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***When Politicians Attack: Party Cohesion in the Media.* By Tim Groeling. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 256p. \$89.00.**

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In addition to providing a strong theoretical foundation and an extensive historical analysis, the author includes a content analysis of print (*New York Times*) and broadcast (NBC News) coverage of justices in the 1968–2007 period. Taken together with Lawrence Baum's *Judges and Their Audiences: A Perspective on Judicial Behavior* (2008), we now know a great deal more about the process by which unelected judges communicate with the public and various constituencies.

The book is invaluable as a foundation for classroom teaching and future scholarly research. Those who teach judicial process and constitutional law can relate well-known examples of justices who did not lead a monastic life on the Court. Some, like Abe Fortas and Felix Frankfurter, remained advisors to presidents; others, like Louis Brandeis, interjected themselves into policy debates. With this book, we have a new set of examples of justices seeking to enhance their public persona or using the media to pursue various other goals. As a pathbreaking study that is now the definitive work on the subject, it will provide the grist for future research.

Despite its obvious merits, *Justices and Journalists* is not without a few problems. It seems that many of the justices who leave the Court and suspect that their replacements will tip the balance in the opposite ideological direction are doing two related things. First, they are trying to preserve their individual or doctrinal legacy. It appears that Justices William Brennan and Thurgood Marshall, for instance, were using public statements in an attempt to protect the doctrine they took decades to construct. Second, justices are shining a spotlight on their institution to raise public awareness. Harry Blackmun, in his public statements and his opinions, tried to demystify the Court, warning the public that changes in the membership of the institution could lead to wholesale changes in the law. The author alludes to such motivations (particularly in regard to John Paul Stevens), but does not systematically label them as factors. Apparently, such motivations will only increase over time.

On a less important note, the book is occasionally redundant. For example, the author relates the story of the relationship between Hugo Black and journalist Marquis Childs in three different places. In each one, we get a full explanation of the nature of their relationship, rather than a simple reference to the previous discussion. But that is a minor critique of what is otherwise an important study that will be widely read and cited.

When Politicians Attack: Party Cohesion in the Media. By Tim Groeling. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 256p. \$89.00.
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— Doris A. Graber, *University of Illinois at Chicago*

In nearly all US elections, candidates supported by one of the two major parties—the Republicans or the Democrats—

win. Citizens usually vote for these candidates on the basis of their party label. That makes it crucial for political parties to cultivate a label or, to use Tim Groeling's terminology, a "brand" that resonates with the audience's aspirations. Consequently, it is equally important for the opposing party to sully the good image of that brand.

Because this battle for building a superior brand image is a struggle for individual votes, it must be waged where most voters are likely to actually encounter it. That means the mass media. In turn, that means that the brand image has to be constructed so that it becomes a newsworthy story that can be brought to the attention of journalists who are likely to incorporate it into published "news."

Groeling tells the story of the ways in which US political parties create and develop their brands and keep them consistent at various political levels and settings. He also shows how these stories become published news that helps or harms the goals of the parties. Each of the six chapters of *When Politicians Attack* is studded with hitherto unfamiliar details about the actualities of newsmaking processes. Groeling enlivens his analyses by illustrating them with multiple, brief case studies drawn from recent political history. The inspiration that seemingly guides his inquiries is a passion to test instances of conventional wisdom to establish whether and when each actually holds true. His book excels in laying out multiple viewpoints. In fact, the book is a goldmine political communication issues explored from diverse perspectives.

Most prior studies glibly discuss the parties' plans and actions in support of their brand without attention to each step in the process. They may say that candidates and parties should get their stories on the front pages of print news or early in the broadcasts of prominent, large-audience media, but they do not say precisely what needs to be done to accomplish that feat. By contrast, Groeling explains why "cheap" rhetoric—like stories about "dog bites man"—will not do, whereas the unpredictable, counterintuitive tale that "man bites dog" might qualify. In the end, what eventually becomes the subject of a news story depends on interactions among a whole host of complex factors that he documents, analyzes in painstaking detail, and tests and retests, almost obsessively. Herein lies the strength as well as the weakness of the book.

Groeling is right that political communication scholars have paid too little attention to the nature of the collective effort that is required of political parties to establish their brand as an appealing condensation symbol. His study enriches the literature because it provides insights into the intricate details, compromises, and costs of melding diverse values so that they attract the broadest support and the least intense opposition. It explains clearly how parties maintain collective support for the values encompassed by the brand across the branches of government.

