



MRC Special Report

An In-Depth Study, Analysis or Review Exploring the Media

January 2004

Still Liberal, Still Biased

How Big Media Helped the Left and Hurt the Right in 2003

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

According to a growing number of journalists, the media's liberal bias — a trait that most reporters refuse to acknowledge — is no longer a problem. Pointing to the commercial success of conservative talk radio hosts such as Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity, plus the Fox News Channel's dominance of cable TV, many media liberals insist the news industry has all of the fairness and balance it needs.

"It took conservatives a lot of hard and steady work to push the media rightward. It dishonors that work to continue to presume that — except for a few liberal columnists — that there is any such thing as the big liberal media," *Washington Post* columnist E. J. Dionne argued late in 2002. Dionne, formerly a top political reporter for both the *Post* and the *New York Times*, asserted that the media are actually "heavily biased toward conservative politics and conservative politicians."

But as a new election year begins, the news organizations who truly dominate the media landscape — such as the Big Three broadcast networks and influential papers like the *New York Times* — remain what they have been for decades: allies of liberalism and enemies of conservative policies. All last year, Media Research Center analysts documented the media's coverage of a variety of social and political issues, and found that the Big Media in 2003 reliably reflected the liberal mentality that Dionne and others argued was a thing of the past:

- **Economic Policy: All year, the media waged a campaign against taxpayers while pushing for ever-expanding government spending.** TV gave three times more airtime to liberal arguments against President Bush's tax cuts than conservative

rebuttals, emphasizing how “big” and “huge” those cuts were. But when the subject was a much larger federal handout for senior citizens, the same network correspondents found critics who charged the giveaway of at least \$400 billion was “still not enough.”

- **Foreign Policy: The media showered skepticism on the elected defenders of American liberty, not the tyrants and terrorists who threatened us.** Before the war in Iraq, journalists such as ABC’s Peter Jennings advertised their open hostility to President Bush’s policies. During the war, NBC had to fire one of its correspondents for appearing on enemy-controlled Iraqi TV to declare the “failure” of the American war plan. After the war, journalists equated the alleged “quagmire” in Iraq to the failed U.S. effort in Vietnam two generations ago. The networks delighted in bad news – on the day of Saddam’s capture, Jennings pessimistically declared that “there’s not a good deal for Iraqis to be happy about at the moment.”
- **Social Issues: The media marginalized believers in traditional values and celebrated the counter-morality of secular progressives.** On the 30th anniversary of the *Roe v. Wade* decision, TV virtually ignored the well-attended annual March for Life. Supreme Court reporters contrasted “conservatives” with those supporting “gay rights,” as if conservatives are against “rights.” The networks also portrayed Gene Robinson, the first gay Episcopalian bishop, as a courageous pioneer.
- **Politics: The media showed extreme reluctance to portray liberal Democrats as ideologues and revealed their double-standard on character issues.** Although his presidential campaign is based on absolute opposition to the war in Iraq and reinstating the high tax rates of the Clinton era, numerous journalists rejected the notion that Howard Dean is liberal. As the California recall approached, reporters like Tom Brokaw – who refused to detail Juanita Broaddrick’s sexual assault charges against Bill Clinton – hypocritically confronted Arnold Schwarzenegger with last-minute groping allegations. “In many states, what you did would be criminal,” Brokaw lectured the GOP candidate.

The following month-by-month review shows how liberal bias contaminated the coverage of the major news stories of 2003, even as so many reporters continue to deny such bias exists. As the 2004 presidential campaign gets underway, the media elite – the Big Three networks, CNN, major newspapers and newsmagazines, wire services and taxpayer-subsidized public broadcasting – will surely be the Democrats’ greatest asset, as they twist their stories to boost liberals and thwart conservatives.

Still Liberal, Still Biased

How Big Media Helped the Left and Hurt the Right in 2003

BY TIM GRAHAM AND RICH NOYES

According to a growing number of journalists, the media's liberal bias — a trait that most reporters refuse to acknowledge — is no longer a problem. Pointing to the commercial success of conservative talk radio hosts such as Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity, plus the Fox News Channel's dominance of cable TV, many media liberals insist the news industry has all of the fairness and balance it needs.

"Today you have broadcast journalists who are avowedly conservative," CBS's Lesley Stahl insisted in a January 18, 2003 interview on FNC's *After Hours with Cal Thomas*. "The voices that are being heard in broadcast media today are far more — the ones who are being heard — are far more likely to be on the right, and avowedly so." Stahl, however, could not name a single conservative journalist working at CBS News.

When it came to the war, journalists wished their brethren had been even more critical of the Bush administration. "Certainly television and, perhaps to a certain extent, my station was intimidated by the administration and its foot soldiers at Fox News," CNN's Christiane Amanpour claimed in a September appearance on CNBC. Amanpour said a "climate of fear and self-censorship" kept network journalists from truthfully reporting.

There wouldn't be liberal bias when it came to the 2004 presidential election, either. "It took conservatives a lot of hard and steady work to push the media rightward. It dishonors that work to continue to presume that — except for a few liberal columnists — that there is any such thing as the big liberal media," the *Washington Post's* E. J. Dionne argued in a December 2002 column. He found that traditional news sources are "under constant pressure to avoid even the pale hint of liberalism...What it adds up to is a media heavily biased toward conservative politics and conservative politicians."

These liberal journalists may have correctly sensed that they can no longer get away with the egregious bias that was possible before Limbaugh, before the Internet, before Fox News and before the MRC began documenting the media's twisted take on the news. But in spite of these beneficial alternatives, the really Big Media — the powerhouse news organizations that produce what most Americans see, hear and read each day — retain a liberal perspective that continues to warp the news.

Although their audiences are steadily shrinking, the ABC, CBS and NBC evening newscasts still reach 25 million people, far more than any program on the Fox News Channel. And when the media pack goes looking for story ideas, they are far more likely to parrot the predictable analysis of the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* than repeat the insights of talk radio's conservative stars.

All last year, the Media Research Center's news analysts documented the media's liberal spin on a variety of social and political issues, ranging from the war in Iraq to the presidential election, tax cuts, the welfare state, abortion and the elevation of a gay bishop by the U.S. Episcopalian church. On these issues and many others, the media reliably reflected the liberal mentality that Dionne, Stahl and others have insisted was a thing of the past.

