn’t be susceptible to the highest bidder, should it?” Scalia argues that newspapers endorsing candidates is the same idea because they use their own space to promote their political opinions. Morgan agrees, but asks if that money should be limited, “Do you think, perhaps, they should be” (Morgan, 2012b)? In comparison to other Piers Morgan interviews, he acted almost childlike in his interview with Scalia, questioning himself as well as his guest. The interview was replayed again in July and three months later in October with a new introduction: “Tonight, inside the Supreme Court, a rare exclusive interview with the longest serving justice, Antonin Scalia...Colorful, controversial, powerful and polarizing. Scalia’s decisions have changed the nation” (Morgan, 2012d). Morgan was equally gentle in interviews with Stephanie Cutter, Bill Maher, and Russ Feingold. He asked Stephanie Cutter, “Given that you’re so closely involved with this campaign – is there a slight credibility issue with this dramatic U-turn on the Super PACs” (Morgan, 2012a). Morgan replayed the Cutter interview ten days later and also replayed the interview with Bill Maher. But when talking to another journalist, Frank Rich, he is much more straightforward. Rather than ask questions, Morgan made bold claims, occasionally interrupted his guest, and then waited for a response. Here are a few examples: “The welfare ad which is also riddled with just downright lies;” “I find it contemptible. I mean I’m really appalled;” “People have to decide who’s going to run the bigger super power in the world and all they’re doing is cracking sort of one-liner puns, coming out with poisonous attack ads” (Morgan, 2012c). It is possible that with other journalists, Morgan is more in a relaxed and less scripted roundtable mode and works hard to be particularly respectful rather than brash when conducting more formal interviews. But simply based on air time, it is clear that the interviews with Maher, Scalia, and Cutter were deemed as more important than his discussions with journalists as they were all replayed on his own show and

sourced by other shows on CNN. Morgan also gave much of his show's time in journalist interviews to clips of Super PAC ads; he did not play any ads in the formal interviews. Morgan has the reputation of "grilling" some guests and of enjoying controversy (Bennett, 2013). His newest book stirs up controversial thoughts in its title alone, *Shooting Straight: Guns, Gays, God, and George Clooney* (Bennett, 2013).

On all three networks, interviews that were perhaps less difficult to schedule did not result in any rudeness, but much of the time was filled by watching Super PAC ads and the conversations were not replayed at a later time. Guests that were fellow journalists were asked more follow up questions whereas answers from guests who were household names were more likely to have their answers left standing as the journalist switched to another topic. Journalists, pundits, and low-level political employees were also more likely to be met with challenge from an opposing viewpoint that was also invited to the studio as a guest. This most often occurred with Bill Burton. The anchor would typically air a few Super PAC clips, ask one question and allow the opposing sides to go at it with little interruption. Perhaps to lighten the mood, or more likely, because cable "news" operates on a political reality format, a few comedians were also invited into the studios to discuss Super PACs.

Truth in Parody Only

While only four of the 96 stories focused on Colbert's Super PAC, "Americans for a Better Tomorrow, Tomorrow," comedy was one of the themes worth mentioning in the coverage. Colbert was mostly sourced early in the primary before most Republican presidential hopefuls had even announced their candidacy. Stories on Colbert provided some clarity for viewers into what Super PACs were and how they could operate legally, although with some clear concerns over corruption and coordination. Throughout all cable, broadcast, and public coverage, only

stories focusing on Colbert shed any light on the actual process these organizations go through to achieve Super PAC status. The first story on Colbert was also the only time a media conglomerate's name was uttered, "His parent company Viacom, doesn't want him getting into trouble with the Federal Election Commission while he's doing this and so now Colbert is making a big production of going to the FEC to file a request for a media exemption that would give him and Viacom some protective cover when all they would have to do is send a piece of paper over to the FEC" (Lawrence et al., 2011). When a reporter asked Colbert if the Federal Election Commission was concerned that Viacom would be financing his Super PAC, he responded and informed, "But they are allowed to give money to a super pac. Corporations can give money. Why wouldn't they want to give me all of that sweet, sweet money? (sic)" (Lawrence et al., 2011). A few months later, CNN correspondent Brian Todd explained, "In typical Colbert fashion, he's parodying the system by seemingly pretending to join it" and finished the story adding, "Whatever he comes up with is going to be hilarious." Wolf Blitzer agreed, "Whatever he does is very, very, funny" (Blitzer, 2011). After Colbert released his "Mitt the Ripper" attack ad, Blitzer played it and commented, "It's funny. It's cute, but he's trying to make a point." CNN reporter Maria Cordona responded, "It's hilarious, Wolf, but as you know, the old saying goes many a truth is spoken in jest (sic)." After a few sexist comments by Blitzer and his guests calling the female reporter "cute," Republican strategist Rich Galen said, "I actually thought the first 15 seconds was better than the last 15 seconds. I think they ran out of gas" (Foreman et al., 2012). From the commentary described, viewers get the sense that Super PACs leave something to be critiqued, but that ultimately, the Colbert Super PAC experiment should be evaluated in terms of entertainment rather than as a springboard for a broader social movement. When mixed with the messages of there being nothing citizens can do besides wait

and a lack of protest representation, Colbert's campaign just becomes the story reporters giggle about at the beginning or end of their show before sending viewers to commercial.

Comedians Bill Maher and Dean Obeidallah were also interviewed about Super PACs. Obeidallah was invited on CNN after the Supreme Court's summer decision on Montana state law, *American Tradition Partnership, Inc. v. Bullock*, that upheld post-Citizens United campaign finance changes and set a murky precedent for what qualifies as coordination. When asked what can be done about the problem of Super PACs, Obeidallah first went for shock value, "Unbelievably out of control. And some people don't follow politics and think that super is a good word. Super is not a good word in this scenario. It's a bad thing. They're throwing money like a stockbroker at a strip club making it rain" (Malveaux et al., 2012b) After being chastised that CNN is a G-rated network, Obeidallah became serious and explained a plan for taxing contributions, "Super PACs get billions of dollars. And they don't pay one penny on the contributions, because they're considered gifts under our law...Money going into super PACS should be taxed like a business. I think there should be an excise tax or surcharge if it is over the \$2500, which is what we can give to a certain candidate" (Malveaux et al., 2012b). He continued arguing that any contribution over the amount that citizens can legally give to a candidate should be taxed a rate of 50% and that money should be spent "helping people." Obeidallah is the only person in cable coverage to make such a suggestion, but he is also the only one to mention popular opinion on the Court ruling. He stated, "A recent poll in the 'Washington Post' says they're wrong [sic]" and went on to surmise we would eventually be discussing "citizengate" (Malveaux et al., 2012b). It is telling that cable news repeatedly reported newspaper and online fact-checkers, but never mentioned the numerous published polls about how the majority of the public no matter their political leanings disagrees with outside

spending in elections. In fact, the spring prior to the presidential election, a Brennan Center poll found that more Americans believe in witchcraft (19%) than agree with the Citizens United ruling (15%) (Millhiser, 2012). One would think that the slightly less dry poll would make its way into the mainstream news discussion during an election, but it did not. The new information was likely ignored because it shows evidence of backlash against the commercialization of political elections and the ability of broadcasters and cable companies to profit off of them. It is also important to note that the most progressive call for reform of current law came from a comedian rather than a politician or expert.

Bill Maher also became quite newsworthy after he donated one million dollars to Priorities USA. As discussed, Piers Morgan interviewed Maher and played the interview twice on his show. In the interview, Maher simply defended the President's decision to accept Super PAC funding and explained that it is his duty and the duty of other Democratic millionaires to make large donations in hopes of counterbalancing that "almost all the billionaires are on the side of the Republicans" (Morgan & Savidge, 2012). He went on to call it naïve to expect Obama to reject Super PAC funding.

The donation was considered controversial not because of the dollar amount, but because Maher had previously called Sarah Palin a "cunt" and a "bitch" during a nationwide comedy tour. Fox News was particularly enamored with Maher and discussed him in three different stories. On Hannity, a roundtable discussed misogyny and whether or not Priorities USA should send Maher's donation back. On a separate show, Hannity brought Maher back up as an example of the "political opportunities" Obama has had to rescind controversial remarks made by liberals while he also "lectures on civility." Sarah Palin and Hannity spurred the discussion into a conversation aimed at perpetuating the myth of the liberal media. Palin claimed, "What is

shameful in all of this, Sean, is that a cornerstone of our democracy of our republic that involves fair elections is the atrophy of fairness in the media.” Hannity agreed, “What did he know about the ads? When did he know it? And why won’t he condemn it? And those are the questions the media aren’t asking” (Hannity, 2012e). This sort of lopsided coverage that expects the President to comment on and make right all wrongs by his members of his party was common. The next section will elaborate on the atypical coverage provided by Fox “News.”

6.4 We Pundit, You Decide: *Fox News* Outliers

As previously discussed, the favorite topic of Fox News Super PAC coverage was the Priorities USA death ad. There were three other types of stories favored by Fox News that were not as prevalent in the other cable, broadcast, or public coverage. Anytime a new Super PAC advertisement came out that was produced by American Crossroads or attacked Mitt Romney, it was newsworthy on Fox, as was the creation of any new conservative Super PACs. Fox News shows were also particularly interested in the possibility of an attack ad connecting President Obama to Reverend Jeremiah Wright. There was one other outlier that applied only to Fox News. The only mention of a union by name in any of the broadcast or cable coverage was by Fox the summer before the primary. James Rosen explained, “Claiming to speak for America’s silent majority, a term borrowed from Richard Nixon, Trumka announced the formation an AFL-CIO Pac designed like other already in existence on both sides of the aisle to corral unlimited sums of cash, in this case, Chris, on behalf of pro-labor candidates for 2012” (Wallace et al., 2011). The story went on to prepare viewers of the “billion dollar blitz of political ads by outside groups” and named the titles of three conservative Super PACs that had been formed and Priorities USA. The story was more than six months before Obama agreed to accept his Super PAC funds, but the story claimed of Priorities USA, “The group has been in action for several

months promoting the Obama agenda and blasting Republicans...Obama used to bad mouth such PACs. Now, his insiders are running one of the nation's biggest." Aside from Fox, all news coverage represented Obama's Super PAC as inferior in size and scope to Romney's. The AFL-CIO PAC's creation received only a few sentences of coverage, but the next few sections will illustrate the attention given by Fox News to the creation of new conservative Super PACs.

"Check Out This New Ad"

In as close to Super PAC product placement as a show can get, Fox News repeatedly highlighted Super PAC ads just to make sure everyone saw them because they were new. The first ad placement story came from Americans for Herman Cain. The ad compared Cain to Clarence Thomas, and after sourcing a previous Cain sound bite, the discussion turned to how Romney's campaign may be affected by the ad. The second and third Fox stories were both on August 8, 2012 and focus on the death ad. Ann Coulter had a particularly offensive take on why the ad was produced:

He is trying to get the stupid, single women voters, which is the Democratic Party base. And I would just say at these stupid, single women voters, your husband will not be able to pay you child support – I mean, if Obamacare goes through and Obama is re-elected, you are talking about the total destruction of wealth in America. (Hannity, 2012d)

The lack of representation of women in news coverage becomes especially problematic when it is compounded by the fact that the few female voices that are amplified by the mainstream media often come from women who claim post-feminism and promote conservative ideology in return for masculine protection and a promise of future income if they continue to repeat the same convenient, but untrue rhetoric (Klein, 2007). There should be a space in a diverse media environment for all voices, including Coulter's, but it should not be represented as news.

In the final example of a Super PAC product placement, the O'Reilly Factor ended its newscast with "Check out this new ad from Karl Rove's Super PAC" (J. Williams, 2012). The ad was played in its entirety without any context or commentary, clearly promoting the interests of Rove who is on the Fox News payroll. Four of the 42 cable news interviews were conducted with members of that station's payroll, but the vast majority of roundtable members were. Of the 30 round table members, 23 were on the payrolls of the network the shows aired on. CNN had 10 of their 17 roundtable members working for the company while Fox News and MSNBC employed all of their roundtable discussants. Once again, roundtables provided inexpensive coverage of "expert" discussion rather than investigative reporting. This comes at the cost of the public and their democracy.

As previously discussed, the coverage continued to fail to put effort or investigation into fact checking the ads and instead gave them free ad space within the newscast, thereby legitimizing the dark money voice in elections. This finding was not specific to Fox News, but Fox was the only network to play the Super PAC ads just to have viewers watch without bothering to further discuss or problematize the power of money-speech. If Fox was actually a news network, the promotion of the Karl Rove ad would present such a clear conflict of interest, linking a media conglomerate to a Super PAC, that it would not play during a report. Only faux news can get away with such disingenuous ploys to promote conservative ideology motivated by profit. Although Fox owner Rupert Murdoch is a well-known conservative, he has publicly shown that his real interest is in making the biggest profits even if that means abandoning his ideology (Bettig & Hall, 2012). For now, Murdoch has conservative political reality cornered, and it was used to alert conservatives to otherwise unknown new Super PACs. The first was aimed at not supporting any Republican candidates but rather at opposing Barack Obama.

PACking In Conservatism

To promote a new Super PAC, Special Operations for America, Sean Hannity invited its founder, Montana State Senator Ryan Zinke, for an interview. Hannity explained Zinke's rationale for the Super PAC's creation: "Now we have heard anonymous reports for over a year that members of the special ops community are not happy with President Obama. Now they argue that he politicized the killing of Osama Bin Laden. He exposed the identity of special ops units. He jeopardized the safety of our troops, their families and our overall national security" (Hannity, 2012c). In the brief interview, Zinke and Hannity suggested that Bin Laden's assassination should have been credited to President Bush for his use of torture, which they referred to as "enhanced interrogations" because without the techniques, the intel to find him would not have existed. Zinke concluded that his motivation for creating the PAC that had purchased Nascar 32 in a Sprint race was "God and country" (Hannity, 2012c).

The second new Super PAC story appeared on Your World with Neil Cavuto. Its founder and former Ohio Secretary of State, Kenneth Blackwell, was invited to the studio just as Zinke was. Blackwell explained the Super PAC, Defend Paul Ryan, "It is about making sure that the opposition and Obama forced don't define, distort and destroy Paul Ryan's record and his chances of becoming Mitt Romney's Vice President" (Cavuto, 2012b). Much of Fox's coverage presented President Obama as a power hungry self-promoter whose ability to persuade should be feared by Republicans. For example, after *The New York Times* revealed there had been canceled plans for a Restore Our Future ad about Reverend Jeremiah Wright, Hannity claimed that the Obama campaign was panicked and the Romney campaign disagreed with the ad's premise. Hannity responded that the ad should have been produced:

Now, Governor Romney, I have to respectfully disagree with you. Now, I do believe the economy, jobs, National Security are by far the most pressing issue facing the country today. I also feel that every candidate, though, needs to be fully vetted. Now, that's something the mainstream media failed to do back in 2008 with Barack Obama. And I believe that the President's relationship with the Reverend Jeremiah Wright, a man that influenced him for over 20 years, inspired him is a very important campaign issue.

(Hannity, 2012c)

The following day on “The Five,” the Jeremiah Wright story was used to paint Romney as a victim of religious bias. Fox sourced a clip from Martin Bashir’s MSNBC show: “Do Republicans really want to start talking about religious influence on candidates? Do they really want us to talk about Mitt Romney whose part of a religious group that has been one of the most racially segregated in the history of this country...You are now putting Mormonism on the table. You are now putting on the table how African Americans were treated by the Mormon religion” (Perino, Bolling, Tantaros, Marshall, & Gutfeld, 2012). The five pundits went on to discuss how Bashir and his guest’s comments would be treated if they had been holding up a Koran instead of The Book of Mormon and suggested that Obama supporters think it is in bad taste to discuss Reverend Wright, but legitimate to question Romney’s faith. Eric Bolling conferred with Hannity, “Here’s what I think the Romney camp should do – let the Super PACs deal with this because it’s relevant. I mean, it really outlines President Obama who spent 20 years with this Reverend Wright who is of questionable character” (Perino, Bolling, Tantaros, Marshall, & Gutfeld, 2012). The panel went on discuss sound bytes and previous conference attendences that they find proves Obama to be a socialist. Like that vast majority of Fox coverage, the discussion of the Jeremiah Wright ad plan was presented only by punditry and opinion shows, and it was

suggested that the place of Super PACs is to produce dirty ads while allowing the candidate's hands to be free. If the ad had been released, Romney could have rejected it, benefitted, and kept his hands and reputation clean. Even if the Fox had compelling evidence that Obama was a socialist who worshipped Reverend Wright, many would likely disregard the messages due to the style of delivery. Fox News entertainment ends the cable analysis portion. The next section will seek to draw conclusions about themes and ideology and answer how cable and broadcast compare in their coverage of Super PACs.

6.5 Cable Conclusions: The Public Loses Again

Although expert journalists were often given time to speak to the history of campaign finance in cable coverage, only four of the 96 stories focused on the role of Super PACs in the election. In the other 92 stories, Super PACs were secondary to an election conflict or concentration on spending. One cannot expect the media to continually replay the same informative story on Super PACs, but somewhere in the coverage, opposition and possibilities for reform should have been explored in detail. As there is strong opposition and a movement for a Constitutional Amendment outlawing outside money in elections, the implications of the finding that only one NPR story covered protests of Citizens United will be detailed in the next chapter.

In comparison to broadcast and public news coverage, cable coverage had much in common. Women and Democrats were greatly underrepresented as journalists, sources, and guests. Cable and broadcast both allowed Super PAC ads to determine campaign issues and to provide content within the news coverage as sources. All of the coverage did follow the master narrative although cable stuck to it the most closely. From 2011 until late January 2012, all stories concentrated on Colbert, money, donors, and mostly, Newt Gingrich's anger of Romney's

negative Super PAC tactics. In February, coverage centered on President Obama's flip flop. In the spring, the Jeremiah Wright scandal received attention, and in the summer, Obama's death ad went viral. Cable, broadcast, and public coverage perpetuated several of the same ideologies. Mostly, violent language and commentary mixed with polarizing sources and sound bytes perpetuated the myth that Democrats and Republicans are as different as two political parties could possibly be instead of drawing conclusions about why they both received large amounts of Wall Street and mogul money. None of the journalists went to great lengths to fact check ad claims, dark money, or the possible motivations of the wealthy candidate "sugar daddies" that funded the Super PACs. Failure to provide that sort of information made it much easier for reporters and commentators to pretend that there was little to no public outcry about money in elections. Real coverage and critique would not have fit with the master narratives that citizens were not that upset, money had little effect on the outcome, and that there was little anyone could do about money in politics anyway.

As can be viewed in the appendices, the biggest difference between cable and broadcast or public coverage was that cable's expert sources were rarely from independent organizations or interest groups. CNN sourced the Center For Responsive Politics, FEC representatives, Supreme Court Justices, the Campaign Legal Center, Public Citizen, and the Sunlight Foundation, but Fox News and MSNBC did not source any of these sorts of organizations. Although it seems CNN had a variety of voices, those independent groups only made up 20% of CNN's sources and 10% of all cable sources. This further shows how a regulation on the word news would help citizens recognize the difference between news and punditry. The next chapter will outline possibilities for a more deliberative, agonistic democracy and explain the type of news programming that

must accompany it to ensure an informed citizenry resulting in one person one vote, instead of one dollar one vote, elections.

