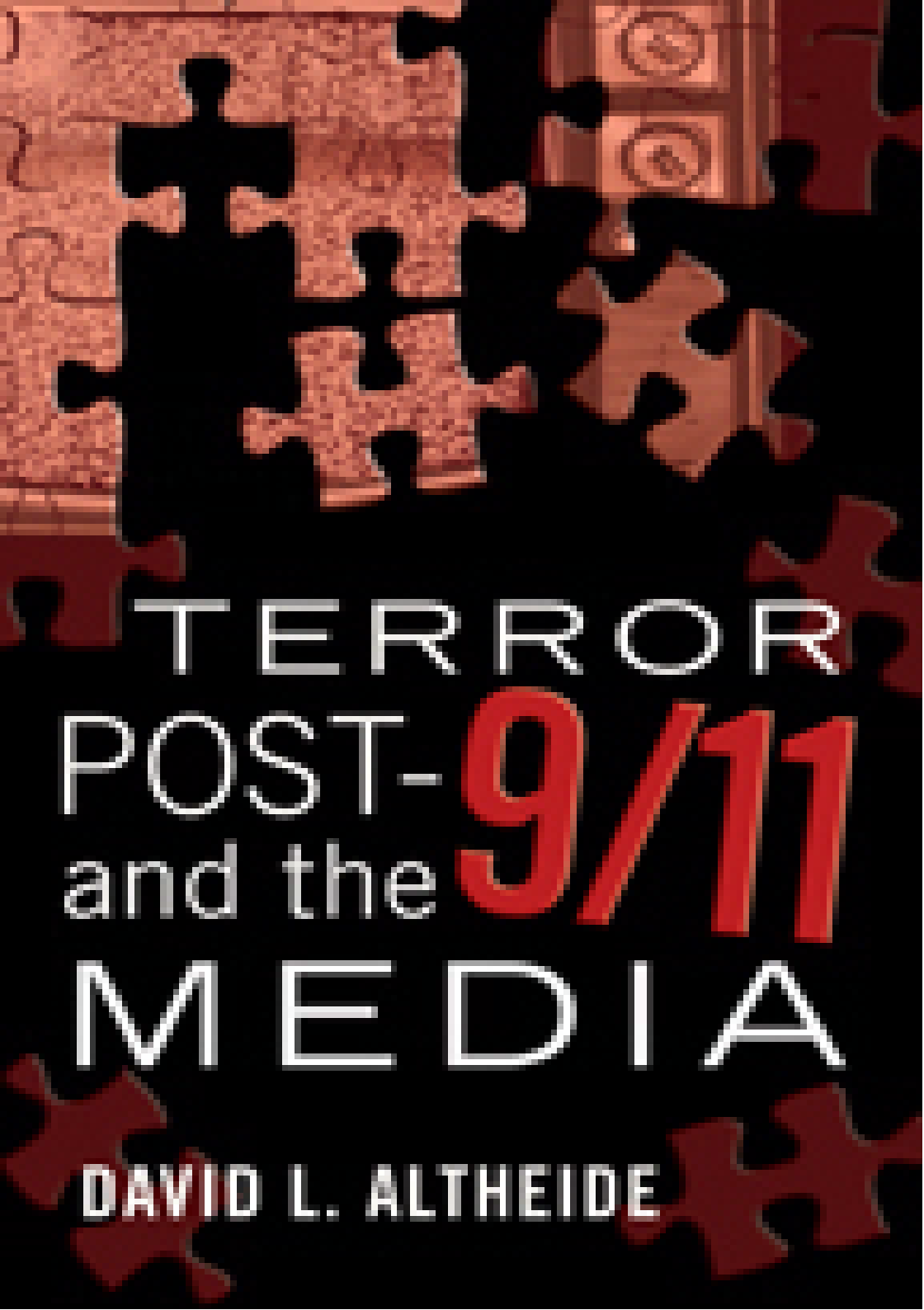
TERROR
POST-9/11
and the
MEDIA
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■ Introduction

> "I was crying the whole time. I didn't know what to do," Pena said. "We didn't know what was happening because everyone started running. Some people thought it was a bomb but then we figured out it was immigration."
>
> *—Young mother with child after an immigration raid in Mississippi*

The young woman was reacting to an immigration raid in Mississippi to find and deport illegal immigrants. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security developed this program in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and the near-hysterical calls to "protect us" and keep our borders safe. The mass media transmitted and helped shape this propaganda of fear, hate, and control. Part of my project is to understand how this has happened, describe the social and communication processes through which this continues to occur, and to suggest some remedies. This is critical, since policies and police actions like the one that terrorized the young mother are constructed and promoted by the mass media and popular culture.