The following month-by-month review of the media elite's performance in 2003 shows that liberal bias is still very much with us. And that bias is not just of academic interest: As the 2004 presidential campaign gets underway, the media elite – the Big Three networks, CNN, major newspapers and newsmagazines, wire services and taxpayer-subsidized public broadcasting – promise to be the Democrats' greatest asset, as they twist the news to boost liberals and harm conservatives.

- JANUARY -

REPORTERS PUSH SPIN OF ANTI-TAX CUT LIBERALS: On January 7, President Bush proposed a new round of tax cuts designed to boost the beleaguered stock market and provide a stimulus to the slow-growing economy. In spite of the weak economic environment, an MRC study found network reporters displayed their classic bias against tax cuts by emphasizing the arguments of tax cut opponents.

Media Research Center analysts studied all 28 tax cut stories on the ABC, CBS and NBC evening newscasts from January 2 through January 15, 2003, the two weeks surrounding the new tax cut plan's debut. The study found ABC, CBS and NBC gave three times more airtime to liberal arguments against Bush's tax cut than to the conservative arguments for it.

There were three main elements to liberals' critique of Bush's tax cut plan. First, they argued that tax cuts were a poor way to stimulate the economy. Second, they claimed that tax cuts would worsen the budget deficit. Lastly, they condemned the tax cut for supposedly only aiding the rich.

The three evening newscasts showed 58 sound bites from politicians, activists or others making one of these three liberal attack points, compared with 27 sound bites from conservatives rejecting these

Reporters Shifted Tax News Left		
	Liberal Arguments	Conservative Arguments
Soundbites	68%	32%
Reporters	94%	6%
ABC	83%	17%
CBS	74%	26%
NBC	64%	36%
Total	73%	27%

Based on an MRC analysis of 102 statements from reporters and sources on the ABC, CBS and NBC evening newscasts, January 2-15, 2003.

assertions, a greater than two-to-one liberal skew. When TV correspondents themselves weighed in, they sided with liberals another sixteen times, while only one journalist offered an argument supportive of the tax cuts.

The lonely dissident was CNBC's Ron Insana, who told NBC's John Seigenthaler on the January 4 *Nightly News* that "there are some elements of this package that could, in fact, encourage business leaders to spend more on new plant and equipment [purchases], and that is what has been missing in this economic recovery."

Network correspondents were most likely to repeat the liberal view that the tax cuts benefited the rich, a point reporters asserted 10 times during the two week study period. "The bigger your wallet, the bigger the benefit," *CBS Evening News* reporter Byron Pitts insisted on January 6 as he presented the tax cut as liberals wished, in terms of dollars saved, not the percentage tax reduction each family would receive. Emphasizing percentages would have showed the benefits were larger for lower-income families.

Pitts played a soundbite from an "expert" source, an accountant who proclaimed, "If you were to summarize this tax proposal as we see it today, the winners are the wealthy." Pitts failed to tell CBS viewers that the accountant, Avery Neumark, was a longtime contributor to liberals like New York Congressman Jerrold Nadler as well as the Democratic National Committee.

Reporters could have balanced their coverage by citing statistics placing liberal claims in context. Using IRS figures, the Tax Foundation showed how the tax code punishes the rich: the top 10 percent of Americans (those earning over \$92,114) account for 46 percent of all income earned in the U.S., but pay 67.3 percent of income taxes. The top half of earners (those making over \$27,682 a year) pay nearly all of the nation's income taxes. Just two NBC reporters – Campbell Brown and Lisa Myers – told viewers (in general terms) that the rich pay a far higher share of federal income taxes. ABC and CBS completely omitted this basic fact.

And because Bush's proposal envisioned moving many lower income families into the ranks of non-taxpayers, the rich would wind up paying an even greater share of the income taxes. As *Washington Post* reporters Dana Milbank and Chris Jenkins noted January 10, "Treasury figures show the share of the tax burden borne by those earning more than \$100,000 would rise from 72.4 percent to 73.3 percent" if the whole tax cut passed Congress. But not one network reporter hinted at this further skewing of the tax code against the rich.

TV TREATS PRO-LIFE MARCHERS AS IRRELEVANT: Despite the 30th anniversary of the Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* decision, the networks studiously ignored the well-attended annual March for Life on January 23 – a stark contrast with the amount of publicity heaped on a well-attended left-wing, Bush-bashing protest against the approaching war in Iraq that occurred just four days earlier.

Tax Cut Is Bush's Teapot Dome

"It's crumbs for about 99 million, and then it's caviar for the very top....It won't create jobs, it's not going to stimulate the economy, it will exacerbate the income disparity in America.... You've got to go back to Teapot Dome to find such a fleecing. This time it's legal — Bloomberg reported that George W. Bush himself, \$44,000 tax break here; Dick Cheney, \$327,000 tax break."

— *Wall Street Journal Executive Washington Editor Al Hunt on CNN's Capital Gang, January 11, 2003.*

ABC, CBS, and NBC aired 26 segments on the anti-war march, 14 of them before the rally began, stories which emphasized the protesters' diversity, including political diversity. "Braving frigid temperatures," ABC's Lisa Sylvester proclaimed on the January 19 *World News Tonight*, "they traveled across the country — black and white, Democrat and Republican, young and old."

On CBS that night, Joie Chen sounded similar notes: "Young, old, veterans and veteran activists united in the effort to stop the war before it starts." The coverage, print and broadcast, excised speeches from the podium, from rally organizer Ramsey Clark's call for President Bush's impeachment to a man decrying the Bush administration as "greedy imperialist murderers."

The networks were much less interested in reporting on the March for Life. While they offered nine stories (four of them pre-rally) on the wider news angle of the 30th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, stories made only oblique references to marches around the abortion issue. Not one network news story had the pro-life demonstrations as its central topic, in contrast to 26 that featured left-wing anti-war protesters.

While both the anti-war and the pro-life rallies were organized to demonstrate a tide of public opinion for their cause, network anchors blurred the tens of thousands of pro-lifers in Washington into the tiny bands of pro-abortion protesters (a midday Planned Parenthood rally was estimated by Reuters at 150). Before the march, NBC's Lester Holt explained: "Rallies are scheduled in many places including Buffalo, New York." That evening, Dan Rather obscured the counts this way: "Tens of thousands of demonstrators on both sides of the issue filled the streets of Washington today."

In fact, the pro-life side consisted of tens of thousands, while the pro-abortion side could only muster a few tens.