CHAPTER SEVEN

IN THE INTERESTS OF OWNERS, IGNORE THE PROTESTORS

As 23% of Americans in 2014 doubt climate change, 70% of believed Saddam Hussein was responsible for 9/11, and 64% of Republicans believe Barack Obama was born in another country, a need for regulation on the term news is clear as these are all fallacies perpetuated, and sometimes created, by the types of political reality shows analyzed in the last chapter (Pappas, 2014; Froomkin, 2012). And as reality television scholars can attest (see Pozner, 2010), reality TV is anything but real. The supposedly sparring MSNBC and Fox News consistently cite each other, keeping one another in business, rather than competing for viewers and furthering their parent companies' business interests by staging the more commercial entertainment to be news. So long as they are not represented as news, these political reality shows have their place in the democratic sphere. Citizens just need a more robust and non-market driven public interest source of journalism. Today, even NPR and PBS have commercial interests albeit to a lesser extent than broadcast or cable. Broadcast and cable coverage is most problematic when one highlights what they failed, and likely meant to fail, to report on: public protest for change.

7.1 Promoting Products & Suppressing Protest

The previous two chapters explained the master narrative produced and ideologies perpetuated by correspondents and journalists regarding Super PACs on cable, broadcast, and public television news sources. But perhaps the most important finding of this dissertation is what those outlets chose not to cover. As mentioned in chapters five and six, of all of the transcripts studied, only NPR covered the Move to Amend protests on the second anniversary of the *Citizens United* decision. As discussed in the methodology section of chapter six, there were thousands of cable transcripts that mentioned Super PACs that were excluded because Super

PACs were not the main topic of coverage. To verify that no commercial television news covered the campaign finance protests, a secondary Lexis-Nexis search was conducted using the search terms “Citizens United” AND protest AND “Super PAC” in January 2012. After expanding the search to include all news, a few more stories were gathered.

If one excludes print and online sources, the search verified that only NPR covered the protests in the manner of a reporter package. A few more television transcripts did show evidence of short snippets discussing the nation-wide public demonstrations. Rachel Maddow of MSNBC discussed within her show that it was the second birthday of the Court’s ruling. Interestingly, even though pundit Maddow would be assumed to empathize with the side of the protesters, she did not interview any of them or go into detail about the number of cities or citizens involved in the movement. Her only mention of the dissenters focused on a town in Maine:

The birthday of Citizens United was today celebrated with an “Occupy the Courts” protest across country. Little Portland, Maine, where it was 26 degrees today, you can see – there were one, two, three, I think you can see we figured out, I think it’s 20 people here, maybe more. I’m starting to think the crowds over Citizens United today actually rivaled some of the crowds for the South Carolina primary. This, for example is the crowd that turned out to hear Newt Gingrich today, 25 people – so few the Gingrich campaign cancelled the speech. (Maddow & Schmidt, 2012)

The commentary did not show up in the original search because that part of the show was about Newt Gingrich’s campaign. A later portion of the show, which was included in the cable analysis, focused on the Citizens United anniversary without mentioning the protest. Even a pundit who is presented as someone who would support campaign finance reform marginalized

the protesters and concentrated on their small numbers even as she congratulated them on attending despite the weather. NPR's coverage of the demonstrators provides evidence that there were participants willing to be interviewed that were not contacted for comment.

CNN Newsroom also had a snippet that discussed Move to Amend. Once again, the mention showed pictures, but included no sound bytes from the ground or from planners:

You're now looking at some live pictures. These are protesters in front of the U.S. Supreme Court today, members of the Occupy movement. They're going to mark the two-year anniversary of a ruling that allowed for the rise of super PACs. We've been hearing a lot about those super PACs, political action committees. They raise unlimited funds for the candidates. Occupy is also planning protests outside federal courthouses around the country. (Malveaux et al., 2012a)

Neither CNN nor MSNBC explained the goals of the protest and both represented the event as one by members of Occupy, even though other organizations were present and involved in the event's preparation. There was one other national television news mention of the Move to Amend. At four o'clock the morning of the anniversary, CBS's Betty Nguyen reported a few sentences: "A protest against Super PACs at New York's Federal Courthouse has been nixed by a judge. The judge said the courthouse could not be a public forum. Occupy the courts protests are planned nationwide today. It's the second anniversary of the Supreme Court decision allowing unlimited political spending by corporations, unions and other groups" (Nguyen, Quijano, McGinnis, & Morrison, 2012). In the traditional news format, reporter packages are the most important and lead stories of the day. No commercial stations found the movement to warrant a reporter package.

As Pew studies find, most Americans rely on their local news (Olmstead, Jurkowitz, Mitchell, & Enda, 2013). Of stations that submit their transcripts to Lexis-Nexis, only one local station in Minneapolis and one in Chattanooga mentioned the protests. Both networks aired three sentences without pictures or sources. The same was true of print media. Only nine local and one national American newspaper mentioned the protests, the vast majority of them failing to cite any sources. This finding is especially problematic when one considers that five different wire services provided context and information about the protests. Newspapers and television news could have easily utilized the already-written news stories. Canadian, British, and French news sources covered the protest and even reported that some protesters were arrested, but U.S. coverage was minimal. *The Ottawa Citizen* reported the many were groups associated with the protest and sourced a Common Cause leader. The coverage, or lack of coverage, provided by commercial television news is particularly concerning when compared to the excessive amount of ad placement within the newscasts and the master narrative that assured viewers there was nothing that could be done to change campaign finance. The media has historically concentrated on protestor conflict and then promote a return to order (Bettig & Hall, 2012). According to Weaver and Scacco (2012), “Political movements, regardless of ideology, represent a threat to entrenched interests and values” (p. 62). When it comes to Super PACs, the entrenched interest of the mainstream media is to keep the outside money in elections flowing, and likely increasing every few years. Reports of backlash and promotion of anti-political advertising social movements would question future profits, not benefit media owners. Instead of providing even on story from the reformist side, commercial news just kept playing Super PAC ads, ensuring that even more citizens would view their messages.

The reliance on Super PAC ads to generate news topics further promoted the interests of those who produced the ads. This is not the sort of journalism that fosters democratic ideals. The additional airing of ads during programming and commercials commodified elections and sold democracy as a product to be marketed to consumers. The current media system has created a climate that minimizes democracy to mean the summation of votes after an extended and ad-saturated campaign season. But before one can deride the current state of the news media and its failure to provide coverage that allows the citizenry to rule their own government, democracy must be defined. The next section will explain why the news media's popularized notion that the problem with modern politics is a lack of compromise and bipartisanship is actually antithetical to democracy.

7.2 Normalized Neoliberalism

As Chantal Mouffe (2000) argues in *The Democratic Paradox*, there is a fundamental problem with the neoliberal movement championed by Milton Friedman. Mouffe (2000) writes:

What guides me is the conviction that the unchallenged hegemony of neo-liberalism represents a threat for democratic institutions. Neo-liberal dogmas about the unviolable rights of property, the all-encompassing virtues of the market and the dangers of interfering with its logics constitute nowadays the "common sense" in liberal-democratic societies and they are having a profound impact on the left, as many left parties are moving to the right and euphemistically redefining themselves as "centre-left." (p. 6)

The problem with defining oneself as center is that neoliberals tend to present themselves as above the politics of the Left or the Right. Instead, they claim to be the party of modernization and have had success attracting some working class groups who feel ignored by the two parties

even though striving for social equality has never been a part of the neoliberal platform (Mouffe, 2000).

This dissertation's research finds that one of the main ideologies preserved by television newscasters is that of two invariably different parties that represent most, if not all, Americans politically. Mainstream media exhibit a denial of political voices outside the two party system by excluding them from the conversation completely. This is likely because two radically different parties are much easier and less expensive to cover for news organizations than the much more complex political landscape that exists. By simplifying the political sphere, an easy to follow master narrative emerges that pundit voices reiterate and defend for profit. As Champlin and Knoedler (2006) explain, "The master narrative is advanced not only by complacent reporters but also by these so-called experts and pundits. The power of the master narrative is such that pundits who fail to conform by supporting or advancing the narrative will not be 'believable'...the master narrative determines expert opinion rather than the reverse" (p. 143). This misrepresentation of issues is detrimental to democratic ideals. It is unlikely that the type of news media examined here would exist in a truly democratic country. As others, such as Noam Chomsky, have said before, the current political climate of the United States has only the voting process left to defend its democratic assertion. On too many important social, economic, cultural, and political issues, policy does not match public opinion. The mainstream news media's master narrative has been honed and prostituted to conceal that truth by those decision-makers who have the wealth, knowledge, and power necessary to rule.

According to William Domhoff (1999), the status quo is upheld by two groups of citizens: the ruling class and the power elite. Domhoff (1999) defines the ruling class as the small population of powerful individuals who own a disproportionate share of wealth and enjoy

the most entitled lives. Because current policies benefit the ruling class, they select an even smaller population of individuals to run for political offices and represent their interests.

Domhoff (1999) refers to modern politicians not as public servants, but as the power elite who were chosen for us so that we may vote between them. In this scenario, the ruling class always wins elections. Domhoff identifies four processes through which the ruling class's desired results are achieved. The four processes are composed of the special interest process, which brought about media deregulation, the policy-planning process, which assures long-term capitalist class goals are met, and the candidate selection process and ideology process. The final two processes are particularly applicable to this dissertation.

Even prior to *Citizens United*, critics wrote that politicians were reliant on the ruling class to secure candidacy and nominations. Now, the ruling class can sponsor candidates through Super PACs without any contribution limits. Elections today display Domhoff's (1999) candidate selection process on steroids. Although many conservative voices amplified in this study's news coverage claim that Super PACs have improved competition in politics, they have actually just extended primary elections and guaranteed that viable candidates have already molded their platform to fit with the interests of the ruling class members who gave the largest donations. A larger number of candidates does not equal more competition, particularly when they are funded by such as small group of donors. According to *U.S. News*, 80 percent of Super PAC donations came from just 196 people (Flock, 2012). That small number equates to just .00000062% of the American population. A competitive election requires diversity of candidates. Similarly, more money donated and spent during an election does not mean that a larger number of voices were amplified. Super PACs will lead to many of the same types of people representing the same types of interests with slightly different campaign messages. As

Lawrence Lessig (2011) wrote in the *Huffington Post*, “A single large contributor is worth 100 \$50 contributors. Most incumbents thus find it easier to raise from the top down. It takes real discipline to raise from the bottom up.” Campaign finance deregulation has made it nearly impossible for a candidate who does not represent the ruling class to participate in the electoral process. According to the Brennan Center, there is little difference between the legal unlimited contributions to a Super PAC and the illegal unlimited contributions to a candidate’s campaign:

Contrary to the Supreme Court’s assumption, however, there is no reason to believe that independent spending benefiting a candidate is, in fact, less likely to lead to corruption than direct contributions. After all, political candidates want to win. From the perspective of Newt Gingrich, for example, it makes little difference whether Sheldon Adelson spends millions on supportive campaign advertisements rather than donating that money directly to the campaign—Gingrich will simply consider whether the money helped his efforts. If the money was valuable to the campaign (and in Gingrich’s case, it was essential), Adelson would be treated no differently than someone who had donated millions directly to Gingrich’s campaign committee. Except that it is illegal to make million-dollar contributions directly. (Marziani, 2012)

Some Republicans, such as Romney, stated that allowing unlimited contributions to campaigns would provide accountability for electoral advertisements, but made no mention of how the flood of money creates clear concern for political corruption.

By utilizing Super PACs and negative advertising, the ruling class can more easily accomplish the ideology process. Media conglomerate owners are no doubt members of the ruling class. Currently, they can donate to, produce, and broadcast misleading ads that promote

the favored ideologies that uphold the profitable status quo. Judging by the upswing in negative advertising by outside groups this election (from 25% in 2008 to 86% in 2012), the ruling class put their money on the assumption that citizens would be exposed to fabricated information enough that the lies would become accepted and they'd stay home on election day:

Although they rarely admit it, presidential candidates and their surrogates license their campaigns to engage in calculated forms of spin, confident that a repeated falsehood will override journalistic corrections. Attempting to discredit the fact-checking enterprise with accusations of bias is among the strategies deployed by dissembling campaigns caught in the act of shading or shredding facts. (Gottfried, Hardy, Winneg, & Jamieson, 2013, p. 1565)

The ruling class benefits from both of the ideologies that current news media are liberally biased and that the two parties are dramatically different. As long as Republicans are represented as small government champions with conservative values and Democrats as large government defenders of the poor, rather than two sides of the same pro-business coin, there is little room for other perspectives in election coverage. The most critical reporting leads the viewer to believe that the real problem is a need for bipartisanship.

The claim that there is a future in some sort of “center” politics is actually quite detrimental to democratic goals. By claiming to have the answers, neoliberals take themselves out of the competition, but the purpose of democracy is to have lively debates, not to find a consensus. That, Mouffe (2000) writes, is the “paradox” of a liberal democracy (p. 9). Liberal democracy should be described as a place for “agonistic pluralism” (Mouffe, 2000, p. 9). The more arguments and disagreements within a democracy, then perhaps, the more healthy and democratic that society actually is. “The blurring of the frontiers between left and right, far from

being an advance in a democratic direction, is jeopardizing the future of democracy,” Mouffe (2000) writes (p. 7). As Mouffe (2000) points out, there should not be hopes of bipartisanship or perfect agreements between parties within a liberal democracy, but the current news media report on these ideals rather than investigating the diverse opinions that do exist.

Supposed center politics also have a silencing effect at the polls. After one of the lowest voter turnouts, McChesney (1998) writes, “The neoliberal system therefore has an important and necessary byproduct – a depoliticized citizenry marked by apathy and cynicism” (p. 10). If neoliberals claim to have found the happy medium and the media promote that misconception, then voter turnout will continue to dwindle and American politics will stay much the same, that is, pro-business and anti-regulation. One of the main problems with neoliberalism is that it pervades American democracy almost invisibly. Neoliberalism survives by being “characterized as free market policies that encourage private enterprise and consumer choice, rewards personal responsibility, and entrepreneurial initiative and undermines the dead hand of the incompetent, bureaucratic, and parasitic government (even when well intentioned, which it rarely is)” (McChesney, 2008, p. 283). In short, neoliberalism is often referred to as simply the way things ought to be with few referring to it by name.

The current news media operate within an advertising-reliant, capitalist system that benefits monetarily from neoliberal policies. Perhaps by creating a more democratic media, U.S. democracy can move away from the conversations about finding a center and complaining about polarization and instead move towards a more pluralistic, diverse, and democratic discussion. According to media scholars, experts, and critics, there are many steps that can be taken to democratize U.S. media. Herman (1995) writes:

There are two main routes to democratizing media. One is to try to influence the mainstream media to give more room to now excluded ideas and groups. This could be done by persuasion, pressure or by legislation compelling greater access. The second route is to create and support an alternative structure of media closer to ordinary people and grassroots organizations that would replace, or at least offer an important alternative to, the mainstream media. (para. 14)

If U.S. citizens were to accept Herman's (1995) suggestions, perhaps they could begin with changing current ownership laws and enforcing public interest standards.

7.3 Re-Regulate in Favor of Human People

Although the FCC has created regulations for serving the public interest, convenience, and necessity, they go largely unenforced. Rather than evaluating news coverage and public affairs programming, the FCC concentrates on fining broadcasters for expletives and nudity. Cursing and sexuality are far from the media system's most upsetting weaknesses. The possibility of advertisers affecting news coverage and political ads commodifying elections are much more pressing issues. It may prove effective to force media industries to remove advertising from all news and children's programming on commercial stations, while requiring that they continue journalist-run news and children's programming in order to maintain their broadcast licenses (McChesney, 1998). Admittedly, the rest of the station's programming would still rely on commercialization. The lack of advertisements during certain programs would not alleviate the conflict of interest that arises in market-driven news. This principle makes the funding of an entirely public news media much more important. Although often problematic, commercial media do provide a small amount of diversity, and citizens could benefit from it being regulated and taxed to help create a treasury for public broadcasting rather than completely

disbanding it (Herman, 1995). Regulation of the word news in a network or television show name would also give some regulatory power to the FCC over cable “news” programming. The use of the word news should be directly tied to a public interest model of reporting. A regulation on the word would ensure that punditry and opinion could no longer masquerade as news and misinform citizens. Gwiasda (2001) found that less politically aware citizens are more likely to be affected by poor news coverage as they do not consume enough news programming to evaluate a message’s truthfulness. Many who work long hours to make ends meet are the citizens who are the least likely to have the free time to research candidates even though they are the ones who would most benefit from social change. The FCC should be protecting the interest of those Americans rather than the interests of the conglomerates with the money and time to hire representatives to lobby for them.

To improve the democratic process, it is also vital that the Federal Election Commission (FEC) outlaw paid political advertisements. A Constitutional Amendment could solve the issue of attack ads aimed at keeping citizens at home on Election Day and could deem Super PACs illegal. Instead, commercial media should be required to give political candidates free airtime during elections in the form of news coverage and debates (McChesney, 1998). This regulation alone could help to ensure that politicians win elections based on their qualifications rather than their wealth, which would be a true democratizing force in U.S. politics and a step at getting money out of elections. Current campaign finance law allows broadcasters to continue airing political ads even after they have proven to be inaccurate because they are protected in the name of Freedom of Speech. Separating speech and money would benefit the majority of citizens who do not have extra millions to spend to ensure their voices are heard. The forced and unpaid labor of watching political ads put on citizens by Super PACs and the media have completed the

selling of elections and commodification of democracy. The FEC and FCC ought to realize that even in a capitalist economy, there are some things that are too sacred to allow them to be sold as products.

What Would A Democratic Media Look Like?

A democratic media would likely include much of the entertainment programming that is seen today on cable and broadcasting, but it would also include educational and children's programming that is currently not available as well as independent, noncommercial, nonprofit, and student-run variety shows, music television, films, documentaries, and much, much more. There would be room for reality television, but there would also be room for investigative journalism and community programming. The existence of independent and noncommercial voices could ensure that citizens who wanted to be informed about a variety of topics would have plenty of sources to turn to. A regulation on the word news would mean citizens would no longer be duped by the cable programs that present cheap opinion and punditry as if it were fact. In a democratic media, there would still be room for Honey Boo Boo, Rush Limbaugh, and The Bachelor if people wanted to watch or listen to them, but there would also be room for thousands of other voices that citizens do not currently have access to. Herman (1995) refers to the difference between democratic and undemocratic media as the difference between a horizontal flow of communication going in both directions versus the vertical and top-down flow that Americans currently receive. If there are voices that citizens have grown tired of, only a democratic media can give them the power to replace those voices. The market driven media system relies on a system of ratings that weigh the interests of advertisers and media owners before beginning to analyze audience responses. According to Meehan (2005), current television programming is anything but the fault of viewers. What is profitable is often cheap to produce

niche programming. The more frequently that model is imitated, the fewer choices viewers have from the already homogenized options available.

Herman (1995) writes, “A democratic media is a primary condition of popular rule, hence of a genuine political democracy. Where the media are controlled by a powerful and privileged elite, whether of government leaders and bureaucrats or those from the private sector, democratic political forms and some kind of limited political democracy may exist, but not genuine democracy” (para. 1). Many who defend the current media system point to the Internet as evidence that citizens who desire diversity of viewpoints have access, but the Internet does not solve all of the problems created by commercial media.

The Promise of the Web

There is no doubt that the Internet can serve as a strong democratizing force that gives citizens political voice as well as access to millions of websites to make those voices heard. McChesney (1998b) and Herman (1995) both warn that Americans must be cautiously optimistic about the democratizing power of the Internet. McChesney (1998b) writes, “The evidence to date suggests that as the Internet becomes a commercial medium, the largest media firms are most likely to succeed. The media giants can plug digital programming from their other ventures into the Web at little cost. To generate an audience, they can promote their Web sites incessantly on their traditional media holdings” (p. 7). Indeed, Microsoft has made deals with Disney and Time Warner to give them the best online positions, and it is expected that online advertisers are given even more power over content because they have more sites from which to choose (McChesney, 1998).