We have more media and less information today. This is one of several paradoxes that I wish to address in this book. Both the media and the information are increasingly complicit in promoting fear that has been nurtured by an expansive information technology as well as entertaining formats that draw users/audiences. The guiding orientation or key concept that shapes

many of my comments is a perspective tied to an ecology of communication that refers to the structure, organization, and accessibility of information technology, various forums, media, and channels of information (Altheide 1995). The basic argument is that information technology interacts with new communication formats that in turn inform, change, and create social activities, including everyday life routines and the language that we use—what we call things. One of these activities is "terrorism engagement," or the symbolic recognition and validation that terrorism is a major threat. Terrorism has become a dominant frame surrounding many cultural and institutional narratives, including the perceived threat of illegal immigrants, which is really a code for "fear of the other." All of this makes for exciting talk and media programming.

We have seen even more advances in communication technology that have promoted new communication formats, including variations of entertainment, the more pervasive orientation to modern communication. A lot of content and activities have changed along the way. I will explain how the following chapters examine some aspects of this problem a bit later in these introductory remarks, but the first task is to provide an overview of how I regard changes in communication, organizations, technology, formats, and content.

A key feature of the new media environment is the emergence of media logic, which is defined as a form of communication, and the process through which media transmit and communicate information. Elements of this form include the distinctive features of each medium, the formats used by these media for the organization, the style in which it is presented, the focus or emphasis on particular characteristics of behavior, and the grammar of media communication (Altheide and Snow 1979; Snow 1983). This logic—or the rationale, emphasis, and orientation promoted by media production, processes, and messages—tends to be evocative, encapsulated, highly thematic, familiar to audiences, and easy to use. Media logic represents another generation of media studies. A previous listing of communication phases (Altheide 1995) has been updated. McQuail's (McQuail 1983 p. 176) insightful demarcation of "phases of media effects" lists the following approximate dates and focus:

- Phase 1 (1900 to late 1930s). The emphasis was on the nature and impact of the mass media to shape public opinion.
- Phase 2 (1930s to 1960s). Attention turned to the role of film and other media for active persuasion or information, including some of the unintended consequences of media messages.
- Phase 3 (1960s to 1980s). Interest centered on studies of media effects, but with a shift toward long-term social change, beliefs, ideologies,

cultural patterns, and "even institutional forms." (This was the period of the rise of "cultural studies" approaches [Williams 1982], interest in structural and rhetorical uses of the mass media, and also a renewed interest in semiotics, deconstruction, and critical literary criticism.)

With the exception of a few works represented in Phase 3, the overwhelming majority of significant works examined media as content and tended to focus on individual effects, e.g., voting behavior, violence, prejudice, and susceptibility to messages. It is really in the latter part of Phase 3 that attention began to shift to cultural and especially institutional analyses, but even here—including some of my previous work—the focus was on content, ideology, and how messages can be "biased."

- Phase 4 (1990 to 2000). The contemporary focus is on cultural logics, social institutions, and public discourse (Ferrarotti 1988; Gronbeck et al. 1991). This phase focuses on media and modes of representation as significant features of social life. Drawing on a breadth of theory and research, the latest phase of mass communication studies assumes that since all "messages" are constructed, there will be different interests represented in the content, including those made by social scientists about the biases of others! It is axiomatic that all statements contain and reflect some features of the cultural and ideological context and perspective in which they are offered. While such pronouncements are useful to inform the lay public about, say, news programs, my understanding of media effects is hardly enhanced by spinning my conceptual wheels on such forms of bias. The reason, of course, is that the problem is not solved by merely altering the "content" or by having one news source replace another. Rather, what is needed to move ahead is a fresh approach to the nature of communication basics, especially cultural forms.

  During this phase of media analysis, attention shifts decidedly away from the content of communication to the forms, formats, and logic of order. Formats of communication and control are central elements of this phase. Communication modes are no longer regarded merely as "resources" used by powerful elements; rather, they become "topics" in their own right, significant for shaping the rhetoric, frames, and formats of all content, including power, ideology, and influence. In this period, significant social analysis is inseparable from media analysis. Here the key concept is "reflexivity," or how the technology and logic of communication forms shape the content, and how social institutions that are not thought of as "media arenas"—such as religion,

sports, politics, the family—adopt the logic of media and are thereby transformed into second-order media institutions.

