

Niccolo Machiavelli once wrote, “For the great majority of mankind are satisfied with appearance, as though they were realities and are often more influenced by the things that seem than by those that are.” This is an accurate description of a frightening percentage of America’s population. The popular media is an overwhelmingly powerful agent of persuasion and influence regarding the American public’s perception of their country. The coverage of both the good and the bad is influential—though admittedly, such definitions are often subjective depending on which side of the argument one stands. Though the general purpose of media is to inform the public, every single outlet of media is guilty of influencing it to a particular point of view at one time or another. Whether this is electronic or print media, the effect is always present.

One strong example is the portrayal of America’s policies in movies, newspapers, television news and blogs. Consider, for example, a headline crying, “Friends and family beg for no death penalty for John Doe”. Regardless of the fact that John Doe is a convicted murderer, one might feel some form of sympathy for him because of his family’s pleas. Movies also play a role in this, portraying, for instance, illegal aliens as poor, helpless victims and not law-breakers. A situation like this is found in the movie *Crossing Over* in which US immigration officers are villainized for doing their job, following the law and deporting illegal aliens. Furthermore, television news often shows exclusively views of Middle East residents screaming that they want America out of their lands while neglecting to show the vast numbers of people thanking America for freeing them. Lastly, blogs have become a very important and powerful influence on my generation’s perception of America in recent times. Perez Hilton is a staggeringly biased,

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factually inexperienced and relatively uneducated loudmouth celebrity blogger. His criticisms of homosexual union policies may plant a seed of resentment in the hearts of citizens who only hear his emotional and generally irrational perspective. In all these examples, the reader might begin to slowly harbor resentment against America and view her as a barbaric nation, disregarding or perhaps ignorant of the truth of the situations.

A second example is the way in which media outlets cover politics. The actions of *People* magazine during the 2008 presidential election are a prime example of this. During the election, it featured now-President Barack Obama with his family in sweet portraits, while harshly criticizing Sarah Palin's pregnant unwed daughter, choosing to totally disregard both parties' policies and using the emotional appeal instead. The reason I give this as an example of media affecting our perception of America is that clearly we are being influenced by it—negatively—if it has caused us not to even hold our own country in high enough regard to more closely scrutinize our potential leaders' policies, and not just their personal lives.

That being said, however, the media can also be a powerful outlet for good. Blogs and networking sites such as Twitter have evolved from a mere social network into a powerful conveyer of messages. Pro-American messages have equal opportunities online to succeed; today, any 'regular' person (a citizen in no position of superior power) can broadcast his or her message over the Internet. The only requirement for a positive perception of America to spread is a large number of hard-working people willing to spread the message.

Overall, I think the media causes United States citizens to have a negative view of their own country. With disparaging newscasts, liberal radio DJs and the often-ignorant

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public unwilling educate themselves, it is no wonder that the media has influenced our opinions and caused such a negative tilt on our view of the nation. However, on the positive side, perhaps we should just recognize this as a prime opportunity for the upcoming generation of young adults to rise to the occasion, accept responsibility for America's future, and work to change the tides so that the citizens of America may love her more and feel more pride in bearing her name.