Network neutrality has been threatened and attempts have been made at making the Internet more corporate and copyright friendly. January 17, 2014 marked the two-year

anniversary of the defeat of the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) and the Protect IP Act (PIPA) that would have limited citizens' online freedom (Martinez & Sasso, 2013). Unfortunately, January 2014 also marked a new D. C. Appeals Court ruling in *Verizon v. Federal Communications Commission* that eroded net neutrality. The fight continues and there is a possibility that the FCC may be able to protect Web freedom in the name of the public interest. If not, "AT&T, Verizon, and Comcast will be able to deliver some sites and services more quickly and reliably than others for *any reason*" (Hiltzik, 2014, para. 4). Those reasons could include cash bargaining from major Internet sites, or in the case of Comcast, providing the content it owns the most quickly. At least one tech report suggests that Verizon is already using the court ruling to wage "war against Netflix" (Lilly, 2014, para. 4).

Even though Internet access is not available for all as it requires some knowledge of technology, a connection, and a computer, activists must work for Internet neutrality (Herman, 1995). Because even though the representation of protesters is harmful to the status quo and often demonized by the mainstream media, the Internet served as a site for opposition to bloom. Many online news sources reported on the Move to Amend in January 2012. Perhaps due to increased diversity of competition online, networks that failed to cover the demonstrations on television posted stories about them on their websites. CNN.com, FoxNews.com, and MSNBC.com all gave space to the story online. Fortunately, the Internet is currently less affected by ideological threats to the status quo since there is an infinite amount of space available for conglomerates, citizen journalists, and alternative news alike.

Although the majority of the population relies on television news to get information, this trend is quickly changing. A recent Pew study found that most people under 50 years old get the majority of their news from online sources (Olmstead, Jurkowitz, Mitchell, & Enda, 2013). As

long as the Internet continues to have the same space available for citizens as it does for corporations, it holds promising power in providing alternative information to fill mainstream media's gaps, such as its failure to report on itself, even if it is only for those with access. But if net neutrality is turned over for good, Internet news may become much more like commercial television news. The first sources to pop up will likely be those with the money to excessively promote themselves while independent sites will require much more browsing to come across.

The Internet's innovation of information dissemination has caused concern for some citizens. A 2013 Pew study found that most citizens believe the role of professional journalists is more important today because sifting through all of the news available is just too burdensome a task. The same study found that citizens today view the media to be better living up to their role as a watchdog of those in power than in previous years, largely due to the Snowden leaks. This is problematic since the Snowden leaks are likely quite profitable for media owners. Although the issue of privacy is an important one, the news media can simply report the leak by framing it as a conflict between two groups rather than spending any time or money investigating the issue on their own. Conflicts such as NSA spying and political disagreements are used as distracting tools that result in excessive, but shallow coverage by the news industry. Inexpensive he said she said reporting then takes up time that could be used to give an outlet to dissenting voices calling for social change. It is impossible to guess how re-regulation in favor of human, rather than corporate, people would change the ideologies perpetuated by conglomerate controlled news sources, but it is clear that a more powerful public media system is necessary to democratize the media. Baker (1998) suggests that many different types of ownership would promote the interests of many more types of groups. For example, commercial ownership could still exist, but so could public and nonprofit ownership that were created for and by specific

groups of people such as African American media, Hispanic media, and environmentalist media. Diversity of ownership would “hopefully increase instances of supporters of different groups owning media entities and orienting content toward their groups’ interest” (Baker, 1998, p. 382). Baker (1998) suggests that strengthened antitrust law coupled with economic incentives could result in the media industry breaking apart its own concentration. The current system has far too much concentration, which makes the shoring up of public media one of the most pressing matters for media activists today.

The Importance of Publicly Owned Media

The current U.S. media system is in a crisis, and it is necessary that it become democratized. Currently, commercial enterprises are utilizing citizen airwaves and property at no cost and failing miserably to serve the public interest. This is not the way that it must be, but rather, it is due to a series of poor political decisions that resulted in media monopolies that consistently fail at providing diverse and quality news programming (McChesney & Nichols, 2002). McChesney and Nichols (2002) call it a “Rotten system, as corrupt and destructive as the one the mobsters constructed and we – the citizens – must change it” (p. 33). It is up to citizens, activists, and academics to continue working for antitrust laws, better regulation of commercialization, and stronger public and nonprofit media because the mainstream media are going to continue to try to distract and detract while maintaining record profits.

Americans consistently hear about a supposed “liberal media,” but it’s clear that neoliberal policies have taken over:

In the years since 1980, the political spectrum of the United States has shifted radically to the far right. What was once the center has been pushed to the left, and what was the far right is now the center. What was considered the eccentric right wing of American

politics is now considered the normal conservative outlook. What was the left is now at the far edge, barely holding its precarious position and treated in the news as a sometimes amusing oddity. (Bagdikian, 2004, p. ix)

Americans must fight the pervading message that there is no alternative to neoliberalism.

Nichols & McChesney (2005) remind citizens that there is nothing natural about the current system:

To make the journey from accepting the media status quo as inevitable to something we can and must change, we must demolish the one huge myth that has protected entrenched media power from the reckoning it so richly deserves: the notion that our media system is a free market system, a system ordained by the Founding Fathers (if not an even higher force), and protected from public intervention by the First Amendment to the Constitution. (p. 173)

In actuality, the current media system is not a free market system. The media were simply re-regulated to benefit media owners rather than citizens. Media conglomerates enjoy government handouts, beneficial copyright laws, and protection for their monopoly power (Nichols & McChesney, 2005). Interestingly, after defeating Japan in World War II, the United States required that Japan create a public, noncommercial media because “the American occupying forces declared publicly that no modern democracy should be without one” (Bagdikian, 2004, p. 259). It is time that the United States begin following its own mandates.

The neoliberal voice is beneficial to many of those in power who have come to their elected or appointed positions by having the right amount of money or by knowing the right groups of people. The neoliberal voice ought to be out there, but it should not be the only voice allowed, and it certainly should not be privileged to the point of making other opinions seem

unpatriotic. Jhally (1989) argues that capitalism can oppress society: “We should recognize that the marketplace does not automatically ensure diversity, but that (as in the example of the United States) the marketplace can also act as a serious constraint to freedom” (p. 81). Further, a news media that benefits corporate or government interests over the interests of its people is a mainstay in authoritarian governments (Jhally, 1989).

Large political donors and politicians too often benefit from the non-investigative and deficient commercial news media. Neoliberalism is actually quite far to the right of what would be considered “center” politics. Further, those who truly identify as centrist do not enjoy an area where no one can disagree with them; rather, the center is an area for both the leftists and the rightists to antagonize and that is exactly what true democracy requires: agonistic pluralism, not some sort of faux and misguided consensus.

7.4 Coverage Conclusions

The master narratives utilized by journalists to cover Super PACs and other important news topics have far reaching implications. This political economic analysis concludes that the commercial and even the slightly less commercial public news coverage analyzed here furthers the already problematic messages relating to a variety of issues including the environment, women and minority representation, American exceptionalism, media literacy, and the lack of other critical discourse in both schools and society.

Environmentalist groups and individuals have spoken out against the *Citizens United* decision, but were completely ignored by commercial media. Environmentalists realistically fear that unlimited money will be used to promote an anti-regulation agenda that will leave the environment even more unprotected from corporate destruction. This perspective was drowned out by the discussions of wealthy donors and neoliberal propaganda.

Women were represented in the coverage in alarmingly low numbers. This finding was in line with a 4th Estate (2012b) study found that women usually comprised less than 20% of sources in election coverage even when the story focused on women's issues. The elimination of women as experts on serious political topics promotes the commercial industry's commodification of femininity and its importance placed on consumption to maintain appearances. Fox News is famous for its buxom blondes used to read off of the teleprompters, but no women were represented in the anchoring or reporting of Super PAC packages. The use of women as objects to look at rather than respected sources to listen to further promotes the ideology that women should focus on makeup, shopping, and cleaning since they are much better represented in cosmetics, clothing, and home care advertisements in between stories than they are by news programming. This lack of representation allows men to remain the experts and decision-makers and women who try to make it into politics are easily cut down by voices who focus on her appearance, voice, or past as a cheerleader or beauty queen.

Unsurprisingly, the only negative comment about the United States that found a place in the news coverage was referred to as a shocking display of un-Americanism. The Reverend Wright comments about United States military intervention were replayed as evidence that he is a crazy and frightening influence on his congregation. As one of only a handful of African-American sources, the handling of his statements was particularly problematic as he and Herman Cain were left to represent an entire race and both were presented as immoral and dishonest.

The media messages that promote American exceptionalism are particularly commercial. Critical discussion is rarely allowed on a national platform. This is also evidenced by underfunded schools that have been forced to allow branded soda and candy machines as well as the commercialized Channel One into their doors. At the same time, corporations and local

businesses are partnering with schools and universities and purchasing naming rights to promote business oriented classes that teach job skills rather than critical thinking skills. The poor funding of public schools furthers the media and ruling class's power because few children and citizens have been taught media literacy and instead depend on the media industry that they know little about to inform them. When critical thinking isn't taught and critical voices aren't amplified, it is considered radical to question those in power and creates a climate where neoliberal school privatization schemes are possible. The media coverage analyzed here fostered the idea that we as citizens must respect all decisions made by politicians, regulators (or de-regulators), and judges. The only citizen recourse presented is voting and writing the representatives already elected, which puts little pressure on the power elite to bow to public opinion, particularly when the media monopoly rarely holds them accountable and upholds the powerful and the rich as examples of success.

This dissertation aims to add to scholarly research on the political economy of media, media texts, political communication, election coverage, and media law. Although theory and method were carefully applied to offer a critical analysis of Super PAC coverage and the messages presented, there were several limitations in the study.

Limitations of Transcripts

The theory and method of political economy and the method of textual analysis do not lend themselves to knowledge about viewer reception. Critiques of the transcripts could also vary from how audiences received the original live video format of the newscasts. Data collection also assumed that Lexis-Nexis had a full population of the news transcripts and that the transcript generators themselves spelled all of the search terms correctly. Any incorrect spellings would have resulted in a failure to be collected and analyzed. Due to the large number

of cable transcripts returned from the original source, all cable coverage was not analyzed. Only cable shows with Super PACs in the headline, subject, or lead lines were downloaded, which greatly reduced the number of transcripts studied from all three cable networks.

Because transcripts instead of video were utilized as the text, some sources were titled “unidentified male” or “unidentified female.” Without video access, race representation in the coverage could not be accurately evaluated. Similarly, NPR’s transcripts stated “(political ad)” instead of providing a written record of which ad played. Due to the omission, the number of times individual Super PAC ads were played could not be quantified and the study cannot determine which ads’ messages were most reinforced by the coverage. This research does not provide a comparison to any news sources that are completely free of market driven goals, but does provide evidence that the less-commercialized NPR had moderately superior coverage to the commercial networks in terms of diversity of viewpoints provided and length of discussions, suggesting that ownership does matter in news coverage. Further, MSNBC and Fox News coverage was so lacking, this study provides evidence that a regulation of the word news would serve the public interest.

Future Research Possibilities

Future research could compare the current media and money election complex to coverage of a more democratic 2016 election. If not, spending will likely continue to skyrocket and impact elections in a way that may never be fully understood, since we as researchers, citizens, and critics cannot guess what election results would be without all that money changing hands. Studies of audience reception, ad persuasiveness, and a comparison of how many times ads played as commercials versus as news content on each network would complement and

further this research. Studies of campaign finance protestation from 2010 on and its effects on reform are also necessary. There are a plethora of opportunities to research campaign finance, and it is important that researchers do so until meaningful change is achieved. Investigative research into donations and motivations for buying political speech, anonymously or with disclosure, would be helpful for citizens who must sift through the Super PAC advertisements. Further research must also examine the gap between public opinion and campaign finance policy. With more research, citizens can arm themselves with the information they need to force a discussion about corruption, money, and democratic ideals.

It's Time to Frame our own Fight

This research provides further evidence for the critical view that the U.S. constitutional republic model is not democratic and the current two party system does not accurately represent the views of its citizens. Popular discussion of a democratic institution is a market creation that has expanded in light of pro-business deregulation at the expense of the public interest.

Television news relies on print media for investigation and sticks to a cheap and dirty model of news coverage, often resorting to entertainment or punditry to fill time and distract from more complex issues. Super PACs do not increase competition, but rather further homogenizes the sort of politicians who can gather enough funding to have a chance at candidacy. Super PACs are the most corrupt political creation in the past 20 years, but will likely prove to be very effective at maintaining the status quo and Domhoff's (1999) candidate selection and ideology processes. As has been the case historically, meaningful change in campaign finance and political representation will have to rise from the bottom up through a radical social movement. To use the idea of Jhally (1989), U.S. citizens must refuse to consent to a life of domination. Money is not speech and a participatory and agonistic democracy would never have equated the

two in the first place. The ruling class and their power elite are not going to help us democratize elections or the media. It is up to the majority of citizens who oppose political corruption to take back elections and demand both a reversal of *Citizens United* and a transformation of news media ownership and diversity.

APPENDIX A

BROADCAST & PUBLIC SOURCING

ANCHORS:

1. RUSS MITCHELL PM
2. Scott Pelley PM
3. Chris Wragge, Erica Hill AM
4. CHRIS WRAGGE AM
5. JIM AXELROD AM
6. Scott Pelley PM
7. SCOTT PELLELY PM
8. SCOTT PELLELY PM
9. CHARLIE ROSE & ERICA HILL AM
10. CHARLES OSGOOD AM
11. SCOTT PELLELY PM
12. Charlie Rose & Erica Hill AM
13. Scott Pelley PM
14. BETTY NGUYEN AM
15. Scott Pelley PM
16. SCOTT PELLELY PM
17. Betty Nguyen AM
18. SCOTT PELLELY PM
19. ANTHONY MASON PM
20. CHARLIE ROSE & ERICA HILL AM
21. SCOTT PELLELY PM
22. TERRELL BROWN AM
23. GAYLE KING AM
24. TERRELL BROWN AM
25. SCOTT PELLELY PM
26. SCOTT PELLELY PM
27. ROBIN ROBERTS, GEORGE STEPHANOPOULOS
28. CHRISTIANE AMANPOUR AM
29. DIANE SAWYER
30. JOSH ELLIOTT, ELIZABETH VARGAS
31. DIANE SAWYER
32. DAVID MUIR
33. DAVID MUIR
34. DIANE SAWYER
35. GEORGE STEPHANOPOULOS
36. GEORGE STEPHANOPOULOS, ROBIN ROBERTS
37. DIANE SAWYER
38. DIANE SAWYER
39. BRIAN WILLIAMS
40. ANN CURRY, CARL QUINTANILLA

41. BRIAN WILLIAMS
42. MATT LAUER, ANN CURRY
43. LESTER HOLT, AMY ROBACH
44. BRIAN WILLIAMS
45. CARL QUINTANILLA, ANN CURRY
46. BRIAN WILLIAMS
47. BRIAN WILLIAMS
48. LYNN NEARY
49. ROBERT SIEGEL
50. DAVID GREENE
51. RENEE MONTAGNE
52. STEVE INSKEEP, DAVID GREENE
53. STEVE INSKEEP
54. DAVID GREENE
55. DAVID GREENE
56. STEVE INSKEEP
57. STEVE INSKEEP
58. LINDA WERTHEIMER
59. RENEE MONTAGNE
60. RENEE MONTAGNE
61. STEVE INSKEEP
62. RICHARD REEVES
63. BRIAN WILLIAMS

REPORTERS:

1. WYATT ANDREWS
2. DEAN REYNOLDS CBS CORRESPONDENT
3. WYATT ANDREWS
4. WYATT ANDREWS
5. WYATT ANDREWS
6. Jan Crawford CBS CORRESPONDENT
7. JAN CRAWFORD
8. CHIP REID CBS CORRESPONDENT
9. DEAN REYNOLDS
10. DEAN REYNOLDS
11. WYATT ANDREWS
12. ARMEN KETEYIAN (CBS News Chief Investigative Correspondent)
13. ARMEN KETEYIAN
14. SUSAN MCGINNIS
15. NORAH O'DONNELL
16. WYATT ANDREWS
17. NANCY CORDES
18. WYATT ANDREWS
19. ANTHONY MASON
20. BILL PLANTE
21. WYATT ANDREWS

22. NANCY CORDES
23. NANCY CORDES
24. MANUEL GALLEGUS
25. NANCY CORDES
26. NANCY CORDES
27. JAKE TAPPER
28. JONATHAN KARL
29. JONATHAN KARL
30. JONATHAN KARL
31. DAVID MUIR
32. JONATHAN KARL
33. BRIAN ROSS
34. DAVID MUIR
35. JONATHON KARL
36. DAVID MUIR
37. JAKE TAPPER
38. DAVID MUIR
39. CHUCK TODD
40. CHUCK TODD
41. MICHAEL ISIKOFF
42. PETER ALEXANDER
43. MICHELLE FRANZEN
44. TEDD KOPPEL
45. MICHAEL ISIKOFF
46. CHUCK TODD
47. WILLIE GEIST
48. Don Gonyea
49. BRIAN NAYLOR
50. NEDA ULABY
51. BRIAN NAYLOR
52. JULIE ROVNER
53. PETER OVERBY
54. PETER OVERBY
55. PETER OVERBY
56. GREG ALLEN
57. KATE WELLS
58. BRYAN NAYLOR
59. KATHY LOHR
60. BRIAN NAYLOR
61. PETER OVERBY
62. PETER ALEXANDER

SOURCING IN PACKAGES

1. MITT ROMNEY: All right. Thank you. Good to see you.
2. PETER STONE: He went to the dinner. He spoke briefly at the dinner. (Center for Public Integrity)

3. STEVEN LAW: The money is nothing new. American Crossroads, president Steven Law
LW
4. NEWT GINGRICH, GOP PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE NEWT GINGRICH, GOP
PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: If you see one of these candidates who's running
negative ads, ask them to stop it. Just look them in the eye and say it's unworthy of Iowa
and it's unworthy of America.
 - a. GINGRICH: I don't object to being outspent, I object to lies.
 - b. GINGRICH: In the short run, they work, sure. Unanswered, negative ads work in
the short run.
5. MITT ROMNEY (R-Presidential Candidate; Morning Joe, MSNBC): It's illegal as you
probably now. Super PACs have to be entirely separate from a campaign and a candidate.
I'm not allowed to communicate with the Super PAC in any way.
6. NEWT GINGRICH (R-Presidential Candidate): We got to understand these are his
people running his ads, doing his dirty work while he pretends to be above it.
7. MITT ROMNEY: I think it's a disaster by the way. Campaign finance law has made a-- a
mockery of our-- of our political campaign season. We really ought to let campaigns raise
the money they need and just get rid of these Super PACs.
8. MITT ROMNEY (R-Presidential Candidate): That's the nature of-- of a campaign, to
point out distinctions with one another.
 - a. MITT ROMNEY: You know, if you can't stand the relatively modest heat in-- in
the kitchen right now, wait until Obama's hell's kitchen shows up.
 - b. MIT ROMNEY: And we have a President who is a nice guy, but doesn't
understand America.
 - c. MIT ROMNEY: Filet Mignon with some brie, is that it back here? What's going
on?
 - d. MITT ROMNEY: Yeah, some arugula-- some arugula. That's the John Kerry bus,
back there. I'm sorry.
9. NEWT GINGRICH (R-Presidential Candidate): I can take the heat plenty well.
 - a. NEWT GINGRICH: They've hurt my feelings. And when you ask how I've been
affected it-- maybe feel me.
 - b. NEWT GINRICH: Go back and ask Mister-- Governor Romney, would he like to
come and play in the kitchen? I don't think so. I don't think he wants to do
anything except hide over here and pretend it's not his fault that he is flooding the
people of Iowa with falsehoods.
10. MITT ROMNEY: Exactly right, and show people that I'm not sitting back ass-- assuming
people will vote for me because they like my ads.
11. NEWT GINGRICH (R-Presidential Candidate): I'm happy to go all over Iowa and point
out that he doesn't mind hiding behind millions of dollars of negative ads, but he doesn't
want to defend them.
 - a. NEWT GINGRICH: We're coming together very fast in Iowa and I suspect we'll
be very, very competitive. My goal is to be in the top three or four.
12. REPRESENTATIVE RON PAUL (R-Presidential Candidate): Well, I feel obligated to
tell people about what-- what his positions have been and how he has flip-flopped and
been-- on-- on different issues.
13. MITT ROMNEY: My goodness what a squeaker, but it sure is nice to have a win, I'll tell
you.