- Phase 5 (2000 to 2009). More attention is paid to cyberspace and the impact of digital media on personal identities, relationships, activities, and social institutions. This book is about Phase 5 and seeks to clarify key social processes and consequences of this expanded information technology and formats for understanding how the mass media operated after 9/11, as well as significant changes that have occurred across other social institutions and how these have been reported. All major social institutions, including finance, have changed and are continuing to adjust and reflect the non-linear and virtual features of digital media.

  This phase is largely defined by the ecology of a communication process involving technology, formats, and social activities. Social science concepts and theory lag behind the technological curve and related social activities that increasingly are partially played out in cyberspace, "on line," and involve constant computer-aided updates and interaction. This is the period in which more social science theory pertaining to social change had to attend to the role of the mass media in social and political life (Altheide 2003b; Kamalipour and Snow 2004; Meyer and Hinchman 2002; Norris et al. 2003). I devote a few more comments to this phase, since it is still emerging and was influential in—and influenced by—the events of 9/11, including a flurry of sites offering "alternative explanation" for the terror attacks, as well as a host of views critical of the Bush Administration, on the one hand, while spurring on significant political changes—such as the election of the United States' first black president—on the other.

Significant changes include information technologies that operate in cyberspace, rapid individual-group interaction for recreational, affective, and consumption purposes—marketing and advertising are major developers. Many of these changes involve the Internet and include numerous blogs, which users—especially younger people—prefer. This expanded use and mining by marketers has led to the rapid decline in traditional media such as newspapers, which, in turn, are scrambling to attract Internet users. Massive multiple-player Internet games now exist (e.g., "World of Warcraft" with 10 million participants), along with cyber playgrounds such as "Second Life," where surrogate actors known as avatars are constructed and instructed to play at social life in simulations of both real and fantasy experiences. Individual behavior, organizational processes and goals, and social movement programs and agendas are being planned and carried out through interactive formats

such as cell phones (e.g., texting) that open up Internet access to games, information, and personal Web spaces (e.g., Facebook, MySpace, YouTube). Consider that President Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign cultivated webbing and blogging in unprecedented numbers. For example, one on-line supporter, "Obama Girl," was viewed more than 20 million times during the campaign. As one observer noted: "The Obama video is the only one that all age groups have heard about in roughly equal numbers" (http://pewresearch.org/pubs/539/campaign-web-video, accessed December 10, 2008). Let us turn to some of the basic information changes.

■ Information Changes

Our news has changed since 9/11 in several important ways. Exactly what is 9/11? If we are to chart changes and make claims about impacts, we should have a handle on what this means. While much of this book is devoted to answering this question, suffice it for now to say that 9/11 is not just a series of events, but is a series of meanings so diverse that it is best conceived as emergent, still under construction, and varies widely by the situation and the social occasion of its use. I suggest that the critical question is neither "why 9/11?" nor "what is 9/11?" but rather "how is 9/11 used?" or how is it played out? Indeed, 9/11 is now used throughout the world, but especially in North America, as a symbolic vessel that is only partly full; it contains some basic meanings (e.g., crashing airliners into buildings), but it is a space for the interpretation of new events and for any speaker (or writer) to associate themselves (or their project) with some unspecified values and concerns. To share 9/11 integrates and legitimizes individual behavior, social policies, and institutional practices. Searching massive information bases such as Lexis/Nexis, Westlaw, etc., shows that 9/11 is invoked in a kind of global unity, but mainly as either a justification or an excuse for certain policies and practices. Terrorism oozes from this phrase, but it is mainly the reaction and rationale for more social control and wariness of threats from a seemingly endless source of "others," typically immigrants. These uses of 9/11 may be as diverse as the European Union trying to forge a common military force (beyond NATO), or Middle Eastern countries proposing and tempering policies of defending-against-terrorism that closely resemble attacking old threats with new language.

9/11 means something different in southern Asia, where decades of hostilities involving Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, and many other religious/ethnic/tribal/regional groups struggle to survive against collective memories of atrocities, victimization, injustice, and a thirst for revenge. Consider Mumbai, India,