

education, came as a shock when he came back to the United Kingdom after two years in the USA (Dean, 2012: 98).

Even when it does attract attention coverage can be less than exhaustive. One of the most controversial and contested developments in UK education in recent decades was the establishment of 'grant maintained' or 'opted out' schools – terms applied to schools that were able and encouraged to detach from local authority (local government) control after 1988. While the issue was aired considerably in a few 'quality' newspapers, the research concluded that coverage was characterised by a 'discourse of omission' as much as, if not more than by a 'discourse of derision'. In other words, while a lot of the relevant educational research was dismissed or derided, more was simply ignored (Pettigrew and MacLure, 1997). The education establishment has often felt obliged to seek to hit back at the dismissal of its concerns by media and political leaders alike.

Alongside this neglect is research that suggests teachers, though rarely, or only occasionally, represented, are much maligned or misrepresented. In a study of teachers' press images in the United Kingdom in the second half of the twentieth century, Cunningham notes the insistent presence of 'attacks from the political right and their development in the media' (Cunningham, 1992: 55). Yet he notes, as do others, the continuing regard for teachers in popular opinion despite such disparagement of them, and perhaps especially of their union representatives. The latter is highlighted in much US research. For example, a study by Goldstein of media coverage of teachers' unions suggests that the notion of teachers' unions as 'bullies' 'reflects much of the discourse revealed in data analysis' (Goldstein, 2011: 556). A British study by Warburton and Saunders of press cartoons in the UK suggests they play on a number of images that they serve to cement, including that there are two types of teacher, 'traditional' and 'progressive', and that teachers' own standards are poor, or that parents are 'worried sick', and so on (Warburton and Saunders, 1996: 320). It is not surprising that Dean quotes David Bell, a former head of the national schools' inspection service Ofsted, who, in commenting on a welcome increase in specialist correspondents, suggests they could counter the 'fact-free and prejudice-rich who witness the casual slandering of state education that permeates our newspapers' (Dean, op.cit.: 373–4).

The environment

Climate change and the environment, are of a different order to some of the other areas of public life considered here. While the occasional subject of 'event' stories, notable in exceptional natural events (volcano eruptions, violent storms, tornadoes and forest fires), the palpable and increasingly (though not universally) accepted importance of climate change is a challenge for the media in many ways. It is not surprising that the issue was barely evident in media output in earlier decades, although the 'anthropogenic' character of climate change, that is its causation by human activity, has been known, or at least discussed, for some considerable time. Occasional news about reports by international bodies, or the latest meteorological data showing yet another improbably hot year, or even dramatic films of forest fires across the globe or unlikely and disastrous flooding, are all important bases for news stories, but amount to a good deal less than the informed citizen might wish or need to know about such an important and increasingly apocalyptic subject.

In past times, few media would have had 'environment' correspondents or have thought about it as a news category. Despite spikes of concern in the 1960s, not least prompted by the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962 (see Kroll, 2001), most such posts were created in the 1980s, though often lapsed again a decade later as the subject declined in political prominence (Hansen, 2010: 76–9). The cyclical rise and fall of coverage of the environment, or more particularly climate change, has often been charted (for a useful summary see Boykoff, 2011: 20–28). The issue rose significantly in press and TV reporting in the late 1980s, not least through the prism of prominent personalities or political announcements. The emergence of climate change denial, and promotional lobbying designed to question the scientific evidence, followed swiftly in the 1990s, prompting what was to become one of the primal dilemmas of news reporting in this area. In seeking 'balance' between two apparently contradictory views – that climate change was indeed 'anthropogenic', or that it was not, or even that its very existence was dubious, invited many media to see these two positions as requiring balanced presentation by offering equal prominence to each. Such slavish adherence to one of the apparently basic requirements of journalism, in practice, gave the overwhelmingly consensual scientific view of the seriousness and human origins of climate change no greater prominence than the very much smaller and sectional, if vociferous, denial of such concerns. For the citizen seeking clarification, active pursuit of information and evidence became essential if not to be becalmed by this apparently reassuring balance (Boykoff, *ibid.*: 124 et. seq.).