Reporters failed to describe the pro-lifers marching in Washington as a diverse collection of young and old, Republican and Democrat. Instead, reporters highlighted the most extreme elements. Both NBC's *Today* and the CBS *Evening News* filed reports from Buffalo, where NBC's Kelly O'Donnell reported on a "crowd" that was later described as "a dozen or so" by the *Buffalo News*: "Today, supporters of James Kopp the man who confessed to the killing [of abortionist Barnett Slepian in 1998], have come to Buffalo to claim the shooting was justified." On CBS, reporter Jim Axelrod held up the "small number of demonstrators" as "telling," since the Slepian shooting was "an example of how abortion is redder than any other red meat social issue in America. It's the one producing the most violence." Axelrod spoke over video of a bomb going off.

This stark contrast in microcosm was best demonstrated by ABC's *Nightline*. On January 22, ABC split the program roughly in half between abortion advocates and foes. Reporter Dave Marash suggested the country might be better off without a national abortion discussion: "The year 2003 looks like both a crucial and a cruel one for America's harshest political debate."

By contrast, on January 16 *Nightline* had devoted most of its program to promoting the anti-war movement, and worrying about how it could broaden its appeal. Instead of showing both sides, Ted Koppel interviewed two leftists: Vietnam War protester Tom Hayden and Rep. Dennis Kucinich. Koppel began: "Thousands of anti-war demonstrators will take to the street this

weekend and their message is clear...But is America really listening? Tonight, 'The Movement,' struggling to be heard."

If it were up to the networks alone, only the pro-life movement would need to struggle to be heard.

- FEBRUARY -

PETER JENNINGS EMPHASIZES ANTI-WAR VOICES: Liberal revisionists now insist the news media meekly went along with the Bush administration's so-called "rush to war," but in the weeks preceding military action many journalists expressed deep skepticism of the President's tough stance against Saddam Hussein. Although all of the broadcast networks portrayed protesters from the anti-war Left as respectable and mainstream, ABC's Peter Jennings was the most supportive of their message, and he routinely tilted his newscasts in favor of their complaints.

On his February 7 *World News Tonight*, for example, Jennings excitedly reported how "the Iraqis appear to be making some concessions." He concluded that night with a slanted preview of the upcoming week: "The UN weapons inspectors go back to Baghdad this weekend. They have not been happy with Iraqi cooperation so far. We'll see if the Iraqis do any better — and if that means anything to the Bush administration."

Exactly one week later, during live coverage of a debate at the United Nations, Jennings continued to paint the administration as obstinate and destructive. "I think a lot of people got the impression this week that maybe the Bush administration doesn't mind if the Western alliance as we've known it in the post-war period breaks up," he remarked to White House correspondent Terry Moran.

Five days later, Jennings was still at it. "We're going to begin this evening with the Bush administration and its allies. It is quite clear in Washington tonight that the administration is prepared to jeopardize its relations with several of its oldest and best friends in order to get its way about Iraq," he intoned on the February 19 *World News Tonight*.

Most of the networks offered indulgent coverage of anti-war marches on February 15 and 16 — CNN even gave the protesters their own two-hour special, *Voices of Dissent*. But only Jennings was still beating the anti-war drums three days later. While the other anchors had moved on to fresh news, Jennings on the February 19 *World News Tonight*, celebrated that while the "the enormous anti-war demonstrations" have not "changed" President Bush's "mind about Saddam Hussein," they "have certainly given Mr. Bush's opponents some sense that they have momentum."

On February 26, Jennings tried to make the gimmicky "virtual" march of electric complainers sound impressive: "Thousands of people opposed to war against Iraq bombarded the Senate and the White House with phone calls, faxes and e-mails. They called it a virtual march on the Capitol. Communications were virtually paralyzed in the Senate for a while. Many congressional phone

lines were jammed for several hours and one Senator reported 18 times more e-mail than usual." Protesters did not even have to take the trouble of flying or driving to an actual demonstration to make it onto ABC's airwaves.

But was the protest movement a political powerhouse? It's fair to describe a protest of 100,000 strong as "massive," but at the same time tens of millions of Americans were supporting the idea of a war with Iraq. And ABC doesn't always go out of its way to celebrate passionate minorities. Harry Browne, the Libertarian candidate, received more than 384,000 votes in the 2000 presidential campaign, but it's fair to say ABC never described that campaign as a political juggernaut.

DAN RATHER PANDERS TO SADDAM HUSSEIN:

While his coverage of the subsequent war with Iraq was far better than that of his ABC colleague, Texan Dan Rather seemed interchangeable with Canadian Peter Jennings on one Wednesday in February.

In retrospect, it's easy to express relief that Saddam Hussein was deposed in April and captured in December. On both occasions, newscasts briefly underlined how Saddam had been the force behind brutal torture and the filling of mass graves. But on February 26, CBS's *60 Minutes II* devoted an hour to the anchorman's interview with Saddam, a murderous dictator for whom Rather gave more respect than he has offered to some elected American leaders.

Many Americans remember Rather yelling at then-Vice President George H. W. Bush about Iran-Contra on January 25, 1988: "Can you explain how — you were supposed to be the — you are — you're an anti-terrorist expert. We — Iran was officially a terrorist state...Mr. Vice President, the question is, but you, made us hypocrites in the face of the world!...How could you sign on to such a policy?"

Not only did CBS submit itself to humiliating conditions they would never accept from an American politician — being driven around town for hours on end before the interview, ceding control to Iraqi translators, Iraqi camera operators, and Iraqi minders reviewing the tape afterwards. During the interview, Rather politely referred to the dictator as "Mr. President," sitting calmly and quietly as Saddam repeated the absurdity that he had received 100 percent of the vote in Iraqi "elections."

TV Promoted Left-Wing Critics

"Bundled up against the cold, protesters came by the thousands, filling block after block around the United Nations to make a single dramatic statement against going to war."

— **Pat Dawson, *NBC Nightly News*, Feb. 15.**

"There are many here today who speak with a sense of urgency and frustration....So many voices, filling the streets, struggling to be heard."

— **ABC's John McKenzie on *World News Tonight*, February 15.**

"Despite some arrests and clashes with police, it was, for the most part, a peaceful reminder to the powerful that there is a divide over whether the nation should go to war."

