Abstract

During the Nixon administration, Republicans, led by Vice President Spiro Agnew, pressed high-profile public critiques of liberal bias in network television news. This paper examines conservative media criticism in this period, with specific attention to a significant irony: conservatives often drew on arguments from liberal media reform traditions to attack a liberal media elite. In making their case against the networks, Agnew and his contemporaries critiqued media concentration and monopoly power, touted the public’s rights in the media system, and cited progressive reformers and legal opinions in support of their points. Drawing on analysis of the Vice President’s speeches, conservative writing on the media, and coverage of the events in the trade press and in National Review, this paper argues that the use of progressive media reform rhetoric aided in the development of a populist conservative media critique that identified liberals with privilege and power and conservatives with the people.