

## The Clinton Administration and the Changing Communication Environment: An Assessment of Communication Policies.

Susan Drucker, Hofstra University School of Communication, Dept. of Journalism/Mass Media Studies and Gary Gumpert, Professor Emeritus, Queens College

The Clinton administration spanned a period of time which produced a profusion of technological innovations. It was those technologies that constituted a bridge to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The innovations included the popularization of the internet, the rise of digital telecommunication technologies, and consolidation of media industries. Cell phones and PDAs became ubiquitous and wi-fi had begun. New terms entered the public lexicon: downloading, instant messaging, broadband rollout, e-commerce, web casting, v-chip technology, digital divide, identity theft and digital signatures to name a few.

Each administration renegotiates the social contract between government and the governed. Clinton's policy of government in the sunshine led to changes in policies on classification and declassification of documents, compliance with Freedom of Information Act requests and other forms of openness—all of these connected to the technologies of access and delivery. The illusion of access, of transparency, fostered by an ever-growing environment of electronic access to and press coverage of the governors and public institutions, made government appear more accessible and open.

Changes in data collection and retrieval technologies were reflected in Clinton era policies on communication and privacy that addressed the protection of personal information including medical records, and credit reporting. Protracted negotiations between the Clinton Administration and the European Union emerging from the 1998 EU directive on privacy reflected concern for balancing security and law enforcement with personal privacy and continued global trade.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of February 1996 President Clinton signed The Telecommunications Act of 1996 into law. This was a milestone in the history of telecommunications regulation in the United States. This revision of the Communications act of 1934, reflected the new realities of the telecommunications industries. The bill based on increased competition for development of new services in broadcasting and cable, telecommunications, information and video services reasserted Congress' role as the primary communications policymaker. Five general areas of policy were addressed: local telephone service, long distance telephone service, cable television, radio and television broadcasting, and regulation of the internet. The act abolished many cross-market barriers that had prohibited dominant players from one communications industry from providing services in other industry sectors.

The act reflected the new media environment of convergent technologies and industries. Convergence, the super-imposition of one medium upon the platform of another, required policy and regulatory reconsideration during the Clinton era. This paper will offer an inventory and assessment of Clinton administration communication policies.

Statement of Intent:

We agree that, should this panel be accepted, we will submit our essay by the established deadline and will attend the conference to deliver our paper.

Susan J. Drucker, Hofstra University

Gary Gumpert, Professor Emeritus, Queens College

November 15, 2004