— **Jim Acosta, *CBS Evening News*, Feb. 15.**

"It's an extraordinarily diverse crowd. I have seen elderly men and women with mink coats carrying their posters. I have also seen children with their parents coming from public schools....I have seen old anti-war folks who say that they have been coming to demonstrations since the 1960s, as well as high school students and college students who have never taken part in any demonstration who are now becoming part of the activity here."

— **Reporter Maria Hinojosa during CNN's special 2-hour program on the protests, *Voices of Dissent*, February 15.**

Rather also spent several minutes entertaining Hussein's gimmick of an international TV debate with President Bush, as if Saddam gained his office with debating skills. He prompted Hussein to expound on his propaganda: "What's the most important thing you want the American people to understand at this important juncture of history?" He followed up with questions about the logistics and who would moderate.

Rather called it "surprising" and "new," and CBS plugged it relentlessly. But the tape from August 29, 1990 – Rather's last exclusive sit-down with the dictator – quickly revealed an identical offer from Saddam Hussein to debate George H. W. Bush or Margaret Thatcher.

Rather dramatically concluded the interview by expressing concern that "given the sober moment and the danger at hand, what are the chances this is the last time you and I will see each other?"

In the end, the interview was a ratings success, with 17 million Americans tuned in. But CBS wasn't the only happy participant. On *Fox & Friends* February 28, reporter Greg Palkot relayed: "Last night, Iraqi state television ran in its entirety that interview that CBS News's Dan Rather conducted with the Iraqi president earlier this week. Our contacts in Baghdad tell us that this is an indication that the regime was very pleased with how the interview went, and they felt that it effectively got across the points the government there wanted to get across."

- MARCH -

PETER ARNETT COMFORTS A DYING DICTATORSHIP: As a CNN reporter during the first Gulf War back in 1991, Peter Arnett transmitted Saddam Hussein's lies to an international audience. Before this year's Gulf War, MSNBC and NBC chose to give Arnett, technically a correspondent for *National Geographic Explorer*, a starring role in their war coverage. As he had a dozen years before, Arnett's war stories often parroted the propagandistic claims of Iraqi officials without a trace of professional skepticism.

On the *Today* show on March 26, for example, he told Matt Lauer a horrifying – and false – story about the U.S. using cluster bombs on civilian targets in Baghdad: "We traveled down a wide road, and we got to the scene, and shops on both sides of this highway had been destroyed, Matt, and there was smoldering, 20 or so smoldering vehicles in the street. Residents said that 11 o'clock this morning, local time, two missiles came in, exploded, and the first journalists there earlier said they counted 15 corpses. It was smoldering on the road. We saw body parts being handed around by people and it was, later the Information Minister, Mr. al-Sahaf, complained that the U.S. has started using cluster bombs in the Baghdad area."

An hour later, Arnett dutifully repeated the Information Minister's claim about "cluster bombs," again without any skepticism or doubt. NBC finally summoned its Pentagon correspondent, Jim Miklaszewski, who told *Today's* audience the claim was highly dubious, that cluster bombs are normally used against troops in the field, not urban areas. Miklaszewski explained: "It would be very unusual if, in fact, cluster bombs were used inside Baghdad. And if

you look at pictures...a cluster bomb would create a Swiss-cheese effect, thousands and thousands of holes in the target, and we don't see that."

Peter Arnett's worst treachery came March 30 when he appeared on Iraqi state television and praised the "determination" of Iraq's army, declared the U.S. war plan a "failure" and arrogantly proclaimed that he had warned the Bush administration that Iraq wouldn't be a pushover. Even though three U.S. journalists were missing in Iraq and feared kidnaped by the Hussein regime, Arnett mindlessly gushed: "I've met unfailing courtesy and cooperation, courtesy from your people and cooperation from the Ministry of Information." Arnett then bucked up Iraqi morale, opining that their "resistance" had caused the initial U.S. war plan to "fail" (see box).

For that, NBC and MSNBC correctly decided to cease using Arnett's reports, and *National Geographic Explorer* fired him. But in ending his contract, NBC said nothing about the substance of what he said and only cited how it "was wrong" to do the interview with Iraqi TV and "was wrong for him to discuss his personal observations and opinions in that interview."

After a farewell interview on *Today*, co-host Matt Lauer told Arnett, "Peter, at the risk of getting myself in trouble, I want to say I respect the work you've done over the last several weeks and I respect the honesty with which you've handled this situation. So good luck to you."

Within a day, Arnett had begun writing for Britain's far-left, virulently anti-American *Daily Mirror* newspaper. In an essay about himself, Arnett claimed that he had lost his job because the U.S. government and "right-wing media" feared his "truth" telling.

Arnett asserted in his story in the April 1 edition of the tabloid: "They don't want credible news organizations reporting from here because it presents them with enormous problems." And why, Arnett not so humbly wondered, was "my successful NBC reporting career...turned to ashes?" His answer: "Because I stated the obvious to Iraqi television; that the U.S. war timetable has fallen by the wayside." Arnett elaborated on the conspiracy against him: "The right-wing media and politicians are looking for any opportunity to be critical of the reporters who are here."

REPORTERS WORRY THEY ARE TOO PRO-BUSH: As the "rush to war" approached an end after eight months, some reporters grew frustrated that the media was not stopping it. After a March 6 White House press conference failed to shake public confidence in President Bush, ABC reporter Terry Moran made waves by telling the *New York Observer* newspaper that Bush left his colleagues in the

Comforting a Dying Dictatorship

"Within the United States, there is growing challenge to President Bush about the conduct of the war and also opposition to the war. So our reports about civilian casualties here.... help those who oppose the war."

"Clearly, the American war planners misjudged the determination of the Iraqi forces....And I personally do not understand how that happened, because I've been here many times and in my commentaries on television I would tell the Americans about the determination of the Iraqi forces, the determination of the government, and the willingness to fight for their country. But me, and others who felt the same way, were not listened to by the Bush administration.

"Now America is re-appraising the battlefield, delaying the war, maybe a week, and re-writing the war plan. The first war plan has failed because of Iraqi resistance; now they are trying to write another war plan."

— **Fired reporter Peter Arnett's comments on Iraq's state-controlled TV network, March 30.**

press corps “looking like zombies.” *Observer* columnist Matt Taibbi suggested reporters were routed, like Texans at the Alamo: “The entire White House press corps should be herded into a cargo plane, flown to an altitude of 30,000 feet, and pushed out, kicking and screaming, over the North Atlantic.”