- a. ROMNEY: Thank you, Iowa.
- 14. SEN. JOHN MCCAIN, (R), ARIZONA: I think candidates always complain, you don't like to see that kind of thing, unfortunately it is what it is today particularly with these outside, quote, super PACs.
- 15. JON HUNTSMAN, FORMER GOVERNOR OF UTAH: Governor Romney enjoys firing people. I enjoy creating jobs.
- 16. GINGRICH: Bain at times engaged in behavior where they looted a company.
- 17. MITT ROMNEY: There were a couple of times I wondered whether I was going to get a pink slip.
 - a. ROMNEY: Like anybody that starts at the bottom of an enterprise you wonder when you don't do so well, whether you're going to be able to hang on your job.
 - b. ROMNEY: I like being able to fire people that provide services to me.
 - c. ROMNEY: I believe in this setting as I described this morning, where people are able to choose their own doctor, choose their own insurance company, if they don't like their insurance company or their provider they get rid of them.
- 18. RICK PERRY, GOP PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: With all the jobs that they killed, I'm sure he was worried he'd run out of pink slips.
- 19. NEWT GINGRICH, FORMER HOUSE SPEAKER: I think if he wants to counterbalance Romney's millionaires, I have no objection to him counterbalancing Romney's millionaires.
 - a. NEWT GINGRICH, FORMER HOUSE SPEAKER: I think if he wants to counterbalance Romney's millionaires, I have no objection to him counterbalancing Romney's millionaires.
- 20. PETER STONE, CENTER FOR PUBLIC INTEGRITY: Both sides are arming themselves to the teeth with millionaire friends..
 - a. STONE: So we have a fund-raising war, we have a negative advertising war being underwritten by super-rich friends of the candidates.
- 21. STEPHEN COLBERT (Host, The Colbert Report, Comedy Central): So is Mitt Romney a serial killer? I don't know. But that question's out there now.
 - a. STEPHEN COLBERT (This Week, ABC News): They said you can't go to the moon. They said you can't put cheese inside a pizza crust. But NASA did it. They had to because the cheese kept on floating off in space.
 - b. STEPHEN COLBERT (This Week, ABC News): They said you can't go to the moon. They said you can't put cheese inside a pizza crust. But NASA did it. They had to because the cheese kept on floating off in space.
 - c. STEPHEN COLBERT: You know, I'm-- I'm exploring right now. I'm a one-man Lewis and Clark and I'm just looking for my Sacagawea. When you are exploring you don't know what you're going to find.
- 22. PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA: With all due deference to separation of powers, last week the Supreme Court reversed a century of law that I believe will open the floodgates for special interests.
- 23. STEVEN COLBERT: Anybody who knows me knows that I've believed in the message of Herman Cain for several days now.
- 24. NEWT GINGRICH, GOP PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: There will be an executive order about two hours after the inaugural address. We will send the embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem as of that day.

- a. GINGRICH: We've had an invented Palestinian people who are in fact Arabs.
25. GEORGE HARRIS: And I can promise you something -- Mr. Adelson doesn't ask anybody for anything. I don't believe there's any quid pro quo for this money at all.
26. STEPHEN COLBERT (The Colbert Report, Comedy Central): Even if the singing is all he's got, no other candidate can match his voice. At least in the last election, we had John McCain and his old singing group. And he might have won, if that house hadn't landed on his running mate.
27. JAMES BOPP (Attorney): Unfortunately, there's not enough information out there. People don't know the name of their congressman. They don't know name of their vice president, much less what their policies are. So we need much more spending in order to have informed voting.
28. MITT ROMNEY (R-Presidential Candidate): He said he deserves a second term. Can you believe that?
29. NEWT GINGRICH (R-Presidential Candidate): I think we need a very big change.
30. PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA: The Supreme Court reversed a century of law that I believe will open the floodgates for special interests.
31. BARACK OBAMA, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA: All across America special interests have pored millions of dollars into phony front groups. You've seen them. They're called "The Americans for Prosperity." "Moms for Motherhood."
32. ELLEN MILLER: It doesn't seem to me it could be anymore brazen than having a campaign manager tell the world that it is OK for them to contribute to the super PACs. I mean, you can't get more coordinated than that.
- a. MILLER: Absolutely. These independent committees are run by very close associates of all the candidates and that ties them even closer to the candidates' campaigns.
- b. MILLER: This is clearly one of those Washington situations where with a wink and a nod you can do almost anything.
33. FORMER GOV. MITT ROMNEY, GOP PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: Florida, you're the best!
34. STEWART ROY: I think the Super PACs have gotten more sophisticated in terms of online, in terms of advocacy efforts, from the phones and mail. And they are operating much more like a-- like a-- a full campaign would operate.
- a. STEWART ROY: In this particular situation, ironically in-- in the eyes of a lot of people, you have had candidates who are now competitive who otherwise would not have been.
35. JULIAN ROBERTSON: I have never met a man that I think is more equipped to be president than Mitt Romney.
- a. ROBERTSON: I want a great president of the United States. That's what I want.
- b. ROBERTSON: Yes, sir. I want my grandchildren to have a better place in which to live.
- c. ROBERTSON: I thought excellent. And I'm a part of that. And he won.
- d. ROBERTSON: Absolutely not.
- e. ROBERTSON: No, not in the least.

- f. ROBERTSON: I would expect Mitt Romney to speak to me occasionally, because I think he respects me. I don't think he would ever say I owe Julian Robertson a call because he contributed to my PAC.
36. MITT ROMNEY: I want to get Dodd-Frank out of there, want to get rid of it.
37. BOB FARMER: You have a few very wealthy billionaires calling the shots.
- a. BOB FARMER: Romney has gained the nomination, and as the race tightens, I think his supporters will really around, and I think he'll have plenty of money.
 - b. BOB FARMER: I think there's a point of diminish returns. By the beginning of November, when Election Day comes, everybody is going to be so sick and tired of all these negative ads.
38. JACK COBB (Obama For America): It was like a vampire, they came in and sucked the life out of us.
39. PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA (The View ABC/BarWall): JPMorgan is one of the best- managed banks there is. Jamie Dimon, the-- the-- the head of it, is one of the smartest bankers we got and they still lost two billion dollars and counting. We don't know all the details yet. It's going to be investigated, but this is why we passed Wall Street reform.
40. STEPHANIE CUTTER (Obama Campaign Senior Adviser): Mitt Romney wants to undo all those protections. He wants to roll-- roll back Wall Street Reform.
41. ROMNEY: Thank you so much!
42. OBAMA: I'm Barack Obama, and I approve this message.
43. PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA: If you look at the overall trajectory of our campaign and the ads that I have approved and are produced by my campaign, you'll see that we point out sharp differences between the candidates but we don't go out-of-bounds. And when it comes to releasing taxes, that's a precedent that was set decades ago, including by Governor Romney's father.
- a. PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA: I don't think that Governor Romney is somehow responsible for the death of the woman that was portrayed in that ad. But keep in mind, this is an ad that I didn't put ap-- approve, I did not produce, and as far as I can tell has barely run.
44. MITT ROMNEY (R-Presidential Candidate; on phone): The various fact checkers look at some of these charges in their-- in the Obama ads, and they say that they're wrong and-- and inaccurate, and yet he keeps on just running them.
45. PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA (Wednesday): Basically, they only have one ad. It's just a variation on the same ad, which is--the economy is not where it should be and it's Obama's fault.
46. FRANK LUNTZ (Former Republican Strategist): It's one thing to be negative. It's another thing to demonize your opponent.
- a. FRANK LUNTZ: Some of these ads are designed to get the base engaged and involved, because in the end the undecided vote is so small that the goal is turnout.
47. TIM PHILLIPS: You have to have a ground game that matches the left door to door, neighborhood to neighborhood.
- a. PHILLIPS: They're now going back to states like Florida and Ohio and Michigan and Colorado, and they're going to keep doing the same grass-roots work, educating folks candidly on President Obama's disastrous economic record and what folks can do about it.

48. NEWT GINGRICH (2012 REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE) I'll tell you is I'm gonna stay positive. I'm gonna talk about how we solve the country's problem. And I have one opponent, Barack Obama.
49. MATTHEW DOWD (ABC NEWS) (Off-camera) You have a president that is as vulnerable as any president since Jimmy Carter. But there's no Ronald Reagan in the field.
50. MITT ROMNEY (REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE) I have been married to the same woman for 25 - excuse me, I'll get in trouble - for 42 years.
51. MITT ROMNEY (REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE) I think you compare that to Pearl Harbor? I think it's more like Lucille Ball at the chocolate factory. So, I mean, you know, you got to get it organized.
52. NEWT GINGRICH (2012 REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE) All I'd say Mitt is, if you wanna run a negative campaign and you want to attack people, at least be man enough to own it. That's your staff, and that's your organization. Those are your friends paying for it.
53. MITT ROMNEY (2012 REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE) My goodness, if, if we coordinate in any way whatsoever, we go to the big house.
- I think he compared that to, what's it, Pearl Harbor? I, I think it's more like Lucille Ball at the chocolate factory.
54. WOLF BLITZER (HOST OF "THE SITUATION ROOM")
- If he were to get the Republican nomination...
 - NEWT GINGRICH (2012 REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE)
 - He won't.
 - WOLF BLITZER (HOST OF "THE SITUATION ROOM")
 - Let's say he were, could you vote for him?
 - NEWT GINGRICH (2012 REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE)
 - No.
55. MITT ROMNEY (REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE) Well, Speaker Gingrich's support has fallen off, I think more broadly than just here in Iowa.
- I think the reason for the Speaker's decline across the country and in New Hampshire is something he can address.
 - I think the gap between his promises and his performance is the largest I've seen, well, since the Kardashian wedding.
 - Sometimes people offer a suggestion to me. Other times they were my own. My favorite, by the way, was the "I love Lucy" line.
 - That was mine, all by myself.
 - I got advice from one of my friends on the bus.
 - Oh no, absolutely not.
 - Absolutely.
56. STEPHEN COLBERT (HOST OF THE COLBERT SHOW) I am forming an exploratory committee to lay the groundwork for my possible candidacy for the president of the United States of South Carolina. I'm doing it. Drop them, Jimmy.
- And God bless Citizens United.
57. NEWT GINGRICH (REP) (PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE)
- That is pretty clear if you look at the volume of ads, I have an opponent who has money power, and we need people power to offset money power.
58. HERMAN CAIN (FORMER REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE)

- a. Surprise, surprise.
- 59. SEAN SPICER (REPUBLICAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE)
 - a. It is not.
- 60. PETER PASI (REPUBLICAN POLITICAL CONSULTANT)
 - a. They're being scammed, duped, ripped off, whatever word you want to use.
- 61. JIM (RETIREE)
 - a. I'm stunned that the contribution I made didn't go where I wanted it to go.
- 62. DONALD (SOUTH HADLEY RESIDENT)
 - a. I don't want to talk to him. I don't want anything to do with him. I want him off my property.
- 63. MITT ROMNEY (REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL NOMINEE) The question in this campaign is not who cares about the poor and the middle class. I do. He does. The question is who can help the poor and the middle class. I can. He can't. He's proven it in four years.
 - a. And so my job is not to worry about those people. I'll never convince them that they should take personal responsibility and care for their lives.
- 64. REPRESENTATIVE PAUL RYAN (REPUBLICAN VICE PRESIDENTIAL NOMINEE): He was obviously inarticulate in making this point, and the point we're trying to make here is under the Obama economy government dependency is up and economic stagnation is up.
- 65. PEDESTRIAN (FLORIDA) Was it a poor choice of words? Probably inarticulate. But I don't - I'm not offended by that.
- 66. ANDREW SMALL (FLORIDA) Oh, I think it's just like anything, you're a little bit shocked that someone would say something like that.
- 67. PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA (UNITED STATES) You will see more negative ads. I mean, these Super-PACs, these guys are writing \$10 million checks, giving them to Mr Romney's supporters and...
- 68. SPOKESPERSON (SUPER-PAC)
 - a. What this ad does is it tells a story that one guy and the impact that Mitt Romney had...
 - b. REPORTER (CNN)
 - c. But it's misleading to tell.
 - d. SPOKESPERSON (SUPER-PAC)
 - e. Well, this is your opinion.
- 69. RICK SANTORUM (2012 REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE) Unlike Governor Romney, we have a track record of running as an authentic conservative and winning in the states that are hard to win as conservatives.
- 70. BILL ALLISON (SUNLIGHT FOUNDATION) Under the old rules, a candidate like Newt Gingrich might have had to drop out much earlier because of fundraising.
- 71. Former Representative SUSAN MOLINARI (Republican, Romney Supporter): (From "The Daily Rundown") I think there are those people in Washington who have worked with Newt and who know Newt, for better or for worse, who feel, quite frankly, that we have an obligation to talk about what our experiences are.
- 72. Representative TOM COLE: (From MSNBC/"The Daily Rundown") The speaker, you know, is a--is a pretty polarizing figure on occasion. Not just, you know, in the broad political sense but personally.

73. Former Representative NEWT GINGRICH: (From CNN/"The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer): I wasn't there in a collegial job. I was there as the leader and my job was to drive through change on a scale that Washington wasn't comfortable with.
74. Mr. RUSH LIMBAUGH: (From "The Rush Limbaugh Show") Republican primary voters are finally saying to the establishment, 'We're not doing it your way this time.'
75. Former Representative NEWT GINGRICH: If you see one of these candidates who's running negative ads, ask them to stop it. Just look them in the eye and say, "It's unworthy of Iowa and it's unworthy of America."
- Rep. GINGRICH: His comments today are palpably misleading, clearly false and are politics in its worst form.
76. Former Governor MITT ROMNEY: (From "Morning Joe") Super PACs have to be entirely separate from a campaign and a candidate. I'm not allowed to communicate with a super PAC in any way, shape or form.
- Gov. ROMNEY: It's--my goodness, if we coordinate in any way whatsoever we go to the big house.
 - Gov. ROMNEY: I'm tired of a president who wakes up every day, looks out across America, and is proud to announce, "It could be worse." If I'm president, I will wake up every day and remind Americans that not only must we do better, but also that we can do better.
 - (Clip of MSNBC)
 - Former Governor MITT ROMNEY: I'm not allowed to communicate with a super PAC in any way, shape or form.
 - Mr. JOE SCARBOROUGH: So you're not coordinating in any way whatsoever.
 - Gov. ROMNEY: It's--my goodness, if we coordinate in any way whatsoever, we go to the big house.
77. Mr. CHARLES SPIES (Restore Our Future Treasurer): He has spoken at Restore Our Future fundraising dinners. We haven't had contact with him or his campaign in months, and is not involved in our messaging.
78. Gov. ROMNEY: (From MSNBC) Candidates can support the effort in terms of helping in fundraising, but they cannot, in any way, communicate a course of advertising, what's in the content of the ads.
79. Former Representative NEWT GINGRICH: (Tuesday) We ought to understand these are his people running his ads, doing his dirty work while he pretends to be above it.
80. Mr. TREVOR POTTER (Campaign Legal Center President): This entire election becomes about who has more billionaire friends who can give to these super PACs.
81. Former Governor MITT ROMNEY: Gosh, this feels like coming home to old friends.
82. Former Representative NEWT GINGRICH: I'm just asking questions and I'm shocked--I'm shocked at how defensive they are.
83. Governor RICK PERRY: Listen, I love capitalism.
- Gov. PERRY: They're vulture capitalists.
 - Gov. PERRY: I--look, Romney's running for president and his record is the one that has to be...
 - Gov. PERRY: Correct. And I don't have a problem with that.
84. Mr. STEPHEN COLBERT: (From Comedy Central's "The Colbert Report") Clearly, my fellow South Carolanians see me as the only viable Mitternative.

- a. Mr. COLBERT: (From Comedy Central's "The Colbert Report") I am forming an exploratory committee to lay the groundwork for my possible candidacy for the president of the United States of South Carolina. I'm doing it! Drop them to me! Whoo!
85. Mr. STEPHEN COLBERT: (From "The Colbert Report," January 12, 2012) For my possible candidacy for the president of the United States of South Carolina. I'm doing it!
- a. Mr. COLBERT: (From file footage) I want to form Colbert super PAC for all the PAC-less Americans.
 - b. Unidentified Man: (From "The Colbert Report," January 12, 2012) You can't have the PAC. You could have it run by somebody else.
 - c. Mr. COLBERT: (From "The Colbert Report," January 12, 2012) I think there may be a guy. Jon:
 - d. Mr. COLBERT: (From "Rock Center") A PAC can only take so much money; it can only spend so much money. And I wanted to spend unlimited amounts of money and receive, more importantly, unlimited amounts of money.
 - e. Mr. COLBERT: (From file footage) Thank you, everybody!
 - f. Mr. COLBERT: (From file footage) Citizens united!
86. Mr. CHRIS CILIZZA ([shown on screen] The Washington Post, MSNBC Contributor): It allowed these large political action committees that can be funded by an individual, that can accept unlimited amounts of money, and they can directly advocate for or against a candidate.
87. Ms. SARAH MIMMS (NationalJournal.com): He has actually missed the deadline in South Carolina to get on their Republican ballot. That was over in November. And South Carolina does not allow write-in votes.
- a. Ms. MIMMS: I don't think Stephen Colbert has any intention of being president of the United States.
88. Mr. NEWT GINGRICH: I'm just asking questions.
- a. Mr. GINGRICH: Right. We're now entering a world where, until the laws are changed, every serious campaign will have one or more super PACs. They will spend an absurd amount of money, and it will virtually all be negative. That's a fact.
 - b. Mr. GINGRICH: We might be able to do that, but on the other hand, we learned in Iowa if you unilaterally disarm you might as well not run.
 - c. Mr. GINGRICH: They want--they want--they want their candidate to win.
 - d. Mr. GINGRICH: Well, he knows I'm very pro-Israel, and that's the central value of his life. I mean, he is very worried that Israel's going to not survive.
89. Governor RICK PERRY: The--what's the third one there? Let's see.
- a. Gov. PERRY: Oops.
90. Ms. ELLEN WEINTRAUB: So you have the situation where a donor is told, 'You can't give more than \$2500 directly to the candidate because that creates the potential for corruption. But you can give a million dollars, you can give \$10 million to this super PAC, which is going to be working as hard as it can to elect that very same candidate and doing nothing else.'
- a. Ms. WEINTRAUB: That is the premise.
 - b. Ms. WEINTRAUB: We had one that was about \$100,000.
 - c. Ms. WEINTRAUB: But the average penalty is much lower than that.

