



## Opinion: Confronting a changing media landscape

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THE RECORD

MEDIA BASHING has been a part of American life — particularly its political life — since the dawn of the Republic. Everyone from colonial era pamphleteers with their rudimentary hand-cranked printing presses to the reporters and commentators who inhabit today's sophisticated high-tech communications world has felt the sting of outraged citizens who feel they've been done dirty by something printed or said about them.

The relationship between the media and those in public life — be they politicians, athletes, entertainers or business leaders — has historically been an uneasy one, oft-times sinking into open hostility. Reporters justify their intrusive behavior by arguing that those who seek public attention should be prepared to surrender some degree of personal privacy, while the subjects of their inquiries find that too often the boundaries of propriety, good taste and common courtesy are obliterated.

The overwhelming (some say suffocating) pressures of instant communications and the outlets spawned — 24-hour cable news, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, for instance — has outrun the ability of people to intelligently process the flood of information or, most i

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For 11 years eight as press secretary to Gov. Tom Kean in a similar role to Gov. Christie Whitman I dealt with the issues, putting out fires while igniting others on a daily basis.

To be sure, the influence of the print media has been diminished since then.

Their influence may have waned, but the relevancy has not. If anything, the competitive environment has sharpened a good deal of the print coverage with increased emphasis on analysis of complex policy issues, the kind of objective attention not readily available on blogs or through talking cable heads.

Without question, there are reporters who are excellent, ones that are mediocre and still others who should look for another line of work. It is no different, really, from excellent mediocre lawyers, doctors, politicians or auto mechanics, along with those who do not explore other occupational opportunities.

Public officials confront a new media paradigm, though, one that can bewilder and confuse them. Many are simply not particularly savvy in the ways of today's mass communication environment, and costly missteps committed out of lack of knowledge lurk constantly.

Bramnick's panelists have an opportunity to offer advice and counsel to those in office as well as to those contemplating entering public life.

If it becomes a media bashfest with smarmy comments about how Williams was suspended or Dan Rather was fired, it will be a pointless exercise.

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