By October, Bill Moyers told the left-wing web site Buzzflash.com that “Matt Taibbi wrote in *The New York Press* at the time that it was like a mini-Alamo for American journalism. I’d say it was more a collective Jonestown-like suicide. At least the defenders of the Alamo put up a fight.”

In reality, reporters had challenged the President with tough questions. CNN’s John King cited Ted Kennedy’s belief that “your fixation with Saddam Hussein is making the world a more dangerous place.” Ed Chen of the *Los Angeles Times* demanded to know that if Bush “trusted the people” with their tax cuts, why not trust them enough to give them an estimate of the war costs? Bob Deans of Cox Newspapers even suggested that the Vietnam War was unjustified since Vietnam hasn’t directly threatened American security in 30 years.

For his part, Moran lectured the President that he had “generated opposition from the governments of France, Russia, China, Germany, Turkey, the Arab League, and many other countries, opened a rift at NATO and at the UN; and drawn millions of ordinary citizens around the world into the streets and anti-war protests. May I ask what went wrong that so many governments and peoples around the world now not only disagree with you very strongly, but see the U.S. under your leadership as an arrogant power?” Afterward, Peter Jennings praised it as “a fairly straightforward question.”

On the evening news shows preceding the prime-time event, Jennings asked Secretary of State Colin Powell: “So many people don’t understand why you shouldn’t let the inspections continue if they are accomplishing anything....Most people think they’re doing a reasonably effective job at the moment.” Over on NBC, Ron Allen was reporting from Iraq that “Tonight, word of America’s new deadline and threat of war fazed no one at this Baghdad café.” Allen then cited an Iraqi man: “America is a terrorist country, he says.”

That morning, as the White House press corps prepared to pepper Bush with questions about his “arrogant...obsession” with Saddam Hussein, ABC’s *Good Morning America* was marveling at Saddam’s popularity. Diane Sawyer revealed: “I read this morning that he’s also said the love that the Iraqis have for him is so much greater than anything Americans feel for their President because he’s been loved for 35 years, he says, the whole 35 years.” From Baghdad, reporter Dan Harris seconded Sawyer: “He is one to point out quite frequently that he is part of a historical trend in this country of restoring Iraq to its greatness, its historical greatness. He points out frequently that he was elected with a hundred percent margin recently.”

If the press were to be accused of acting like “zombies,” it was more plausible to argue they were zombies for Saddam than they were zombies for President Bush.

MEDIA CHAMPION FREE SPEECH – BUT ONLY FOR THE LEFT: Before, during, and after the war, celebrities complained that their courageous anti-war stances would be met with harsh punishment in a dissent-hating America. But the networks love famous faces, and celebrities were being courageous all over the television dial, even as CNBC anchor Brian Williams was suggesting “what some say is a war on free expression in the United States.” But when a Republican Senator used his free speech to protest a forthcoming Supreme Court decision on homosexuality, reporters went from championing the intimidated to championing the intimidators who wanted the Senator to resign.

On NBC’s *Today* on April 14, Matt Lauer awarded actor Tim Robbins with two segments to unfurl his opinions. On CBS’s *The Early Show* on April 18, his wife Susan Sarandon claimed “over the next ten years two hundred and some billions of dollars” will be “cut” from veterans’ benefits, even as Congress was planning a 12 percent increase. Actress Janeane Garofalo popped up almost everywhere on the TV networks.

But on the April 16 *World News Tonight*, ABC’s Peter Jennings warned: “When we come back this evening, being against the war and in show business – and the people who want to punish you for that.” Tim Robbins gave a speech to the National Press Club complaining about the “chill wind” blowing against Hollywood peaceniks, and ABC’s Jim Wooten suggested, “All this has reminded some of the McCarthy era’s blacklists that barred those even accused of communist sympathies from working in films or on television.”

Wooten reported on how anti-war entertainers like the Dixie Chicks had been boycotted by war supporters and how Robbins and Sarandon had been cancelled from an appearance at the Baseball Hall of Fame. Sean Penn sued producer Stephen Bing after he was dropped from a movie. That was the extent of the “oppression” on display. ABC did not note any Hollywood hypocrisy, since Robbins led members of the Screen Actors Guild in a 2000 strike of advertisers seeking higher payments. When actress Elizabeth Hurley accidentally crossed the picket line by making an Estee Lauder ad, Robbins suggested her SAG membership should be stripped, ruining her acting career.

Not all political marches were promoted. ABC ignored a pro-troops rally in New York on April 10 that drew an estimated 15,000 people. On April 12, an estimated 5,000 gathered in Washington for a pro-troops rally on the same day that 40 people protested the Masters golf tournament. ABC covered the puny Masters protest, but not the DC rally. NBC devoted a story to the Masters protesters, but gave the DC rally a few seconds in passing.

In April, it did appear dissent had its limits in America – when Associated Press editors and reporters tried to force Republican Senator Rick Santorum into resignation for suggesting that an absolute right to privacy would invalidate not only laws against sodomy, but laws against bestiality and other abhorrent sexual practices. Daily AP dispatches pounding Santorum appeared throughout the week of April 20 until polls showed his Pennsylvania constituency was supportive.

NBC promoted the Santorum “scandal” with relish. On the April 23 *Today*, NBC’s Joe Johns reported: “Some conservatives and religious groups applauded Santorum’s comments. Leading Democrats were appalled, calling Santorum’s remarks out of step and backward,” but conservative spokesmen were not given soundbites in Santorum’s defense.

Johns followed the liberal playbook by comparing the flap to Trent Lott’s Dixiecrat flap: “Only months ago Senator Trent Lott lost the top leadership job for racially-charged remarks. Now gay-rights groups want the party to take a stand on Santorum.” Johns aired a clip of Elizabeth Birch of the Human Rights Campaign, who wanted Santorum stripped of his leadership post. A Johns report also aired on that night’s *Nightly News*.

The next morning on *Today*, Johns was back with another story that mentioned conservative support, but didn’t air it. Senator John McCain and political analyst Stu Rothenberg were awarded soundbites to express concern over Santorum’s political appeal. Then Couric interviewed NBC’s Tim Russert for emphasis. He, too, put the spotlight on opponents: “And some of the strongest criticism of Senator Santorum has come from within the ranks of the Republican party. You saw Senator Collins and Senator McCain, the Log Cabin Society [sic], a gay-Republican group, a Republican Unity Coalition headed by former President Gerry Ford and Mary Cheney, Vice President Cheney’s daughter, has also called on Senator Santorum to apologize.”