- d. Ms. WEINTRAUB: That argument has been made that...
 - e. Ms. WEINTRAUB: ...that they will just view it as a cost of doing business.
 - f. Ms. WEINTRAUB: Oh, sometimes I do it right here in my office.
91. Mr. CARL FORTI: Correct. I mean, we're not allowed to discuss strategy. Could I call up my friends there and chat with them? Sure, but we don't.
- a. Mr. FORTI: I'm sure that we'll discover people have given multimillions to some of these PACs. You know, Restore Our Future, on our last contribution disclosure at the end of June, there were several people who had given us a million dollars.
 - b. Mr. FORTI: Have you seen what's happened to the corporate tax rate? You know, to some of these corporations, if that gets changed, they'll all benefit. I think that's what they want most of all.
 - c. Mr. FORTI: Potentially with--that seems a little high, probably, but between the different entities, it's maybe 300, 350.
92. Mr. MITT ROMNEY: And make a profit.
93. Mr. RICK SANTORUM: That may be the case. I've--have--really--I don't have a whole lot to do with it, to be honest with you.
- a. Mr. SANTORUM: Whoa. Wow, that's a--that's a...
 - b. Mr. SANTORUM: You know, no. At least not now, I can't. But you know what, I'm more and more convinced that, as we saw in Iowa, that, you know, you can--you can compete on other ways.
 - c. Mr. SANTORUM: I have.
Mr. SANTORUM: Oh, there's no question. And don't worry, I have no illusions that, if things continue on for us and we go up one-on-one against Governor Romney, that that super PAC money will be trained right here.
94. Mr. FOSTER FRIESS: I would say we're going to be over \$1 million at some point very soon.
- a. Mr. FREEZE: No, I expect a lot in return. I expect to see a government where regulations are made more sensible. So if you look at all the regulations that are going to go away, the EPA, which you know is the Employment Prevention Agency, these are the kinds of things that I can see a country where I'm going to be excited to be living in again, and there's opportunities for my kids.
95. Mr. RANDY CABLE: The super PACs are outspending the candidates at a rate of 2-to-1 right now. And I expect that spread to go even further by the time Election Day comes here.
- a. Mr. CABLE: Price goes up and, quite frankly, the ones that are buying the most are going to have the biggest impact.
96. Ms. LINDA KAPLAN THALER: ...that we're in the number two position.
- a. Ms. KAPLAN THALER: We have to go through the FTC, you have to go through the networks, you have to prove a claim. It is more difficult to sell somebody a loaf of white bread than it is to sell a president getting into the White House because political advertising is protected by the First Amendment.
97. Mr. STEPHEN COLBERT: The difference between a PAC and a super PAC is like apples and oranges, you know. If the orange could take unlimited corporate and union donations and then spend them in unlimited fashion in political speech to affect the outcome of the 2012 election.
- a. Mr. COLBERT: Who cares? It's not a super PAC.

98. Mr. RICK TYLER ("Wining Our Future"): The money that we received prior to South Carolina really enabled us to answer the attack ads that were being run against Speaker Gingrich.
99. Mr. SHELDON ADELSON: (From February 2010) He's the president of the United States and he shouldn't be degrading or belittling any one city or any one--any one part of the country.
- a. Mr. ADELSON: I am not Israeli. The uniform that I wore in the military, unfortunately, was not an Israeli uniform, it was an American uniform.
 - b. Mr. ADELSON: All we care about is being good Zionists, being good citizens of Israel.
100. Unidentified Man: I don't think it's buying a presidency any more than it was when Joe Kennedy helped his son.
101. Mr. D.TAYLOR (Culinary Workers Union): He claimed he owned the sidewalks and that he could pick and choose who could walk on those sidewalks.
102. Former Representative NEWT GINGRICH: (From The Jewish Channel) We've had an invented Palestinian people, who are, in fact, Arabs.
- a. Rep. GINGRICH: Sheldon Adelson is very deeply concerned about the survival of Israel and believes that the Iranians represent a mortal threat to Israel and to the United States.
103. President BARACK OBAMA: All across America, special interests have poured millions of dollars into phony front groups. You've seen them. They're called Americans for Prosperity, Moms for Motherhood.
- a. Pres. OBAMA: It is very hard to be able to get your message out without having some resources.
104. Ms. STEPHANIE CUTTER (Obama Deputy Campaign Manager): We're going to fight on the same playing field. We're going to level the playing field.
105. Mr. CHRIS CILLIZZA (The Washington Post): The problem for Democratic super PACs affiliated with House and Senate races is that the titular head of the Democratic Party, Barack Obama, made very clear in 2010 and all the way back to his 2008 race that he didn't approve of super PACs. Now that he's given the OK, that should turn on the spigot of outside money.
106. Mr. FRED WERTHEIMER (Democracy 21 President): I am telling you this, by the end of the 2012 election, we will have an historic national scandal in this country, and we will have new opportunities for major reforms.
107. Mr. CHRIS LEHANE: Every single aspect of your life is going to be turned over and scrutinized. You, your spouse, your kids, everything that you've ever done is going to be looked at.
- a. Mr. LEHANE: As you now effectively have in place a permanent opposition research campaign industrial complex. Right? You have these huge entities that are extremely well-funded. In fact, at many levels more well-funded than the traditional parties.
 - b. Mr. LEHANE: As you now effectively have in place a permanent opposition research campaign industrial complex. Right? You have these huge entities that are extremely well-funded. In fact, at many levels more well-funded than the traditional parties.
108. Mr. RODELL MOLLINEAU: The way that we look at our role is to find the truth. It needs to be grounded in some sort of fact because the American people are not stupid. Voters are not stupid.

- a. Mr. MOLLINEAU: We have 50 people working for us. They sit in a war room. They're putting together research briefs. They're putting together research documents. They're looking at the video that our trackers send back from the field.
- 109. Mr. RICK SANTORUM: I have a personal moral objection to it. Even though I don't support it, that I voted for bills that included it.
- 110. Mr. JONATHAN COLLEGIO: The process will start through looking at old news stories in a service like LexisNexis, through Google, through voting records. Because a voter is not going to go through all of these data points and decide whether or not they're going to vote for somebody. They need to have it packaged for them. And I think that the packaging of the information is almost as important as the information itself.
 - a. Mr. COLLEGIO: Probably the most effective negative ad in modern political history was run in the 2002 Senate race in Montana that today is kind of in the hall of fame of opposition research.
- 111. (start NPR) STEPHEN COLBERT: (Singing) ...by the dawn's early light. What so...
 - a. STEPHEN COLBERT: With the stroke of a gavel, these brave men leveled the playing field and then sold the naming rights to that playing field to Bank of America.
 - b. STEPHEN COLBERT: If that is a joke, then they are saying our entire campaign finance system is a joke. And I don't...
- 112. HERMAN CAIN: As I said during one of the debates, America needs to learn how to lighten up.
- 113. NEWT GINGRICH: More people have been put on food stamps by Barack Obama than any president in American history.
- 114. DAVID PROCTER: What they're trying to do is to have themselves associated with positive messages. And then because of the rules of the superPAC, they are able to claim at least some level of deniability that they know anything about this.
- 115. PAUL FREEDMAN: All else being equal, I would rather somebody else did my heavy lifting or did my dirty work when it comes to campaign advertising.
 - a. PAUL FREEDMAN: Campaign ads need to do two things. You need to solidify your base as you reach out to potential supporters of an opponent and give them reasons to vote against your opponent. And so as a race gets tighter, as it gets closer, as Election Day approaches, candidates at this point, you know, it's all in.
- 116. NEWT GINGRICH: I'm calling on the superPAC. I cannot coordinate with them. I cannot communicate directly.
- 117. STEPHEN COLBERT: We're not coordinating.
 - a. JON STEWART: Coordinating.
- 118. STEPHEN COLBERT: Trevor, is being business partners a problem?
 - a. TREVOR POTTER: Being business partners does not count as coordination, legally.
 - b. STEPHEN COLBERT: Great!
 - c. (SOUNDBITE OF LAUGHTER)
 - d. JON STEWART: Can I legally hire Stephen's current superPAC staff, to produce these ads that will be in no way coordinated with Stephen?
 - e. TREVOR POTTER: Yes.
 - f. STEPHEN COLBERT: I had nothing to do with that ad.
 - g. STEPHEN COLBERT: I can't tell Americans for a Better Tomorrow, Tomorrow what to do. It's not my superPAC, George. It's the superPAC of - I hope I'm pronouncing this correctly - Jon Stewart.

119. RITA LITTLES SCOTT: We did not know it was Stephen Colbert for a while.
- a. RITA LITTLES SCOTT: In fact, we've not received any phone calls, except from the media.
120. KINKY FRIEDMAN: My definition of politics - poly means more than one, and ticks are blood-sucking parasites.
- a. KINKY FRIEDMAN: Of course he does. That's why we need Stephen Colbert in there - to stir things up, be a troublemaker. I very much approve of that. That's what Jesus was.
121. KEN GOLDSTEIN: What's going on in South Carolina is everyone's having their say. So, Iowa was heavy, but Rick Santorum or the Rick Santorum super PAC was not up on the air very much in Iowa. The Newt Gingrich super PAC was not up on the air in Iowa. In South Carolina, everybody's up.
- a. KEN GOLDSTEIN: Everybody realizes that if Mitt Romney wins South Carolina, this race is going to be over. And so it makes no sense to save any money for anything down the line, because there's not going to be anything down the line if Mitt Romney wins South Carolina.
122. CHARLES BIERBAUER: Three million dollars, or any number of dollars goes a long way in South Carolina. The television markets are modest in size, so you can do pretty well here. You can blanket the state by hitting Charleston, Columbia and the upstate market, maybe a little bit down in Myrtle Beach, and you're done with it.
123. DONNA CRANE: The idea that either of these candidates is in any way remotely pro-choice would be laughable, if it weren't actually so dangerous for women.
- a. DONNA CRANE: If the charge is, does Massachusetts care for its low-income women? Then yes, guilty as charged. Massachusetts has a good policy in that regard. But it's not attributable, one way or the other, to Mitt Romney.
124. JULIE ROVNER: That's really a reference to the morning-after birth control pill. And while Romney did sign one bill to make those pills more available, he also vetoed one that would have required their availability for rape victims. Still, in the end, Pittsburgh law professor and abortion scholar Garrow thinks the ad might actually help Romney should he, as expected, become the GOP nominee.
125. DAVID GARROW: When that advertisement says, quote, some abortions, unquote, it's knowingly avoiding the fact that the measure that Gingrich supported, sponsored by a well-known, right-to-life, anti-abortion congressman, Henry Hyde, would have had the effect of removing financial support from 97, 8, 9 percent of abortions.
126. Rick Tyler, senior advisor to the pro-Gingrich super-PAC Winning Our Future: Well, we made a \$3.4 million ad buy in South Carolina, which is fairly significant.
- a. RICK TYLER: People who think they know Mitt Romney should think again.
127. SHELDON ADELSON: I believe that there's enough room in Asia - not just China, but all over Asia - for five to 10 Las Vegases.
128. BOB BIRSACK: Now all you have to do, as a person with lots of money, is simply write the check.
- a. BOB BIRSACK: There isn't much ambiguity about how this money will be used. And while that may or may not have been true in the past, it's certainly true today.
129. NEWT GINGRICH: This is a man whose staff created the PAC, his millionaire friends fund the PAC, he pretends he has nothing to do with the PAC. It's baloney. He's not telling the American people the truth.

130. CLETA MITCHELL: There's this myth that somehow there's a wink-wink, nod-nod between the campaigns and the PACs. And I just haven't seen it.
- a. CLETA MITCHELL: If I were advising a candidate or a campaign, I would say to them, don't you ever comment publicly about anything the superPAC is saying. Don't ever say a word about it.
 - b. CLETA MITCHELL: If it's in the public domain, it's fair game for the superPAC.
 - c. CLETA MITCHELL: However, if you're going to be politically astute, what you probably should do is not try to mirror the campaign, but do your own research, your own poll and be able to say: Look, we made our decision based on our own independent determination.
131. MITT ROMNEY: If we coordinate, in any way whatsoever, we go to the big house.
132. LARRY NOBLE: I think a candidate is safe in making a public comment that they disavow a superPAC's ads, and they wish the superPAC would not do those ads.
133. RICK TYLER: What we can do is listen to the campaign and listen to the candidate through the media and determine what the campaign is doing, what the strategy is and echo that strategy, thus expanding the campaign.
134. BILL ALLISON: We have the Iowa caucuses; we have the New Hampshire, South Carolina, and Florida primaries; and we won't know who is donating to the organizations that were trying to knock those other candidates out.
135. ROBERT KELNER: They have already decided, when they chose to make the contribution to a superPAC, that they were comfortable with their name being in the public records.
- a. ROBERT KELNER: If it's that big an issue, then maybe the superPAC doesn't want that particular contribution in the first place.
 - b. ROBERT KELNER: And they can make, you know, nuanced choices as to which contributions they want to accept, and which ones they don't.
136. C. EDMUND WRIGHT: Just common sense tells me that they would've given a lot less money, and maybe not been quite as negative.
137. ANTHONY CORRADO: We're really turning the clock back. We will have more undisclosed money used in the presidential election than we have seen since the elections prior to Watergate.
138. NEWT GINGRICH: How many of you have received enough negative information that you're now tired of it?
- a. NEWT GINGRICH: I am not going to negative, period. And I'm appealing to the people of Iowa. You have a chance in the caucus, to send a signal to the whole country that the age of the consultant-driven, dishonest negative commercials is over. And the easiest way is to simply refuse to vote for people who run those kinds of commercials.
 - b. NEWT GINGRICH: I have a very simple message for Mitt Romney. I'll meet him anywhere in Iowa for 90 minutes, just the two of us in a debate, with a timekeeper, no moderator. I'd love to have him say that to my face. I'd like him to have the courage to back up his negative ads.
139. LARRY SWANSON: We get phone calls and we get stuff in the mail. And the negative ads, I don't really always believe them or pay a lot of attention, 'cause I - they're always - usually distorted, I think.
140. MITT ROMNEY: I think he compared that to - was it to Pearl Harbor? I think its more like Lucille Ball at the chocolate factory.

- a. MITT ROMNEY: And so, I mean, you know, you've got to get organized.
141. CRAIG ROBINSON: I think the ads could help push people one way or the other in the final moments before the caucuses. Hey, it's just like an NBA game, you know?
- a. CRAIG ROBINSON: It's kind of this slow, leisurely game, and then the last three minutes it's crazy, and it's really what you want to tune into and watch.
142. MATT THORNTON: We thought that this was a fun little way to have a little fun at Gingrich's expense going into Christmas, as well as remind some people of his record thus far.
- a. MATT THORNTON: If Newt Gingrich had noticed or put a little effort into determining who owned it, it would not have been difficult for their campaign to obtain it.
143. NEWT GINGRICH: Let me say first of all...
- a. UNIDENTIFIED MAN: Mic check. Mic check.
- b. (SOUNDBITE OF SHOUTING)
- c. NEWT GINGRICH: You can put people first - put people first...
- d. (SOUNDBITE OF PEOPLE SHOUTING)
144. MITT ROMNEY: If we coordinate in any way, whatsoever, we go to the big house.
- a. MITT ROMNEY: Campaign finance law has made a mockery of our political campaign season. We really ought to let campaigns raise the money they need and just get rid of these Super PACS.
145. NEWT GINGRICH: We ought to understand that these are his people running his ads, doing his dirty work while he pretends to be above it.
- a. NEWT GINGRICH: Either you stand behind those ads and you tell people that you're proud of being negative or you get 'em off the air. I don't care if they spend \$1.4 million in positive ads because I don't think they do him all that much good. But I think \$1.4 million in negative ads is really, frankly disgusting.
146. DENNIS GOLDFORD: Gingrich has had simply one ad in which he is so soft spoken and gentle, you expect honey and butterflies to flow from the television screen. This isn't the Newt Gingrich that most people know or imagine.
- a. DENNIS GOLDFORD: There's just this wall of allegation about Gingrich's dealings, and his ads simply ignores those allegations and tries to stay on the high road. But they become a little bit like an acid. They start to eat away at the foundations of his support.
147. (SOUNDBITE OF TV SHOW, "FACE THE NATION")
- a. NEWT GINGRICH: I think positive ideas and positive solutions, the contract we laid out at newt.org has attracted people. I think they like that there's somebody who's determined to be positive.
148. MEREDITH MCGEHEE: So therefore, the contribution limits are pretty meaningless. You can give the money you want to the candidate directly, and then you can give unlimited amounts to the super-PAC.
149. KARL SANDSTROM: Public anonymity and private disclosure. That means the public may be in the dark about who contributes. But the beneficiaries - the officeholders and the candidates - are aware of who contributes.
150. DAN BACKER: And Nixon says, you need to support Nixon's super-PAC. We need your help. And then a staffer from the super-PAC comes up and says, so listen, you can cut a check in any amount. What would you like to give us? A million dollars?

- a. DAN BACKER: The law's the same for everybody. Doesn't matter who you are, what kind of speaker you are, or what you believe in, the law's going to treat you the same as long as you're not engaging in corrupt behavior.
- 151. Gov. ROMNEY: I want to make it very clear I repudiate that effort. I think it's the wrong course for a PAC or a campaign. I hope that our campaigns can respectively be about the future.
- 152. Reverend JEREMIAH WRIGHT: (From sermon) America's chickens are coming home to roost.
- 153. Mr. DARRELL WEST (Brookings Institution): Voters do not distinguish between ads coming from the campaign vs. the super PACs. So candidates run the risk of being held accountable for bad things that these super PACs do.

ADS PLAYED

1. RICK PERRY SUPER PAC MAKE US GREAT AGAIN
2. RESTORE OUR FUTURE AD
3. (Excerpt from political ad; from American Crossroads)
4. RESTORE OUR FUTURE ATTACK GINGRICH AD
 - a. UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Newt has more baggage than the airlines.
 - b. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: He`s demonstrating himself to be the very essence of the Washington insiders.
 - c. UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: He appears unable to transform or even govern himself.
5. RESTORE OUR FUTURE ATTACK GINGRICH AD
 - a. WOMAN (political ad): Newt has more baggage than the airlines.
 - b. WOMAN (political ad): And Newt is the only speaker in history to be reprimanded.
6. RESTORE OUR FUTURE ATTACK AD
 - a. WOMAN (political ad): Gingrich even supported taxpayer funding of some abortions.
7. RON PAUL ATTACK AD AGAINST GINGRICH (Excerpt from political ad)
8. RESTORE OUR FUTURE ATTACK AD
 - a. UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Newt has a ton of baggage.
9. GINGRICH SUPER PAC ATTACK AD
 - a. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: For tens of thousands of Americans, the suffering began when Mitt Romney came to town.
10. GINGRICH ANTI ROMNEY VIDEO
 - a. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: The suffering began when Mitt Romney came to town.
11. Americans for a Better Tomorrow, Tomorrow **Super PAC**, which Colbert
 - a. MAN #1 (political ad): If Mitt Romney really believes--
 - b. MITT ROMNEY (political ad): Corporations are people, my friend.
 - c. MAN #1 (political ad): --then Mitt Romney is a serial killer. He`s Mitt the ripper.
 - d. MAN (political ad) : Thankfully, there is one name on the ballot that stands for true Americanimity, Herman Cain. Americans for a Better Tomorrow Tomorrow believes a vote for Herman Cain is a vote for America. He`s not a career politician. He`s such a Washington outsider. He`s not even running for President. Send them a message. On January 21st, vote Herman Cain.

