

Book Notes: The Last Word. Media Coverage of the Supreme Court of Canada, by Florian Sauvageau, David Schneiderman and David Taras

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BOOK NOTES

THE LAST WORD: MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE SUPREME COURT OF CANADA, BY FLORIAN SAUVAGEAU, DAVID SCHNEIDERMAN & DAVID TARAS. VANCOUVER: UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA PRESS, 2006. Pp. vii + 260. \$85.00 hardcover.

BY DEAN ARDRON

For most Canadians the Supreme Court of Canada exists solely through coverage provided by the media. From this starting point, the authors of *The Last Word* set out to provide the first major examination of the important relationship between the Court and those who report on it. In their attempt to offer a quantitative analysis of media coverage, the authors closely examine both newspaper and television news coverage following four major Supreme Court decisions: *Vriend v. Alberta*, *Quebec Secession Reference*, *R. v. Marshall*, and *R. v. Sharpe*.

Through the analysis, a number of patterns emerge. The study finds significant divergence between coverage of decisions in Quebec and the rest of Canada. This includes substantial differences in the amount of coverage and also in the tone and approach of the pieces. The authors also find a disturbing number of instances where the media have provided incomplete, or simply wrong, summaries of decisions. Additionally, the findings suggest a consistent preference of the media to focus on the outcome—be it a victory for children in *Sharpe* or the success of an underdog in *Marshall*—while often neglecting the complex reasons behind a decision.

The authors conclude by discussing the significant evolution of the communications environment at the Court and the major steps forward that have been taken by Chief Justices Laskin, Dickson, Lamer, and McLachlin. Overall, the authors paint a positive, if imperfect, portrait of the relationship between the Court and the press, predicting that it is in the interests of both to retain the status quo in the future.