According to the author, Republicans have excelled in branding in the past. They have been adept at relating

their policies to the key metaphors that voters attach to their most cherished values. Compared to the Democratic Party, the Republican Party has had a better grasp of the emotional appeals that move voters. Their successes have sprung from conscious efforts by Republican political leaders like Newt Gingrich and his allies to polish their brand and keep it current. In recent years, leaders of the Democratic Party have tried to match Republican tactics, drawing on ideas developed by liberal think tanks. That shows that parties copy each other's strategies. The large proportion of campaign funding allotted to designing and placing advertisements is also solid evidence of the importance that both parties assign to the development and dissemination of an effective party brand that will capture voters' hearts and minds.

Parties must adapt the range and substance of their policies to fluctuating political, economic, and social conditions at a given point in time. Such adaptations are arduous to make in the US context because party discipline is almost nonexistent. Americans do not formally enroll in parties, and that makes it tough to orchestrate the party chorus so that all self-proclaimed members follow the same tune.

The biggest hurdle in marketing a party's brand is getting its messages covered in news stories so that mass audiences of voters have a chance to see them. That challenge then raises the question of the kinds of stories that actually become news. Groeling acknowledges that scholars disagree about the forces that determine news-making processes and outcomes. As is typical of his nuanced approach to controversies, he emphasizes that newsworthiness of a story is rarely a permanent characteristic. It depends very much on political contexts. Accordingly, when the presidency and both houses of Congress are controlled by the same political party, their spats do not warrant coverage. Newsworthiness of spats increases when partisan control over the major branches of government is split among the parties and when elections are looming or the fate of major policies hangs in the balance. And, of course, fact-filled stories that rock the reputations of established idols almost always enjoy a privileged status when it comes to eligibility for inclusion in "the news."

Groeling contends that politicians can exercise some control over the news-making process by choosing their words carefully and by keeping journalists' routines and preferences in mind. He even constructs a model for calculating the odds that a well-crafted story will become newsworthy and published if all of the stars in the political firmament are properly aligned. Counterarguments seem fruitless without committing to extensive research. Groeling's approach is overpowering.

In terms of the advantages and disadvantages that flow from receiving news coverage, the author argues that during times of unified government, when both Congress and the president belong to the same party, published

news stories tend to weaken the parties' ability to support their presidential candidates. They are highly likely to feature conflicts between the president and Congress. It is also likely that the party excluded from power will get news coverage when its leaders attack incumbents. Underdog status in the political game turns out to be a valuable asset in the competition for space and time in broadcast and print news.

Once a story has vaulted across all of the hurdles and has made it into the news, were the costs and scars worth it? Are public opinions and votes affected in significant, politically meaningful, ways? Groeling constructs careful answers to these questions. He assesses the message sender's credibility from the audience's perspectives and how that audience might evaluate the degree of risk involved in sending the message. He claims that messages are most powerful in changing the audience's appraisals if they are interpreted as praise coming from the opposition. If Republicans approve of a controversial policy that a Democratic president is trying to sell to a skeptical public, the chances for major changes in the balance of public opinion increase sharply.

The overall impression that emerges from Groeling's research is that the Republican Party, and the Democratic Party to a lesser extent, have been reasonably successful in establishing their brands. Most voters have some idea of the values prioritized by each brand and how well or poorly these values match their own preferences. Successful brands have been able to keep in tune with the ever-changing environment without losing the loyalty of their adherents. Groeling's research explains better than other studies how such changes can happen without splitting the groups huddled together in the brand's tent.

When Politicians Attack also confirms that scholars have been essentially correct in their findings about the types of stories that have a reasonably good chance to become news. But better than prior books and articles, Groeling's research reveals how and why what is newsworthy varies with changes in political environments. Finally, he makes a convincing case that party leaders' successes in getting messages about their brand published and winning elections are unstable. Stories promoting the Democratic brand successfully are bound to be topped by even better stories about the Republican brand, which then generate more pro-Democratic party stories, and on and on and on.

How Information Matters: Networks and Public Policy Innovation.

By Kathleen Hale. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011. 240p. \$29.95.
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— David L. Weimer, *University of Wisconsin, Madison*

In recent years, researchers have given greater attention to the potential importance of networks in many human processes, such as the reinforcement of personal lifestyle