12. GINGRICH ANTI ROMNEY VIDEO
 - a. MAN #2 (political ad): For tens of thousands of Americans, the suffering began when Mitt Romney came to town.
13. RESTORE OUR FUTURE ATTACK AD
 - a. WOMAN (political ad): Newt has a ton of baggage.
14. RESTORE OUR FUTURE ATTACK AD
 - a. WOMAN (political ad): Newt has a ton of baggage.
15. GINGRICH ATTACK AD
 - a. WOMAN #2 (political ad): I feel that is the man that destroyed us.
16. COLBERT
 - a. MAN #1 (political ad): When Mitt Romney came to town.
 - b. MAN #2 (political ad): If Mitt Romney really believes--
 - c. MITT ROMNEY (political ad): Corporations are people, my friend.
 - d. MAN #2 (political ad): --then Mitt Romney is a serial killer. He`s Mitt the Ripper.
17. GINGRICH ATTACK AD
 - a. UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Think you know Mitt? Think again.
18. MITT ROMNEY (political ad): There are a lot of reasons not to elect me.
19. NEWT GINGRICH (political ad): Did Bain ever do any work with any company which did any work with the government like Medicare?
20. WOMAN #1 (political ad): Gingrich was fined three hundred thousand dollars by a Republican.
21. MAN (political ad): President Obama.
22. WOMAN #2 (political ad): Restore our future is responsible for the content of this message.
23. MITT ROMNEY (political ad): Don`t try and stop the foreclosure process let it hit the bottom.
24. NEWT GINGRICH (political ad): I made a mistake.
25. UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Gingrich even teamed up with Nancy Pelosi and Al Gore on global warming!
26. UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Newt was fined \$300,000 for ethics violations.
27. WOMAN #1 (political ad): Santorum voted to raise the debt limit five times.
28. MAN #1 (political ad): Mitt created Romney care, the blue print for Obama care.
29. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: "Restore Our Future" is responsible for the content of this message.
30. UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Newt has tons of baggage.
31. UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Santorum cosponsored 51 bills to increase spending.
32. PRIORITIES USA
 - a. MAN #1 (Priorities USA Action): He`ll give you the same thing he gave us. Nothing. He`ll take it all.
33. ROMNEY FOR PRESIDENT
 - a. MAN #2 (Romney For President): When I started we had close to fourteen hundred employees. Now we`re over six thousand.
 - b. MAN #3: When others shied away, Mitt Romney`s private sector leadership team stepped in.
34. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Obama has made a lot of bad decisions.
35. JOE SOPTIC (Political Ad): I do not think Mitt Romney realizes what he`s done to anyone.
36. JOE SOPTIC (Priorities USA Action; political ad):
 - a. When Mitt Romney and Bain closed the plant, I lost my health care.

- b. JOE SOPTIC: There was nothing they could do for her. And she passed away in twenty-two days. I do not think Mitt Romney realizes what he's done to anyone.
37. MAN #1 (political ad): Under Obama's plan you wouldn't have to work and wouldn't to train for a job.
38. PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA: If we keep talking about the economy, we're going to lose.
39. MAN #2 (political ad): Dukakis not only opposes the death penalty, he allowed first-degree murderers to have weekend passes from prison.
40. JOE SOPTIC: That's when they found the cancer. And by then, it was stage four. It was-- it was-- there was nothing they could do for her....
- a. JOE SOPTIC (Priorities USA; political ad): I don't think Mitt Romney understands what he's done to people's lives by closing the plan.
- b. JOE SOPTIC: And a short time after that, my wife became ill.
41. COMMERCIAL VOICEOVER (FEMALE)
- a. Why? Newt has a ton of baggage, like the fact that Gingrich was fined \$300,000 for ethics violations.
42. COMMERCIAL VOICEOVER (MALE) – FROM ONLINE VIDEO OF PAUL SUPPORTER
- a. That's right. Newt Gingrich is the Kim Kardashian of the GOP.
43. NARRATOR (POLITICAL AD)
- a. He's demonstrating himself to be the very essence of the Washington insiders.
44. NARRATOR (POLITICAL AD)
- a. The Gingrich record, 30 years in Washington, flip-flopping on issues.
45. NARRATOR (POLITICAL AD) Don't let the liberal Republican establishment pick our candidate.
46. MITT ROMNEY (REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE) I'm Mitt Romney and I approve this message.
47. NARRATOR (POLITICAL AD) Newt has a ton of baggage, like the fact that Gingrich was fined \$300,000 for ethics violations.
48. NARRATOR (POLITICAL AD) Gingrich and Perry. Too liberal on immigration, too much baggage on ethics.
49. POLITICAL AD SPEAKER (MALE)It's about serial hypocrisy.
- a. POLITICAL AD SPEAKER (FEMALE)
- b. Newt Gingrich supports amnesty for millions of illegals.
50. NARRATOR (POLITICAL AD)
- a. Newt has more baggage than the airlines.
51. TOM BROKAW (NBC NEWS) Newt Gingrich, who came to power, after all, preaching a higher standard in American politics.
52. NARRATOR (POLITICAL AD)Behind these doors Mitt Romney calls half the American people...
- a. MITT ROMNEY (REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL NOMINEE)
- b. Dependent upon government, who believe that they are victims.
- c. NARRATOR (POLITICAL AD)
- d. Victims? Behind these doors, middle class families struggle.
53. JOE SOPTIC (POLITICAL AD)
- a. When Mitt Romney and Bain closed the plant, I lost my health care.
- b. JOE SOPTIC (POLITICAL AD)

- c. By then, it was stage 4. It was - there was nothing they could do for her. And she passed away in 22 days. I do not think Mitt Romney realizes what he's done to anyone.
- 54. NARRATOR (POLITICAL AD)
 - a. The Obama administration quietly offered to issue waivers to the work requirement in the law.
- 55. VOICEOVER (FEMALE)
 - a. Santorum voted to raise the debt limit five times.
- 56. NARRATOR (POLITICAL AD)
 - a. They're not so different.
- 57. NARRATOR (POLITICAL AD)
 - a. Santorum was voting for billions in waste.
- 58. NARRATOR (POLITICAL AD)
 - a. I supported President Obama because he spoke so beautifully. He promised change, but things changed for the worse.
- 59. LORIS HUFFMAN (LAID-OFF WORKER)
 - a. I thought that I was going to retire from there. I had about two and a half years to go.
- 60. (Clip from campaign ad)
- 61. (Clip from Rick Perry campaign ad)
- 62. (Clip from political ad)
- 63. (Clip from political ad)
- 64. (Clip from political ad)
- 65. (Clip from Romney campaign ad)
- 66. (Clip from Romney campaign ad)
- 67. (Clip from Gingrich campaign ad)
- 68. (Clip from Restore Our Future campaign ad)
- 69. Narrator #1: (From campaign ad) Ever notice how some people make a lot of mistakes?
- 70. Narrator #1: (From campaign ad) Gingrich even teamed up with Nancy Pelosi and Al ... The only speaker in history to be reprimanded. Gingrich was fined \$300,000 by a Republican Congress for ethics violations.
- 71. Narrator #2: (From campaign ad) Newt stood with Ronald Reagan.
- 72. Narrator #3: (From anti-Romney documentary) This film will highlight just four of Romney's many targets.
- 73. Narrator #4: (From video) His revolving prison door policy gave weekend furloughs to prisoners...
- 74. Narrator #5: (From campaign ad) John Kerry cannot be trusted.
- 75. Narrator #6: (From campaign ad) Make Us Great Again is responsible for the content of this ad.
- 76. Narrator #7: (From campaign ad) Why is Newt Gingrich brutally attacking Mitt Romney?
- 77. (Clip from campaign ad)
 - a. Narrator #8: If Mitt Romney really believes...
 - b. Mr. ROMNEY: Corporations are people, my friend.
 - c. Narrator #8: ...then Mitt Romney is a serial killer. He's Mitt the Ripper.
- 78. (Clip from Winning Our Future political ad)
- 79. (Clip from political ad)

80. (Clip from political ad)
81. (Clip from political ad)
82. Narrator #1: (Campaign ad) Is this dude serious?
83. Narrator #2: (Campaign ad) Freddie Mac paid Newt \$30,000 an hour.
84. Narrator #3: (Campaign ad) Romney drastically increased spending
85. Narrator #4: (Campaign ad) Santorum pushed for billions in wasteful pork, voting for the bridge to nowhere, a teapot museum.
86. Narrator #5: (Campaign ad) Another counterfeit conservative.
87. Narrator #6: (Campaign ad) Twenty million, totally attacking fellow Republicans.
88. Narrator #9: (Campaign ad) What's the state of the middle class under Obama's leadership?
89. Narrator #10: (Campaign ad) Crossroads GPS is responsible for the content of this advertising.
90. Narrator #11: (Campaign ad) John Kerry, whichever way the wind blows.
91. (SOUNDBITE OF A POLITICAL ADVERTISEMENT)
- a. MITT ROMNEY: President Obama wants to fundamentally transform America. I stand ready to lead us down a different path. This president has enacted job-killing regulations. I'll eliminate them. He lost our triple-A credit rating. I'll restore it. He passed ObamaCare. I'll repeal it.
92. (SOUNDBITE OF A POLITICAL ADVERTISEMENT)
- a. UNIDENTIFIED MAN #1: Only Newt Gingrich can beat Obama.
93. (SOUNDBITE OF POLITICAL ADVERTISEMENT)
- a. UNIDENTIFIED MAN #2: (As President Obama) Now, I agreed with Governor Romney on many things, but this presidential candidate Romney, I don't even know the guy. Then again, he doesn't seem to know himself.
- b. UNIDENTIFIED MAN #3: Oh, come on. Governor Romney?
- c. UNIDENTIFIED MAN #4: Winning Our Future is responsible for the content of this message.
94. (SOUNDBITE OF POLITICAL ADVERTISEMENT)
- a. SUSAN MOLINARI: Newt Gingrich had a leadership style that can only be described as leadership by chaos. The decisions that he would make today would be different decisions tomorrow, and a lot of the problems came from sort of the discipline that he lacked in order to get the job done.
95. (SOUNDBITE OF WEB VIDEO)
- a. UNIDENTIFIED MAN #5: Donate today, and we'll destroy both these guys and their superPACs with a merciless ad torrent so fierce, they'll wish they'd never been incorporated - an orgy of pure distortion leaving nothing behind but the clean campaign we all deserve.
96. (SOUNDBITE OF POLITICAL ADVERTISEMENT)
- a. UNIDENTIFIED MAN #6: Obama's a liberal on social issues. Romney once bragged he's even more liberal than Ted Kennedy on social issues. Why would we ever vote for someone who's just like Obama?
97. (SOUNDBITE OF POLITICAL ADVERTISEMENT)
- a. UNIDENTIFIED MAN #1: A group of corporate raiders, led by Mitt Romney, more ruthless than Wall Street.
98. (SOUNDBITE OF TV SHOW, "THE COLBERT REPORT")

- a. UNIDENTIFIED MAN #2: As head of Bain Capital, he bought companies, carved them up and got rid of what he couldn't use. If Mitt Romney really believes...
 - b. MITT ROMNEY: Corporations are people, my friend.
 - c. UNIDENTIFIED MAN #2: Then Mitt Romney is a serial killer.
99. (SOUNDBITE OF A POLITICAL ADVERTISEMENT)
- a. UNIDENTIFIED MAN #1: Who has the best chance to beat Obama? Rick Santorum. A full spectrum conservative, Rick Santorum is...
100. (SOUNDBITE OF A POLITICAL ADVERTISEMENT)
- a. UNIDENTIFIED MAN #2: A group of corporate raiders, led by Mitt Romney - the company was Bain Capital, more ruthless than Wall Street.
 - b. UNIDENTIFIED MAN #3: Pulled the rug out from under our plant.
 - c. UNIDENTIFIED WOMAN #1: Everybody was fired.
101. (SOUNDBITE OF A POLITICAL ADVERTISEMENT)
- a. UNIDENTIFIED WOMAN #2: Newt Gingrich's attacks are called foolish, out of bounds and disgusting. Newt attacks because he has more baggage than the airlines.
102. (SOUNDBITE OF A POLITICAL ADVERTISEMENT)
- a. MITT ROMNEY: The National Labor Relations Board, now stacked with union stooges selected by the president, says to a free enterprise like Boeing: You can't build a factory in South Carolina because...
103. (SOUNDBITE OF POLITICAL ADVERTISEMENT)
- a. UNIDENTIFIED ANNOUNCER #1: As speaker, Gingrich even supported taxpayer funding of some abortions.
 - b. JULIE ROVNER: And here's part of the ad the Gingrich campaign is now running against Romney.
104. (SOUNDBITE OF POLITICAL ADVERTISEMENT)
- a. UNIDENTIFIED ANNOUNCER #2: Romney appointed a pro-abortion judge, expanded access to abortion pills, put Planned Parenthood on a state medical board, but failed to put a pro-life group on the same board. And Romney signed government-mandated health care with taxpayer-funded abortions
105. (SOUNDBITE OF POLITICAL ADVERTISEMENT) ANNOUNCER #1: Gingrich even supported taxpayer funding of some abortions.
106. (SOUNDBITE OF POLITICAL ADVERTISEMENT)
- a. UNIDENTIFIED ANNOUNCER #2: And Romney signed government-mandated health care with taxpayer-funded abortions.
107. (SOUNDBITE OF AD)
- a. UNIDENTIFIED MAN #2: For tens of thousands of Americans the suffering began when Mitt Romney came to town.
108. (SOUNDBITE OF VIDEO)
- a. NEWT GINGRICH: Hi. I'm Newt Gingrich. I want to talk with you for a moment about the stimulus...
109. (SOUNDBITE OF VIDEO)
- a. NEWT GINGRICH: We believe that we should abolish the capital gains tax to match China, Singapore and many other of our competitors, so we attract money to America.

110. (SOUNDBITE OF POLITICAL AD)
- a. UNIDENTIFIED WOMAN: Immigration, Medicare, health care, Iraq, attacking Mitt Romney and more.
 - b. NEWT GINGRICH: I made a big mistake in the spring.
 - c. UNIDENTIFIED WOMAN: Haven't we had enough mistakes? Restore Our Future is responsible for the content of this message. Oops.
111. (SOUNDBITE OF POLITICAL AD)
- a. UNIDENTIFIED ANNOUNCER: He appears unable to transform, or even govern, himself. Newt Gingrich: too much baggage. Restore Our Future is responsible for the content of this message.
112. (SOUNDBITE OF POLITICAL AD)
- a. MITT ROMNEY: I will preserve and protect a woman's right to choose, and am devoted and dedicated to honoring my word in that regard ... I am pro-life, and favor that legislation ...you will not see me wavering
113. (SOUNDBITE OF A POLITICAL AD)
- a. UNIDENTIFIED MAN #1: He is demonstrating himself to be the very essence of the Washington insider.
 - b. UNIDENTIFIED MAN #2: It's about serial hypocrisy.
114. (SOUNDBITE OF ADS)
- a. MICHELE BACHMANN: I'm Michele Bachmann.
 - b. NEWT GINGRICH: And I'm Newt Gingrich.
 - c. RON PAUL: I'm Ron Paul.
 - d. RICK PERRY: I'm Rick Perry.
 - e. MITT ROMNEY: I'm Mitt Romney.
 - f. RICK SANTORUM: I'm Rick Santorum.
115. (SOUNDBITE OF ADS)
- a. CALLISTA GINGRICH: From our family to yours, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. I'm Callista Gingrich.
 - b. RAND PAUL: I'm Rand Paul. Merry Christmas, and God bless America.
 - c. ANN ROMNEY: We just want to take this moment to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and happy holidays.
116. (SOUNDBITE OF ADS)
- a. JIM LIVINGSTON: My name is Jim Livingston. I'm a retired major general.
 - b. UNIDENTIFIED MAN #1: Governor Perry. He is the best person to serve as commander-in-chief.
117. (SOUNDBITE OF ADS)
- a. UNIDENTIFIED MAN #2: He's one of the most honorable men I've ever met.
 - b. UNIDENTIFIED MAN #3: It's about how we can lead this nation. Rick Perry is that leader.
118. (SOUNDBITE OF AD)
- a. UNIDENTIFIED WOMAN: Newt Gingrich supports amnesty for millions of illegals. Rick Perry not only supports amnesty, but gave illegals in-state tuition. Gingrich and Perry: too liberal on immigration, too...
119. UNIDENTIFIED MAN #4: She says she's not a politician. I like to hear that.
120. (SOUNDBITE OF POLITICAL AD)

- a. UNIDENTIFIED WOMAN: Newt has a ton of baggage. He was fined \$300,000 for ethics violations, and took \$1.6 million from Freddie Mac before it helped caused the economic meltdown. Newt supports amnesty for illegal immigrants and teams with Nancy Pelosi and Al Gore on global warming.
- 121. (SOUNDBITE OF POLITICAL AD)
 - a. RICK PERRY: Replacing one Washington insider with another won't change a thing. If you want an outsider who will overhaul Washington, then I'm your guy.
- 122. (SOUNDBITE OF POLITICAL AD)
 - a. UNIDENTIFIED MAN #1: Newt Gingrich has been on both sides of a long list of issues, sometimes in the same week.
 - b. NEWT GINGRICH: I don't think right wing social engineering is any more desirable than the left wing social engineering.
 - c. UNIDENTIFIED MAN #2: With allies like that, who needs the left?
- 123. (SOUNDBITE OF POLITICAL AD)
 - a. NEWT GINGRICH: These are challenging and important times for America. We want and deserve solutions. Others seem to be more focused on attacks rather than moving the country forward. That's up to them.
- 124. (SOUNDBITE OF AD)
 - a. ANNOUNCER: Rick Perry, conservative leadership that works. Make Us Great Again is responsible for the content of this ad.
- 125. (SOUNDBITE OF AD)
 - a. ANNOUNCER: They want the largest cut to student grants in history. But
 - b. President Obama has a plan to help.

APPENDIX B

CNN SOURCING

ANCHORS

1. T. J. HOLMES
2. WOLF BLITZER
3. WOLF BLITZER
4. BROOKE BALDWIN
5. WOLF BLITZER
6. GARY TUCHMAN
7. ANDERSON COOPER
8. BROOKE BALDWIN
9. ERIN BURNETT
10. WOLF BLITZER
11. SUZANNE MALVEAUX
12. ZORAIDA SAMBOLIN
13. WOLF BLITZER

REPORTERS

1. JOE JOHNS
2. BRIAN TODD
3. JIM ACOSTA
4. BRIAN TODD
5. MARIA CARDONA
6. JOSH LEVS
7. DREW GRIFFIN
8. TED ROWLANDS
9. ERIN BURNETT
10. LISA SYLVESTER
11. CHRISTINE ROMANS
12. CHRISTINE ROMANS
13. JESSICA YELLIN

ROUNDTABLES

1. JOHN AVLON
2. JAMAL SIMMONS (DEM STRATEGIST, EDITOR GOVOTE.COM)
3. REIHAN SALAM
4. ARI FLEISCHER (Republican strategist and former press secretary for President George W. Bush)
5. CORNELL BELCHER (DEM STRATEGIST)
6. ERICK ERICKSON (REDSTATE.COM EDITOR IN CHIEF)
7. JOHN AVLON CNN CONTRIBUTOR
8. KEN VOGEL (POLITICO)

9. KEN VOGEL POLITICO
10. ANDY SERWER EDITOR OF FORTUNE
11. KEN VOGEL POLITICO
12. JAMAL SIMMONS DEM STRATEGIST
13. DOUG HEYE REPUBLICAN STRATEGIST
14. GENTRY COLLINS RNC POLITICAL DIRECTOR
15. ROBERT ZIMMERMAN DEM STRATEGIST
16. DONNA BRAZILE DEM STRATEGIST
17. ALEX CASTELLANOS REP STRATEGIST

INTERVIEWS

1. JOHN MCCAIN
2. RON BROWNSTEIN (CNN SENIOR POLITICAL ANALYST)
3. MICHAEL SCHERER, WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENT, TIME MAGAZINE
4. MICHAEL SCHERER WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENT, "TIME" MAGAZINE
5. BILL BURTON (PRIORITIES USA) & CHARLIE SPIES (RESTORE OUR FUTURE TREASURER)
6. BILL BURTON PRIORITIES USA & ARI FLISCHER (BUSH PRESS SEC) (REPLAYED)
7. FOSTER FREISS
8. Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman-Schultz Chair of the Democratic National Committee
9. STEPHANIE CUTTER OBAMA CAMPAIGN MANAGER
10. STEPHANIE CUTTER OBAMA CAMPAIGN MANAGER
11. STEPHANIE CUTTER OBAMA CAMPAIGN MANAGER
12. RUSS FEINGOLD FORMER US SENATOR
13. BILL MAHER
14. BILL MAHER (REPLAYED)
15. FRANK RICH NEW YORK MAGAZINE
16. DEAN OBEIDALLAH, POLITICAL COMEDIAN
17. ANTONIN SCALIA
18. JENNIFER PSAKI OBAMA PRESS SECRETARY & BAY BUCHANAN REPUBLICAN STRATEGIST
19. NEWT GINGRICH
20. BILL BURTON
21. FRANK RICH NEW YORK MAGAZINE
22. BILL BURTON
23. ANTONIN SCALIA

SOURCES

1. MITT ROMNEY, (R) PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: Campaign finance law has made a mockery of our political campaign season. We really have to let campaigns raise the money they need and just get rid of the super PACs.
2. GINGRICH: Governor, I wish you would calmly and directly state it is your former staff running the PAC, it is your millionaire friends giving to the PAC, and you know some of the ads are up true. Just say that straightforward.