The whole debate about climate change and its impact or causes is, of course, problematic for news media to convey. Journalists working in this field are often unusually committed and engaged with their topic, but, perhaps for that very reason, wrestle with the means to inject it into mainstream coverage. As Gibson et al. have noted, this may explain why public engagement with the issue, at least in the United States, has lagged somewhat, as specialist correspondents have sought to develop strategies to convert events, concerns, and warnings into the stuff of news stories (Gibson et al., 2016). Research into coverage in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* from 1980 to 1995 suggested that an early, almost apocalyptic concern with global warming, needs to be considered within a narrative growing over time and that the outcome of the 'master story' of global climate change may have discouraged later attention to global warming (McComas and Shanahan, 1999).

It was not until 2011 that the British Social Attitudes Survey, run annually since 1983, included a question about belief in climate change. This was not least because numerous earlier surveys had suggested that public concern about the environmental impact of climate change had fallen to historically low levels. By the time of the 2011 survey, however, 76% of respondents agreed that climate change was indeed happening and that human activity is, at least in part, responsible.

The complexity of the arguments also makes this an area of media output unusually dependent on material from sources. These could include scientific 'experts' in an age when expertise and its spokespersons are increasingly suspect, or the less overt but certainly powerful sources in the nuclear, fossil fuel, or oil industries.

It is not surprising then that 'The environment, more than many issues, brings to the surface some of the most persistent anxieties surrounding news media practices. . .' (Lester, 2010: 59).

News is about events, not process, yet climate change is very much the latter. One US study published in 2010 found that the US media were continuing to suggest climate change problems were exaggerated. Their findings suggested that in providing, where they did, 'both sides' of the climate change debate, one potential such 'side' – suggesting in line with increasing evidence that climate change was becoming even more hazardous and widespread than hitherto feared – was largely ignored in the US media (Freudenburg and Muselli, 2010).

The requirement of 'balance' seems otiose when the scientific consensus is overwhelmingly behind one position, so that 'balancing' it with the contrary view gives the reader/viewer an inevitably misleading sense of the relative weight of explanations on offer. The concerned citizen, anxious to explore what has become one of the most profound, some would argue the fundamental, issues of our age, would certainly need to be an active seeker for information and analysis to get to grips with the topic in any sustained manner.

Crime

Being made aware of transgressions of social norms and laws is plainly a civic need as well as a long-established staple of both news and fiction. The 'penny dreadfuls' of Victoriana and the gothic high drama of the contemporary police television series have formed a major part of media provision and audience diet. But if imagery, narrative and reporting of crime are plentiful, the sum picture of the world of crime, the penal system and policing is far from a complete or sufficient provision in this central area of public policy. Crime is probably the best example of one of the two paradoxes of news, in that its most dramatic or extreme instances receive prominent coverage, inevitably creating an exaggerated impression of their frequency. In general, news reports the unusual, but in so doing recurrently contributes to a culture that is likely to overstate the prevalence of such events (see Golding and Elliott, 1979). The example considered above, the environment and culture change, exemplifies the other paradox, that news reports events rather than processes.

Research into crime news is voluminous, and I do not here propose to review or summarise all this literature. But three characteristics illustrate its departures from any full account of criminality or criminal justice: the rate of crime events, the nature of crimes committed and the perpetrators of crime. One of the more creative theoretical advances in analysing crime coverage was the development of the notion of the 'moral panic', initially in Cohen's study of riots in England in the 1960s and 1970s, described in his analysis of their news coverage and the emergence into common usage of 'mods' and rockers' to describe the antagonists (Cohen, 1972). Schematically, a moral panic is created when the reporting of a series of acts by a minority increases the apparent frequency and significance of the action so as to give it a threatening prominence that changes perceptions and public concern. This is achieved by a 'deviancy amplification spiral' (Wilkins, 1964) which increasingly labels and characterises the 'crime' and its perpetrators, and in so doing foments a culture of both fear and recognition of the newly labelled problem. In different periods young people generally, women, social security claimants, single mothers, black youth, immigrants and others have all been so labelled and the central figures in such 'moral panics'. Drawing, not least, on the common penchant in journalism, perhaps especially in the popular press, for the implicit or explicit