One of AP’s supporters in its journalistic activism was presidential candidate Howard Dean, whose campaign issued a statement declaring that Santorum’s dissenting free speech was intolerable: “Gay-bashing is not a legitimate public policy discussion; it is immoral. Rick Santorum’s failure to recognize that attacking people because of who they are is morally wrong and makes him unfit for a leadership position in the United States Senate.”

CNN ACKNOWLEDGES THEY WERE SOFT ON SADDAM: On April 10, one day after the liberation of Baghdad, CNN’s top news-gathering executive Eason Jordan admitted to Aaron Brown on *NewsNight* that the network had suppressed stories about Saddam Hussein’s cruelties out of fear for the safety of CNN reporters and Iraqi citizens who worked for the network.

“The secret police terrorized Iraqis working for international press services,” Jordan elaborated in a *New York Times* op-ed published the next day. “Some vanished, never to be heard from again. Others disappeared and then surfaced later with whispered tales of being hauled off and tortured in unimaginable ways.”

“I came to know several Iraqi officials well enough that they confided in me that Saddam Hussein was a maniac who had to be removed,” Jordan disclosed. He argued that CNN could not reveal any of their information without putting lives at risk: “An aide to Uday [Hussein, Saddam’s son] once told me why he had no front teeth: henchmen had ripped them out with pliers and told him never to wear dentures, so he would always remember the price to be paid for upsetting the boss. Again, we could not broadcast anything these men said to us.”

“I felt awful having these stories bottled up inside me. Now that Saddam Hussein’s regime is gone, I suspect we will hear many, many more gut-wrenching tales from Iraqis about the decades of torment,” Jordan concluded his op-ed. “At last, these stories can be told freely.”

Jordan's tardy truthfulness validated critics who deplored the sanitized coverage of Saddam's regime: "Any Iraqi voicing an opinion other than those approved by the state would be vulnerable to arrest, torture and execution. But these were facts rarely mentioned by many reporters," the *New York Times's* John Burns wrote on April 20.

Burns revealed how many Western journalists buried the evil truth about Saddam's dictatorship just so they could maintain a presence in Iraq: "A tacit understanding, accepted by many visiting journalists, was that there were aspects of Mr. Hussein's Iraq that could be mentioned only obliquely. First among these was the personality of Mr. Hussein himself, and the fact that he was widely despised and feared by Iraqis, something that was obvious to any visitor ready to listen to the furtive whispers in which this hatred was commonly expressed."

"The terror that was the most pervasive aspect of society under Mr. Hussein was another topic that was largely taboo," Burns chastised. "Every interview conducted by television reporters, and most print journalists, was monitored; any Iraqi voicing an opinion other than those approved by the state would be vulnerable to arrest, torture and execution. But these were facts rarely mentioned by many reporters."

But other reporters indicated that Jordan should have kept his mouth shut. "If you decide to keep that as a secret for yourself to protect those people and to protect the interests of your company, then you probably ought to keep it secret for a long time, because it opens them up now wherever they go, wherever they're stationed, 'Well, what are they not telling us now?'" NBC anchor Tom Brokaw suggested during an April 15 appearance on CBS's *Late Show with David Letterman*.

Anxious to Declare Failure

"There is a growing sense of disillusionment. Iraqis wanted U.S. troops to bring them freedom and security, but Iraqis are having to protect themselves and have started setting up impromptu check points....Time may be running out. People here don't seem prepared to give the United States the benefit of the doubt. 'Now we know that America came to occupy us' says this man. 'They came to steal our oil and our riches and then to leave.'"

— Freelancer Richard Engel reporting for ABC's *World News Tonight* April 11, just two days after Baghdad fell.

"The sudden disappearance of Iraqi control here quickly gave way to violence and looting, which many blamed on the Americans. 'Saddam Hussein is better than George Bush,' said this man. 'Saddam would never allow any of this looting.'"

— ABC's Jim Sciutto reporting from Tikrit, Iraq, on the April 14 *World News Tonight*.

- MAY -

REPORTERS TOUT DEMOCRAT SPIN ON LINCOLN LANDING: On May 1, President Bush marked the end of "major combat operations" by landing a plane on the U.S.S. *Abraham Lincoln*. Later that day, he gave a prime-time address celebrating the end of the war. He praised the American armed forces: "Your courage, your willingness to face danger for your country and for each other, made this day possible. Because of you, our nation is more secure. Because of you, the tyrant has fallen, and Iraq is free."

But as Americans celebrated, the news media had a different feeling, nervously seeking to avoid looking too favorable to President Bush. Hours before the landing, NBC's Matt Lauer suggested the White House was in danger of "symbolism overshadowing safety" with Bush piloting a plane. Immediate political analysis agreed that the photo opportunity was "A-plus-plus," as ABC's George Stephanopoulos said.

But the images were quickly put through the meat grinder of election analysis. As they discussed how Michael Dukakis drew laughs in 1988 for riding in a tank, Diane Sawyer asked Stephanopoulos: "It sometimes can be tricky to be seen among the military, unless you can carry it off. How could you be sure? Do you think he [Bush] tried on the suit beforehand? Am I being too cynical?" Stephanopoulos replied, "No, I think he probably did."

By that evening, ABC substitute anchor Claire Shipman was hardly offering campaign ads for the White House: "We'll have more on the reunion with eager loved ones in just a moment, but these soldiers, of course, are coming home to a sober reality as well. An economy that, if anything, is struggling more than it was when they set sail. The government said today the unemployment rate is up to six percent. More than half a million jobs were lost in the last three months."

Within a few days, Democratic office holders decided to undermine the aircraft-carrier images, and the networks joined the chorus without any apparent nervous moments about appearing too helpful. On the May 6 *World News Tonight*, ABC's Peter Jennings highlighted that "California Congressman Henry Waxman is asking government auditors to figure out how much the trip cost the taxpayers and West Virginia Senator Robert Byrd said on the Senate floor today it was an 'affront to the Americans killed or injured in Iraq for the President to exploit the trappings of war for the momentary spectacle of a speech.'"