3. ROMNEY: Well, of course, it's former staff of mine. and, of course, they are people who support me. They wouldn't be putting money into a PAC that supports me if they weren't people that support me.
 - a. ROMNEY: hold on a second. I can't direct their ads. If there's anything in it that is wrong, I hope they take it out. I hope that everything that's wrong
4. NEWT GINGRICH (R), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: That's not an issue about the whole capitalist system. That is a question about a very particular style of activity involving a very -- remember, we're not talking about the system. We're talking about somebody who is running for president of the United States and we're asking a question about his judgment, his values, the choices he made.
5. BARACK OBAMA, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: If you ask me would I love to take some of the big money out of politics? I would. Unfortunately, right now, partly because of Supreme Court rulings and a bunch of decisions out there, it is very hard to be able to get your message out without having some resources.
6. ROMNEY: This is a violation of conscience. We must have a president who is willing to protect America's first right, a right to worship God, according to the dictates of our own conscience.
7. BARACK OBAMA, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: Thanks to a gigantic loophole, these special interests can spend unlimited amounts without even disclosing where the money is coming from. We don't know where it's coming from. We don't know if it's from the oil industry, we don't know if it's from banks. We don't know if it's insurance companies. Could be coming overseas. We don't know. They won't tell you. They don't want you to know. They don't want you to know. They won't stand behind what they do.
8. RICK SANTORUM (R), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: We're doing really well and we feel like going forward, we're going to have the money we need to make the case we want to make.
9. MITT ROMNEY (R), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: I repudiate that effort. I think it is the wrong course for a PAC or a campaign. I hope that our campaigns can respectfully be about the future and about issues.
10. REVEREND JEREMIAH WRIGHT, TRINITY UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST: And then wants us to sing God bless America. No, no, not God bless America. God damn America. That's in the Bible for killing innocent people. God damn America.
11. MITT ROMNEY (R), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: I repudiate that effort. I think it's the wrong course for a PAC or campaign, I hope that our campaigns can respectfully be about the future and about issues.
12. OBAMA: He'd ask the middle class to pay more in taxes so that he could give another \$250,000 tax cut to people making more than \$3 million a year. It's like Robin Hood in reverse. It's Romney Hood.
13. ROMNEY: We've been watching the president say a lot of things about me and about my policies, and they're just not right. And if I were to coin a term, it would be Obamaloney. (END VIDEO CLIP)
14. MITT ROMNEY (R), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: With a very careful executive action, he removed the requirement of work from welfare. It is wrong to make any change that would make America more of a nation of government dependency. We must restore and I will restore work into welfare. (CHEERING AND APPLAUSE)

15. ANDREA SAUL, MITT ROMNEY CAMPAIGN PRESS SECRETARY: If President Obama didn't want people to think that he was going to waive the central work requirement in welfare reform, his administration shouldn't have written a memo saying it was going to waive the work requirements in welfare reform.
16. BILL BURTON, SENIOR STRATEGIST, PRIORITIES USA ACTION: It's clearly lost on some folks but make no mistake about that, but the truth is what this ad is about is what Mitt Romney wants his campaign to be about.
17. BARACK OBAMA, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: It's like Robin Hood in reverse. It's Romney-hood.
18. MITT ROMNEY (R), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: We've been watching the president say a lot of things about me and about my policies, and they're just not right. And if I were to coin a term it would be Obama-loney.
19. (BEGIN VIDEO CLIP) MITT ROMNEY (R), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: It's good to trade with other nations. It's good for us to be able to trade. It creates jobs for us, but we have to make sure that when nations like China cheat, we hold them responsible and make them accountable.
20. UNIDENTIFIED MALE(COLBERT'S LAWYER): About what you're trying to do is slightly different than what other people have done before. They are nervous that Viacom is going to end up making an illegal corporate contribution to your pac.
 - a. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: They say that if it's counted as a contribution, they would have --
21. STEVEN COLBERT, HOST, "THE COLBERT REPORT": But they are allowed to give money to a super pac. Corporations can give money. Why wouldn't they want to give me all of that sweet, sweet money?
22. STEPHEN COLBERT, HOST, "THE COLBERT REPORT": Ladies and gentlemen, I am sorry to say we won! I am a Super Pac and so can you.
 - a. COLBERT: I don't know about you, but I do not expect limits on my free speech. I don't know about you, but I do not accept the status quo. But I do accept Visa, Mastercard, and American Express.
 - b. COLBERT: We're doing it. It's authorizing. Thank you. Thank you very much. How much can I put you down for? That's true American right there.
 - c. COLBERT: Knock, knock -- unlimited union and corporate campaign contributions.
23. ROBERT LENHARD, FORMER FEC CHAIRMAN: I think that Super Pacs are here to stay. They're raising a lot of money right now and they're going to have a big impact on 2012. The Colbert advisory opinion today is a sign of the role that Super Pac is starting to have in the process and is making some fun of it.
24. NEWT GINGRICH (R), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: I've just a loss. I object to negative smear campaigns. These are his people running his ads doing his dirty work while he pretends to be above it.
25. MITT ROMNEY (R), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: If you can't stand the heat in the kitchen right now, wait until Obama's kitchen shows up.
 - a. ROMNEY: My goodness, if we coordinate in any way whatsoever, we go to the big house.
 - b. ROMNEY: Corporations are people.

26. VIVECA NOVAK, CENTER FOR RESPONSIVE POLITICS: There's nothing in the law that prevents Mitt Romney from holding a press conference and saying I really wish restore our future would cease and desist from running any ads.
27. NEWT GINGRICH (R), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: I made a big mistake in the spring.
28. SHEILA KRUMHOLZ, CENTER FOR RESPONSIVE POLITICS: Technically, Super PACs are unaffiliated with the campaigns. They're not authorized by the campaigns. However, in reality, they are much an extension of the campaigns. They're run by the former senior advisers.
29. GINGRICH: That's your staff and that's your organization, those re your millionaire friends paying for it.
30. MICHAEL SCHERER, WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENT, TIME MAGAZINE: Every year, every cycle we tend to have more money spent on campaigns than before. The difference is in the past, most of that more money was coming in this -- in -- in \$2,300 or \$2,400 checks that were bundled together.
 - a. Now you have the ability of a billionaire to write on a Tuesday a \$5 million check and then that money to go to a television station on a Wednesday. So it can really radically transform the race.
31. JAMES BOPP, ATTORNEY: I think that we have made significant progress on restoring the central meaning of -- and effect of the First Amendment.
 - a. BOPP: This is a government of, by and for the people. It's not of, by and for the candidates or the news media, or the government.
 - b. BOPP: You can't vote against for or against a super PAC but you can vote for or against the candidate. And it would be much better if this money went to candidates and -- from an accountability standpoint. And then, you know, the voter could decide.
32. DONALD MCGAHN, FEC COMMISSIONER: Control is impossible because courts have already said that they're legal. So there's not much that the government can do to reign them in, so to speak.
 - a. MCGAHN: As an FEC commissioner, I would say, go see the folks in the white dome, your elected representatives, and complain to them about whether or not the penalties are high enough, not the FEC.
33. RICK SANTORUM (R), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: Game on.
34. FOSTER FRIESS, SANTORUM BACKER: Well, I -- it's like, I got to keep that from my wife. She could kill me if she really found out. I think I want to keep that kind of under the radar. It will be reported eventually. But I just believe in Santorum. I believe in what he can do for the country.
 - a. FRIESS: Well, sure. One guy, they'll send \$1 million check. Didn't know who he was, didn't call him, didn't contact them, bang, \$1 million hits.
35. PAUL RYAN, CAMPAIGN LEGAL CENTER: If you do agree with these decades-long principles and understandings that big contributions directly at candidates are a bad thing and potentially corrupting that these super PACs put us right back to the pre-Watergate era with that potential for corruption.
 - a. RYAN: No. I'm anticipating it.
36. JAMES BOPP, ATTORNEY: As somebody very interested in government, politics, and conservative philosophy, this is the ideal place for me.

- a. BOPP: They just don't want people to be spending money on elections.
 - b. BOPP: We just have more voices, more information. People are free to disregard whatever they don't want to consider. They're free to turn off the TV whenever they want.
 - c. BOPP: They don't have the money themselves. So how are they going to participate? They have to join a group, pool their resources with other like-minded people, and then they can participate actively.
 - d. BOPP: He is so wrong on campaign finance law, it's a sad commentary. He's just like so many incumbents. There's a bipartisan disdain for the First Amendment because incumbents know that campaign finance laws help their re-election. And at the very minimum, it stifles people from criticizing them, and they hate criticism.
37. ROBERT WEISSMAN, PRESIDENT, PUBLIC CITIZEN: Whether or not it's for the Democrats or for the Republicans, it's the corporate interest as against the broader public interest. And that's what we're going to have to suffer from.
 38. BILL BURTON, CO-FOUNDER, PRIORITIES USA ACTION: No, what we're going to do is we're not going to give Karl Rove, the Coke brothers (ph), the private equity guys who are supporting Mitt Romney any more advantages. They've already got hundreds of millions of dollars. We're not in the position of saying we're going to step aside and let you play (INAUDIBLE).
 39. BILL ALLISON, SUNLIGHT FOUNDATION: What we're seeing this time is a very few well-heeled donors by giving money to Super PACs can really fuel a candidate and keep them going long before they would have had to drop out in the past.
 40. BOB BIRSACK, CENTER FOR RESPONSIVE POLITICS: We think it's important for people to be able to know who is doing what to whom, who is supporting these campaigns or these organizations in different ways.

ADS PLAYED

1. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Mitt Romney became CEO of Bain Capital the day the company the day the company was formed.
 - a. His mission?
 - b. To reap massive rewards for himself and his investors.
 - c. Mitt Romney and them guys, they don't care who I am.
 - d. UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: he's for small businesses?
 - e. No, he isn't. He -- he's not.
 - f. UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: And that hurt so bad, to leave my home, because of one man that's got 15 homes.
2. AD NARRATOR: So far, Newt has admitted his mistakes or flipped on teaming up with Nancy Pelosi, immigration, Medicare, health care, Iraq, attacking Mitt Romney and more.
 - a. GINGRICH: I made a big mistake in the spring.
 - b. AD NARRATOR: Haven't we had enough mistakes? Restore our Futures is responsible for the content of this message.
3. AD NARRATOR: Haven't we had enough mistakes?
4. NARRATOR: His cash rampage would ultimately slash jobs in nearly every state in the country. Like popular children's toy seller KB Toys. Romney and Bain bought the 80-

year-old company in 2000, loaded KB Toys with millions in debt, then used the money to repurchase Bain's stock. The debt was too staggering. By 2004, 365 stores had closed. Romney called it creative destruction.

5. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: A group of corporate raiders led by Mitt Romney more ruthless than Wall Street. For tens of thousands of Americans, the suffering began when Mitt Romney came to town.
6. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: The story of greed, playing the system for a quick buck. A group of corporate raiders led by Mitt Romney. More ruthless than Wall Street.
 - a. UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Newt was fined \$300,000 for ethics violations, took \$1.6 million from Freddie Mac, and co-sponsored a bill with Nancy Pelosi that would have given \$60 million a year to a U.N. program supporting China's brutal one-child policy.
7. REP. NANCY PELOSI, (D) HOUSE MINORITY LEADER: Join me in stopping Colbert and creating a new politics, free of special interest money. The first step is passing the Disclose Act.
8. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Who has the right experience? Mitt Romney helped create thousands of jobs.
 - a. UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Rick Santorum is called the ultimate Washington insider.
 - b. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Romney rescued the Olympics.
 - c. UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Santorum was in Washington voting to raise the debt limit five times.
 - d. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Meet the real Mitt Romney, supported the Wall Street bailout putting America trillions in debt, raise the jobs killing taxes and fees by 700 million leaving Massachusetts over a billion in debt. His health care takeover, the blueprint for Obamacare.
9. ANNOUNCER: Welcome to the Olympics. There's Mitt Romney, who ran the Salt Lake City Games, waving to China -- home to a billion people. Thousands owe their jobs to Mitt Romney's companies.
 - a. India, which also gained jobs thanks to Romney, an outsourcing pioneer.
 - b. And Burma, where Romney had the uniforms made for the 2002 games.
10. UNIDENTIFIED MALE, POLITICAL AD: When Mitt Romney and Bain closed the plant I lost my health care. And my family lost their health care and a short time after that my wife became ill.
11. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: When Mitt Romney and Bain closed the plant, I lost my health care, and my family lost their health care. And a short time after that, my wife became ill. I don't know how long she was sick. And I think maybe she didn't say anything, because she knew that we couldn't afford the insurance. And then one day she became ill, and I took her up to Jackson County Hospital, and they admitted her for pneumonia. That's when they found the cancer, and by then it was stage four. There was nothing they could do for her. And she passed away in 22 days.
 - a. I do not think Mitt Romney realizes what he's done to anyone. And I -- furthermore, I do not think Mitt Romney is concerned.
12. NARRATOR: In 1996, President Clinton and a bipartisan Congress helped end welfare as we know it by requiring work for welfare. But on July 12, President Obama quietly

- announced a plan to gut welfare reform by dropping work requirements. Under Obama's plan, you wouldn't have to work and wouldn't have to train for a job.
- a. They just send you your welfare check, and welfare to work goes back to being plain old welfare.
13. JOE SOPTIC, WIFE DIED OF CANCER: When Mitt Romney and Bain closed the plant, I lost my health care. And my family lost their health care.
- a. And a short time after that, my wife became ill. I don't know how long she was sick. And I think maybe she didn't say anything because she knew that we couldn't afford the insurance.
 - b. And then one day, she became ill, and then I took her up to the Jackson County Hospital and admitted her for pneumonia, and that's when they found the cancer. And by then, it was stage four. There was nothing they could do for her. And she passed away in 22 days.
 - c. SOPTIC: I was a steelworker for 30 years. We had a reputation for quality products. It was something that was American made. And we weren't rich, but I was able to put my daughter through college.
14. KARL ROVE, FOX NEWS CONTRIBUTOR: In hard times, America needs smart and disciplined leadership, a vice president Americans can count on.
- a. JOE BIDEN, VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: At three letter word, jobs j-o-b-s. Jobs.
 - b. ROVE: Improving race relations.
 - c. BIDEN: They're going to put you all back in chains. Put you all back in chains.
 - d. ROVE: Some people say Joe Biden should be dropped from Obama's ticket. But we say, Joe should stay. Joe Biden, America's greatest vice president when we need him most.
15. UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: -- has more baggage than the airlines.
- a. UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: If you really want to know how a person will operate, look at how they've lived their life.
 - b. UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: From our family to yours, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.
16. UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Haven't we had enough mistakes? Restore our Future, responsible for the content of this message.
17. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Decades ago, Gingrich goes to Washington.
18. (BEGIN VIDEO CLIP) UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Corporations, America's greatest institution, they built this country one job at a time. Mitt Romney says he's for corporations.
- a. MITT ROMNEY (R), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: Corporations are people, my friend.
 - b. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: But Mitt Romney has a secret. As head of Bain Capital, he bought companies, carved them up and god got rid of what he couldn't use. If Mitt Romney really believes --
 - c. ROMNEY: Corporations are people, my friend --
 - d. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Then Mitt Romney is a serial killer. Please, "Mitt the Ripper." If you believe corporations are people, do your duty and protect them.

- e. On Saturday, January 21st, stop "Mitt the Ripper" before he kills again. Americans for a Better Tomorrow Tomorrow are responsible for the content of this advertising.
19. NARRATOR: Newt has more baggage than the airlines?
20. NARRATOR: Rick Santorum, Washington insider, big spender.
21. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Ronald Reagan, President Reagan, Reagan --
- a. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Gingrich exaggerates dropping Reagan's name 50 times, but in his diaries Reagan mentioned Gingrich only once.
 - b. "The Swiss Bank"
 - c. "The Serial Flip Flopper"
 - d. "The Progressive"
 - e. UNIDENTIFIED MALE, "QUESTIONABLE BUSINESS BACKGROUND": There are a lot of reasons not to elect me.
 - f. "Questionable Conservative"
 - g. "Think you know Mitt Romney any better?"
 - h. "Think Again"
 - i. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: There are a lot of reasons not to elect me. (END VIDEO CLIP/POLITICAL AD)
22. NARRATOR: A big government fiasco, infused with politics at every level -- \$500 million to Solyndra, now bankrupt.
- a. NARRATOR: A big government fiasco, infused with politics at every level -- \$500 million to Solyndra, now bankrupt.
 - b. NARRATOR: Solyndra investors raise campaign money for Obama. The government gives Solyndra half a billion in taxpayer money. Politics as usual.

APPENDIX C

FOX SOURCING

ANCHORS

1. CHRIS WALLACE
2. BRET BAIER
3. BRET BAIER
4. CHRIS WALLACE
5. BRET BAIER
6. BRET BAIER
7. BRET BAIER

REPORTERS

1. CARL CAMERON
2. WENDELL GOLER
3. JAMES ROSEN
4. CARL CAMERON
5. ED HENRY
6. ED HENRY
7. ED HENRY

ROUNDTABLES

1. ED ROLLINS (FOX NEWS CONTRIBUTOR)
2. NOELLE NIKPOUR (REPUBLICAN STRATEGIST)
3. COLLIN LEVY, SENIOR EDITORIAL PAGE WRITER
4. DANA PERINO FOX BUSINESS NETWORK
5. AMILYA ANONETTI – RADIO HOST
6. ANDREA TANTAROS
7. LESLIE MARSHALL
8. ERIC BOLLING
9. GREG GUTFELD

INTERVIEWS

1. BYRON YORK (Washington Examiner" chief political correspondent)
2. RICK SANTORUM
3. RICK TYLER (WINNING OUR FUTURE) & CHRIS CHOCOLA (CLUB FOR GROWTH)
4. ELIZA NEWLIN “ROLL CALL”
5. FRANK VANDERSLOOT – DONATOR TO ROMNEY PAC
6. RYAN ZINKE MONTANA STATE SENATOR
7. JOHN SUNUNU FORMER GOV
8. KARL ROVE
9. ANN COULTER
10. SARAH PALI

SOURCES

1. MITT ROMNEY (R), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: There are limits as to what you can tell a PAC obviously. These coordination rules you're not allowed to coordinate. But I'm sure I could go out and say, hey, please, don't do anything negative. But you know this is politics. And if you can't stand the heat in this little kitchen, wait until the Obama hell's kitchen turns up the heat. Look, this is a time when we have to be able to stand up and defend ourselves. I have done the hard work of raising money for ads. And the speaker came after me pretty aggressively in his attacks. We're going to respond. And we've got an ad campaign and my campaign that's positive. But this super PAC that's been organized, it has to do what it does on an uncoordinated basis.
2. BARACK OBAMA, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA: Jessica -
- Jessica Yellin.
 - a. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Bill Maher apologized --
 - b. OBAMA: Jessica.
3. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: -- good question. In light of Bill Maher's comments that Sarah Palin was a -- are you going to call on the Obama "Super PAC" to return the million dollars they got from Bill Maher and if not, why not? Why are you -- ma'am -- why don't you -- quick question.
 - a. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Have you put out a similar statement, calling on the president's "Super PAC" to return the \$1 million that he got from Bill Maher? Why not?! Is that an acceptable thing to call a woman? I guess the headline is you are refusing to call -- what Bill Maher said about Sarah Palin offensive?
 - b. UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: I am supposed to be in a meeting, OK.
 - c. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: I will give you another shot.
4. CHRIS MATTHEWS, MSNBC HOST, "HARDBALL": Bill Maher, the host of HBO's "Real Time with Bill Maher" announcing that he has donated \$1 million to President Obama's Super PAC.
 - a. UNIDENTIFIED WOMAN: Bill Maher, of course, had used the "c" word to refer to Sarah Palin.
 - b. BILL MAHER, STAND UP-COMEDIAN: What is the evidence that I am a misogynist?
 - c. UNIDENTIFIED WOMAN: Every single thing you say about women.
 - d. MAHER: The blonde twink who's asking this question, I don't know who that lady is on FOX, but she's not bright.
 - e. UNIDENTIFIED WOMAN: As woman, as a public figure, I certainly -- if someone called me a "c."
 - f. UNIDENTIFIED MAN: Listen, Erin. Erin, some Republicans are saying hypocrisy though. Should Democrats give the money back?
 - g. UNIDENTIFIED MAN: Well, no, I mean, look.
 - h. UNIDENTIFIED MAN: Understand these words that Maher's used in the stand-up act are a little bit different.
 - i. UNIDENTIFIED MAN: Journalist Ron Suskind describes Obama group -- senior advisor as its boys club.
 - j. UNIDENTIFIED WOMAN: All the classic legal requirements for a genuinely hostile workplace for women.