On the May 7 evening shows, CBS, CNN, and CNBC all jumped on the Byrd-Waxman bandwagon. CBS reporter John Roberts highlighted Waxman saying the trip was "a grandstanding cheap shot that wastes taxpayers' dollars," as well as historian James Thurber claiming the landing brings up "troubling thoughts about separation of the military from civilian rule."

On CNN's *NewsNight*, anchor Aaron Brown spent 12 minutes on criticism of the *Lincoln* landing, resurrecting an old anti-Bush line: "Do you think any of the anger, if that's the right word, that Democrats have, stems from the fact that the President was in the reserves during the Vietnam era and not in Vietnam itself?"

On CNBC, reporter Norah O'Donnell was screening every penny spent on the trip: "Democrats claim the event may have cost up to one million dollars in taxpayer funds, including an estimate that \$200 was spent to outfit the President in a custom-fitted flight suit." Unlike

Channeling Bob Byrd

"Meanwhile, as you know, Senator Byrd really blasted President Bush for his appearance on the *U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln*, saying, quote, 'To me, it is an affront to the Americans killed or injured in Iraq for the President to exploit the trappings of war for the momentary spectacle of a speech.' He also added it should not be a made-for-TV backdrop for a campaign commercial and, and called the President's use of it, 'flamboyant showmanship.' Do you agree with Senator Byrd about this?"

— Katie Couric to then-presidential candidate Bob Graham, May 7 *Today*.

reporters on CBS, CNN, and FNC, O'Donnell failed to relay Navy denials of any cost approaching \$1 million.

As the Iraq reconstruction effort has struggled, media outlets have continued to labor to turn around the public-relations value of the *Lincoln* landing. *Time's* October 6 issue blared: "Mission NOT Accomplished: How Bush Midjudged the Task of Fixing Iraq." But Bush's "mission accomplished" wasn't the complete democratic transformation of Iraq, but the successful removal of Saddam Hussein's regime.

Anchors reported with pounding regularity the death toll since the *Lincoln* landing. On November 11, Katie Couric announced: "There have been 152 soldiers killed in action since May 1st which was, marked the end of, of major combat operations. Prior to that date, 114 U.S. soldiers were killed in action." By November, *Newsweek* editor Jon Meacham predicted: "I think no matter what happens in Iraq, we're gonna see more of that flight suit in the landing on the *Lincoln* next year and the Mission Not Accomplished in Democratic ads than Republican ads."

TV DENOUNCES BUSH TAX CUT, AGAIN: Final passage of the President's tax cut in May was met with network bias on par with the hostile coverage that greeted the plan's announcement in January. Despite the fact that Congress had reduced the size of the package to a mere \$350 billion over ten years, or less than half the size of President Bush's original proposal, CBS anchor Dan Rather persisted in echoing liberal tax cut critics who insisted it was a "big" tax cut.

"In the U.S. Congress, House and Senate leaders today reached the outlines of what's called a compromise deal on President Bush's big tax cut plan," Rather announced on the May 21 *CBS Evening News*. What Rather did not say was that \$350 billion represented barely a 1 percent reduction in expected tax revenue to the federal government over the next ten years.

Reporters also presented as fact the liberal argument that the tax cut rewarded the wealthy to the detriment of the poor. "Big winners are rich people and families with children," ABC's Linda Douglass asserted on the May 22 *World News Tonight*. "The top five percent of taxpayers would get more than half of the benefits from the tax cut. "

Liberal journalists continued to complain about the tax cut even after President Bush signed it into law on May 28. The next morning, the *New York Times* published a front-page story that was little more than a press release from the left-wing Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP). The group argued that the tax law was flawed and unfair because families earning between \$10,000 and \$26,000 would not get the increased child care credit from \$600 to \$1,000 because their tax bills had already been reduced to zero. For such families, any such "tax cut" would have actually been a bonus above and beyond all income tax paid.

A few hours after the *Times* published its one-sided story, ABC's Terry Moran sounded like a Democratic spinner as he took up the issue with White House press secretary Ari Fleischer at a televised briefing: "Is it fair to say that the White House...at the end of the day thought that to make progress, the benefit for these 11.9 million children should go in order to, in part, save the dividend benefit for investors?" His equally-slanted follow-up: "I just want to make sure that you are saying that the White House agreed to make the choice to leave these children behind."

That night, ABC, CBS, CNBC, CNN and NBC all broadcast stories treating the exclusion as evidence of the supposed unfairness of the income tax cut. But CNBC, NBC and CNN never clued viewers in on how those in the affected income range pay little, if any, income tax while ABC and CBS only mentioned that fact late in their stories — after delivering profiles of supposed “victims” who will not get an extra check from the U.S. Treasury.

ABC’s Peter Jennings opened the May 29 *World News Tonight* by lamenting how “it turns out that a whole lot of people in the country who could use the money are not going to get it.” Linda Douglass presented the new tax law as supremely unfair: “Rhonda Williams is an office messenger raising two children alone. She thought she would be getting some extra money from a tax cut bill. She was wrong.”

“The tax cut the President just signed will not help many who need help the most,” *CBS Evening News* anchor Jane Clayson fretted before Bill Plante profiled a woman who “earns just above the minimum wage, the kind of taxpayer the President says he wants to help. But she won’t be getting that refund check the President says is in the mail. An eleventh hour change in the tax bill prevents millions of low-income working Americans...from receiving an extra \$400 child tax credit.”

Like ABC, NBC made the subject its top story as Tom Brokaw led the *NBC Nightly News* by insisting that in what “could be an embarrassing omission in his tax cut package, families making between \$10,000 and \$26,000 a year come up short.” CNBC anchor Brian Williams employed similar language: “We learned today there is an embarrassing omission in what is now the law of the land. Families making between \$10,000 and \$26,000 a year get left out while critics say many who do not need a tax cut get one anyway.”

One sign of how far out the networks were on this issue was how closely their spin matched that of PBS omnipresence Bill Moyers, whose left-wing sanctimony is made even more obnoxious by the fact that it is subsidized by taxpayers who would never freely support such radical nonsense. Two days after the tax bill became law, Moyers railed against its supposed cruelty on his regular Friday evening newsmagazine, *Now*.

“It’s the richest Americans – the top one percent – who get the lion’s share of the tax cuts, people like Secretary of the Treasury John Snow, [and] Vice President Dick Cheney,” Moyers pontificated. “Eleven million children in families with incomes roughly between \$10,000 and \$26,000 a year will not be getting the check that was supposed to be in the mail this summer. Eleven million children punished for being poor, even as the rich are rewarded for being rich.”