- k. UNIDENTIFIED MAN: Suskind says, women are talked over and essentially sidelined.
- l. UNIDENTIFIED WOMAN: It's no secret that democratic women around town have for sometime talked about the fact that this White House, especially in the early days was a challenging place for women to work. That is no secret. But you know, it does seem, Wolf, that this whole I guess fig leaf, they have put on, on whether or not you are saying something vile about a woman whether she is a public or a private figure, that there is a real inconsistency there.
- 5. MITT ROMNEY (R), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: As I read the article, I want to make it very clear, I repudiate that effort. I think it's the wrong course for a PAC or a campaign. I hope that our campaigns can respectively be about the future and about issues and about a vision for America. I -- I have been disappointed in the President's campaign to date, which is focused on character assassination. I just think that we are wiser to talk about the issues of the day, what we do to get America working again. And talk about our respective records.
- 6. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Do Republicans really want to start talking about religious influence on candidates? Do they really want to us talk about Mitt Romney whose part of a religious group that has been one of the most racially segregated in the history of this country? And until the late 1970s, African-Americans, people of color, couldn't be ordained.
 - a. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: If the GOP, they want to do that, well, then guess what? You are putting Mormonism on the table. You are now putting on the table how African-Americans were treated by the Mormon religion. I don't think Mitt Romney wants that conversation considering he was an elder and his dad was an elder.
- 7. BARACK OBAMA, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: Political discussions, the kind that at Occidental had once seemed so intense and purposeful, came to take on the flavor of the socialist conferences I sometimes attended at Cooper Union, or the African cultural affairs that took place in Harlem and Brooklyn during the summers, a few of the many diversions New York had to offer like going to a foreign film or ice skating at the Rockefeller Center.
 - a. OBAMA: I spent the last two years of high school in a daze, locking away the questions that life seems incessant on posing. I kept playing basketball, attended classes sparingly, drank beer heavily, and tried drugs enthusiastically. I discovered that it didn't make any difference whether you smoked reefer in a white classmate's sparkling new van, or in the doom room with some brother you'd met down at the gym, or on the beach with a couple of Hawaiian kids who had dropped out of school and now spent most of their time looking for an excuse to brawl.
- 8. UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: How do you feel about that?
 - a. UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Concerning.
 - b. UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: How do you feel about the president hanging out with Marxists when he was a young man?
 - c. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: I personally hung out with some bad people, so I don't think it's not bad of a thing as long as he's not with them today.
 - d. UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Oh, I did know that.

- e. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: I do not respect that. I do not agree with that.
 - f. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Wow, that's called a (INAUDIBLE).
 - g. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: That doesn't make sense. Like why hang out with Marxists.
9. REP. NANCY PELOSI (D), CALIFORNIA: And bless their hearts, they act upon their beliefs. It's an ideology. We shouldn't have a government role. So reduce the police, the firemen, the teachers, reduce their role and give tax cuts to the high end. That will stimulate the economy and everything will be good. And I say to them, do you have children that breathe air? Do you have grandchildren that drink water? I'm a mom and I have five kids (inaudible). As a mom, I was vigilant about food safety, right moms?
- a. If you could depend on the government for one thing, it was that you had to be able to trust the water that our kids drank and the food that they ate. But this is the E. coli club. They do not want to spend money to do that.
10. STEPHANIE CUTTER, OBAMA'S DEPUTY CAMPAIGN MANAGER: We don't have anything to do with Priorities USA. That by law, we're not allowed to coordinate with them. And by law, we don't have anything to do with their ads. I don't know the facts of when Joe Soptic's wife got sick or when she died. But as I said before, I do know the facts of what Mitt Romney did with GS Steel. I do know the facts of how Joe Soptic lost his job, lost his health care, the entire company went bankrupt.
11. SOPTIC: A little while later, she was diagnosed with lung cancer. I had to put her in a county hospital because she didn't have health care. And when the cancer took her away, all I got was an enormous bill. When you look at what Mitt Romney did in places like GS Steel, you can tell he is worried about one group of people, and that's the people like him, people at the top. You can't expect much more from someone who says he likes to fire people with no concern about what their family really means. Now, I turn the call back over to Stephanie.
- a. CUTTER: Great, thank you, Joe. We really appreciate you and David sharing your experiences.
 - b. (END VIDEO CLIP)
12. WOLF BLITZER, HOST, CNN'S "THE SITUATION ROOM": You are responsible for this ad, is that right?
- a. BILL BURTON, CO-FOUNDER, "PRIORITIES USA ACTION": That's right.
 - b. BLITZER: You stand by it?
 - c. BURTON: Absolutely.
 - d. BLITZER: You make a serious allegation, in effect, suggesting that the Republican presidential nominee, in effect, is responsible for the death of this woman -- and clearly, he's not responsible.
 - e. BURTON: Absolutely not. You are absolutely right. He's not. That's not what the ad suggests.
13. BARACK OBAMA, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA: Over the next 3 months, 89 days, to be precise. The other side will be spending more money than we have ever seen. You have these guys writing \$10 million checks. You have these "Super PACs" that are just -- going crazy.
14. STEPHANIE CUTTER, CAMPAIGN MANAGER, OBAMA CAMPAIGN: We don't have anything to do with "Priorities USA." That by law, we're not allowed to coordinate with them and by law, we don't have anything to do with their ads.

- a. I don't know the facts of when Joe Soptic's wife got sick or when she died. But as I said before, I do know the facts of what Mitt Romney did with U.S. steel. I do know the facts of how Joe Soptic lost his job and lost his health care. The entire company went bankrupt.
15. JOE SOPTIC (via telephone): A little while later, she was diagnosed with lung cancer. I had to put her in a county hospital because she didn't have health care. When the cancer took her away, all I got was an enormous bill.
 - a. When you look at what Mitt Romney did in places like U.S. steel, you can tell he's only worried about one group of people, the people like him, the people at the top. You can't expect much more from someone who says he likes to fire people, with no concern about what their family really means. Now I will turn the call back over to Stephanie.
 - b. CUTTER (via telephone): Thank you, Joe. We really appreciate you and David sharing your experiences.
16. UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: I don't know the facts of when Joe Soptic's wife got sick or when she died.
 - a. ROBERT GIBBS, FORMER WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY: I certainly don't know the specifics of this man's case.
 - b. UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: We have as were to do with the Priorities ads, the super PAC ads as Michael -- as we do with Michael Phelps ' swimming gold medals last week. I cannot speak to the ad.
17. SOPTIC: You can't expect much more from someone who says he likes to fire people with no concern about what their family really means. Now I turn the call back to Stephanie.
 - a. STEPHANIE CUTTER, OBAMA 2012 DEPUTY CAMPAIGN MANAGER: Thank you, Joe. We appreciate you and David sharing your experiences.
18. BARACK OBAMA, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: The other side will be spending more money than we've ever seen. You've got these guys writing \$10 million checks, you got these **Super PACs** that are just -- just going crazy.
19. OBAMA: Mitt Romney.
 - a. (BOOING)
 - b. OBAMA: No, no, no. Don't boo. Vote! Vote!
 - c. (CHEERING) OBAMA: Voting is the best revenge.
20. ROMNEY: He told his supports, voting for revenge. Vote for revenge? Let me tell you what I'd like to tell you, vote for love of country.
21. JAY CARNEY, WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY: He is not saying that the system is now healthy and his campaign is making decisions, but the rules are what they are. And they will not -- they cannot play by a different set of rules.
22. RICK SANTORUM, (R) PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: This is typical Obama, which is whatever is necessary for him to keep power, that's what it's always about. This is not a matter of doing what's right.
23. BARACK OBAMA, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: That's not just a threat to Democrats. That's a threat to our Democracy.
24. MITT ROMNEY, (R) PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: I repudiate that effort. I think it's the wrong course for a PAC or a campaign. I hope that our campaigns can respectively be about the future and about issues and about a vision for America.

- a. ROMNEY: I'm not sure which is worse, him listening to Reverend Wright or him saying that we must be a less Christian nation.
- b. ROMNEY: The centerpiece of his campaign is quite clearly character assassination, and the centerpiece of my campaign is going to be my vision to get America working again and provide a brighter future for our kids.
25. REV. JEREMIAH WRIGHT, TRINITY UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST: And then wants us to sing God bless America. No, no, no. Not god bless America. Goddamn America. That's in the bible.
26. JOE BIDEN, VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: That's not the end of our aspirations! That's wLK hat we demand!
27. BARACK OBAMA, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: When it comes to a woman's right to make her own healthcare choices they want to take us back to the policy more suited to the 1950s.
28. ANDREA SAUL, ROMNEY CAMPAIGN PRESS SECRETARY: He's launching personal character attacks at Governor Romney and frankly blaming him for things in just a disgusting way.
29. ROBERT GIBBS, OBAMA CAMPAIGN ADVISOR: This is an ad by an entity that's not controlled by the campaign.
30. BARACK OBAMA, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: You've got these guys write in \$10 million checks. You got these Super PACs that are just going crazy.
31. VOICE OF MITT ROMNEY, (R) PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: I don't know whatever happened to a campaign of hope and change. I thought he was a new kind of politician.
32. JAY CARNEY, WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY: We do not control the ad.
 - a. CARNEY: Ed, I appreciate the efforts to get me to play political pundit. But that's not my job, and it's not -- I do not have any role in third party groups that produce these ads.
 - b. CARNEY: It is being broadcast in states across the nation to the tune of millions and millions of dollars.

PLAYED AD

1. UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: They can't argue with Herman Cain on the merits. They can't argue with Herman Cain on policy. So what do they do?
 - a. CLARENCE THOMAS, SUPREME COURT NOMINEE: Unless you kowtow to an old order, you will be lynched, destroyed, caricatured, rather than hung from a tree.
2. UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: You know what makes Barack Obama happy? Newt Gingrich's baggage? He has more baggage than the airlines. Fannie Mac helped caused the economic collapse but Newt Gingrich cashed in. Freddie Mac paid Newt \$30,000 an hour. \$1.6 million.
3. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Mitt Romney became CEO of Bain Capital the day the company was formed. His mission -- to reap massive rewards for him and his investors.
 - a. A story of greed, playing the system for a quick. A group of corporate raiders led by Mitt Romney more ruthless than Wall Street. For tens of thousands of Americans, the suffering began when Mitt Romney came to town.

4. NARRATOR: A group of corporate raiders led by Mitt Romney, the company was Bain Capital, more ruthless than Wall Street.
5. JOE SOPTIC, FORMER STEEL WORKER: I don't think Mitt Romney understands what he's done to the people's lives by closing the plant. I don't think he realizes that people's lives completely changed. When Mitt Romney and Bain closed the plant, I lost my health care and my family lost their health care. And a short time after that, my wife became ill. I don't know how long she was sick.
 - a. And I think maybe she didn't say anything because she knew that we couldn't afford the insurance. And then one day, she became ill and then I took her up to the Jackson County Hospital. And admitted her for pneumonia. And that's when they found the cancer. And by then, it was stage four. There was nothing they could do for her. And she passed away in 22 days. I do not think Mitt Romney realizes what he has done to anyone. And furthermore, I do not think that Mitt Romney is concerned.
6. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: She passed away in 22 days. I do not think Mitt Romney realizes what he has done to anyone. And I -- furthermore, I do not think Mitt Romney is concerned.
7. JOE SOPTIC, FORMER STEEL WORKER: And in one day she -- she became ill. And I took her up to the Jackson County Hospital. And -- and admitted her for pneumonia and that's when they found the cancer. And by then, it was stage four. There was nothing they could do for her. And she passed away in 22 days. I do not think Mitt Romney realizes what he has done to anyone. And I -- furthermore, I do not think Mitt Romney is concerned.
8. UNIDENTIFIED MAN: I was devastated. He makes me angry. Those guys are all rich. They all have more money than they will ever spend, yet they didn't have the money to take care of the very people that made the money for them.
9. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: President Obama quietly announced a plan to gut welfare reform by dropping work requirements. Under Obama's plan you wouldn't have to work and wouldn't have to train for a job. They just send you your welfare check. And welfare to work goes back to plain old welfare.
10. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: When Mitt Romney and Bain closed the plant, I lost my health care. And my family lost their health care. And a short time after that my wife became ill. I don't know how long she was sick and I think maybe she didn't say anything because she knew that we couldn't afford the insurance.
11. JOE SOPTIC, WIFE DIED OF CANCER: And she passed away in 22 days.
 - a. I do not think Mitt Romney realizes what he has done to anyone. And, furthermore, I do not think Mitt Romney is concerned.
12. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Did Romney pay 10 percent in taxes, five percent, zero? We don't know.
13. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: What if we had a candidate for president with a real record of creating jobs?
 - a. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: What if we had a better option for president? We do. Rick Perry. Jobs for Iowa is responsible for the content of this advertising.
14. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: There is an honest conservative challenging the Washington establishment, and she is not Rick Perry. Go to keepconservativesunited.com to stop Rick Perry from dividing conservatives.

15. UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Mitt Romney, you have to wonder, which page is he on today?
16. UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Obama gives his supporters at Solyndra a \$535 million loan, even though its business plan is risky. Solyndra goes bankrupt. The FBI is investigating and who pays the bill? We do.
 - a. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: For the first time in 13 years, our dependence on foreign oil is below 50 percent. President Obama kept his promise to toughen ethics rules and strengthen America's energy economy.
17. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: With Romney and Bain Capital the objective was to make money.
18. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: If we lost, they made money. If we survived, they made money.
19. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: He promised us the same thing he promised the United States. He'll give you the same thing he gave us. Nothing.
20. UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Mr. Romney, you're not going to be the candidate we choose.
21. JOE SOPTIC, FORMER STEEL WORKER: She passed away in 22 days. I do not think Mitt Romney realizes what he's done to anyone.
 - a. SOPTIC: They made as much money off as they could and they closed it down --
 - b. SOPTIC: I was lucky to find another job as a custodian in a local school district. They gave me some health insurance but I couldn't afford to buy it for my wife. A little while later she was diagnosed with lung cancer.
22. JOE SOPTIC, FORMER STEELWORKER: In my case and in my department, they actually offer to do buy our jobs out from underneath us.
 - a. SOPTIC: When you look at what Mitt Romney did at places like GST Steel, you can tell he's only worried about one group of people and that's the people like him. Now, I'll turn the call back over to Stephanie.
23. JOE SOPTIC, FORMER STEELWORKER: I don't think Mitt Romney understands what he has done to people's lives.

APPENDIX D

MSNBC SOURCING

INTERVIEWS

1. RICK TYLER (GINGRICH WINNG OUR FUTURE PAC)
2. BILL BURTON (PRIORITIES USA)
3. MICHAEL STEELE (MSNBC POLITICAL ANALYST – FORMER REPUBLICAN CHAIRMAN)
4. TIM PAWLENTY ROMNEY CAMPAIGN CO-CHAIR
5. RICK TYLER (WINNING OUR FUTURE)
6. BILL BURTON
7. TIM PAWLENTY ROMNEY CAMPAIGN CO-CHAIR
8. BILL BURTON & JOHN BRABENDER (RICK SANTORUM CAMPAIGN)
9. Rahm Emanuel Chicago mayor

ROUNDTABLES

1. MICHAELS ISIKOFF (NBC)
2. LAWRENC ODONNELL
3. ED SHULTZ
4. STEVE SCHMIDT

SOURCES

1. NEWT GINGRICH (R), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: I hope that they will edit it. I hope they will make it accurate and I hope they won't show the film without it being edited, and as I understand it, according to newspaper reports, Rick Tyler has said he's very prepared to edit the film.
2. JOE BIDEN, VICE PRESIDENT: My mother and father believed that if my brother or sister wanted to be a millionaire they could be a millionaire. My mother and father dreamed as much as any rich guy dreams.
 - a. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Absolutely.
 - b. BIDEN: They don't get us. They don't get who we are.
3. MITT ROMNEY (R), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: You can focus on the very poor. That's not my focus.
4. MITT ROMNEY (R), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: In the past when people pointed out that something was inaccurate, why, campaigns either pulled the ad, they were embarrassed.
5. NEWT GINGRICH (R), FORMER PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: We have no proof today.
6. ROMNEY: You know, in the past when people pointed out that something was inaccurate, why, campaigns either pulled the ad -- they were embarrassed. Today, they just blast ahead.

- a. ROMNEY: The super PACs that are out there running ads, Ron Paul's, mine, yours, as you know, that is not my ad. I don't write that ad, I can't tell them not to.
- b. ROMNEY: We've got to do some reforms in health care and I have some experience doing that, as you know.
7. SEAN HANNITY, FOX NEWS: We're watching and witnessing here --
 - a. COULTER: No, I'm serious about this.
 - b. HANNITY: I know you're serious.
 - c. COULTER: You're doing your show.
 - d. HANNITY: I agree with you.
 - e. COULTER: There's no point in us going to a convention and pushing for this man if he's employing morons like this.

ADS PLAYED

1. MITT ROMNEY (R), PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN: I believe that abortion should be safe and legal in this country. I will preserve and protect a woman's right to choose. And I'm devoted and dedicated to honoring my word in that regard. I am pro-life. I have faith on that legislation. I was independent during the time of Reagan-Bush. It's time for Republicans to start acting like Republicans. I'm not trying to return to Reagan-Bush.
2. UNIDENTIFIED MALE: With Romney at Bain Capital the objective was to make money. Whether the companies they came in and work with made money or not was irrelevant. Bain Capital always made money. If we lost, they made money. If we survive, they made money. It's as simple as that. He'll give you the same thing he gave us. Nothing.
3. AD NARRATOR: President Obama used his health care plan to declare war on religion.
4. BARACK OBAMA, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: It's going to take a new direction. If we keep talking about the economy, we're going to lose.
5. NARRATOR: Over the past four years, President Obama has traveled all over the world. He's traveled all over the Middle East, yet he hasn't found time to visit our ally and friend, Israel.
6. NARRATOR: People who've worked hard started a business and created jobs can't believe what President Obama's saying about them.
7. JOE SOPTIC, FORMER STEELWORKER: I don't think Mitt Romney understands what he's done to people's lives by closing the plant. I don't think he realizes that people's lives completely changed. I do not think Mitt Romney realizes what he's done to anyone. And furthermore, I do not think Mitt Romney is concerned.

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