Big Government Is Starving

“The majority of the money goes to people who probably already have everything they need...Plus, it raises serious questions about social equity. I mean, who paves the streets that we drove here on? Who teaches the kids to read?...It’s starving the government of money that it could use to do a lot of things.”

— *Nightline* correspondent Michel Martin on ABC’s *This Week*, May 25.

NETWORKS CLAMOR FOR EVEN MORE SPENDING: Network reporters covering President Bush's tax cuts were concerned with assessing the high "cost" and spelling out who would most benefit from the changed policy. But as the House and Senate passed bills in June authorizing a massive new pay-out for prescription drugs, the networks displayed little interest in outlining who would pay (those at lower incomes still working) and who would benefit (the elderly, the wealthiest age group). TV correspondents also rarely mentioned the price tag of the expensive new drug benefit, except in the context of amplifying critics who charged it was not nearly "enough."

As previously noted, Dan Rather on May 21 referred to the compromise tax cut, estimated at \$350 billion before it "sunset" after ten years, as "President Bush's big tax cut plan." Less than three weeks later, on June 10, Rather did not mention the cost of the prescription plan or refer to it as "big" although it will cost much more – \$400 billion over the first ten years and, because there was no sunset provision, and trillions more thereafter.

Instead of fretting about the price tag, Rather portrayed it as long overdue: "In Washington today, for the umpteenth time, there's talk of a possible compromise deal to provide at least some prescription drug coverage for people on Medicare. CBS's Joie Chen reports what's different this time as millions of older Americans wait for action." Chen chronicled how paying for prescriptions is a "daily concern" at senior center before she trumpeted how "some badly needed help may be on the way, a \$400 billion plan outlined today would give all seniors a prescription drug benefit."

The next morning on *Today*, NBC's Campbell Brown stressed the plan's inadequacies: "The cost of the plan, \$400 billion. But advocates for seniors, like the powerful American Association for Retired Persons, say it's still not enough." So did ABC's Linda Douglass that night on *World News Tonight*: "Senators voted earlier this year to limit the cost of any plan to \$400 billion over 10 years....Democrats complain that a third of seniors will still be stuck with big bills."

As the bill moved to the Senate the following week, the networks ignored conservative critics who opposed the expensive new entitlement. Instead, TV coverage contrasted supporters of the new giveaway with detractors who wanted an even *larger* handout. "The Senate begins debate today on what would be the biggest expansion of Medicare benefits in its history," NBC's Ann Curry summarized on the June 16 *Today*. "If the bill passes prescription drugs would be subsidized for all 40 million members for the first time. Critics say the drug benefit isn't enough."

On *Good Morning America* the same day, ABC's Tony Perkins shared Curry's agenda when he interviewed Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson: "Some have said this bill doesn't go quite far enough – it's more of a start than a long-term solution. Do you agree? How do you address those concerns?"

Not even Massachusetts Senator Ted Kennedy was generous enough for CNN's Judy Woodruff. Interviewing the legendary liberal on June 18, she suggested he was shortchanging old people: "I began by asking him about his signing off on a plan that would leave some seniors with less drug coverage than they need and whether he undercut those seniors." She also reprimanded

Kennedy for supposedly aiding a conservative: “At a time when the Democrats are trying mightily to carve out distinct positions for themselves against a very popular Republican President,” she scolded, “what you have done is helped a Republican President take a very controversial issue off the table.”

Woodruff was no doubt pleased that Kennedy opposed the final Medicare reform bill passed by Congress in November.

Network reporters took their cue from liberal groups who wanted an even more expansive program. On *NBC Nightly News* June 23, Norah O’Donnell showed a complaining John Rother, Policy Director for the American Association of Retired Persons: “People are disappointed that there isn’t more of a benefit here. And sometimes they’re mad. Sometimes they think, well, at least it’s a first start. But everyone is disappointed.”

Then, O’Donnell fleshed out Rother’s argument by displaying a victim: “Like 77-year-old Pat Roussos of Connecticut, who suffers from arthritis, diabetes and high blood pressure. Her out-of-pocket drug costs now, as much as \$6,500 a year.” The story then included a soundbite from a pessimistic Pat Roussos: “It’s only a start, and I’m not convinced it’s going to go very far.”

NBC failed to tell viewers that Roussos was not a random senior citizen, but is the Connecticut Community Coordinator for AARP, the official who oversees the state’s 72 local chapters. The next night, CBS echoed the same complaint, that the \$400 billion price tag was just too small to provide proper relief to senior citizens (see box).

Where were the critics arguing that the entitlement’s projected \$400 billion cost was too much of a burden on taxpayers? The Heritage Foundation’s Stuart Butler described the bill as “an impending disaster for all Americans” in a June 13 research memo. And in a June 24 *Wall Street Journal* op-ed, economists Andrew Rettenmaier and Thomas Saving estimated that “the new benefits will create an unfunded liability of \$7.5 trillion, or almost twice the current debt held by the public.” But the budgetary implications of such massive spending was apparently not “newsworthy” to the same network reporters who worried about how much the tax cut would increase the deficit.

MEDIA SEE LEGAL BATTLE AS CONSERVATIVES VS. “RIGHTS”: As the supposedly Bush-favoring, conservative-tilting Supreme Court came to the end of its term in June, the headline-grabbing decisions were more pleasing to liberals — even though the networks didn’t seem to find anyone who fit that label.

Just a Measly \$400,000,000,000

Dan Rather: “Millions of seniors are now expecting President Bush and Congress to deliver on promises of some prescription drug coverage under Medicare. Lawmakers are still working out details, but as CBS’s Joie Chen reports, the plan may wind up falling far short of what Medicare recipients were hoping for.”

Joie Chen: “When you start to look at coverage levels, you’ll see what’s referred to as the ‘doughnut hole’ — that’s the point at which there’s no coverage. Participants would have to pay the entire cost of their prescriptions before they reach the level of catastrophic expense when the plan would pay for most of the drug costs....So why is there a doughnut hole at all? Well, with only \$400 billion to spend, there just isn’t enough money to fix it.”

— *CBS Evening News*, June 24, 2003, referring to a gap in drug coverage for costs between \$4500 and \$5800.

On June 23, the Court ruled largely in favor of allowing the use of racial criteria in admissions at the University of Michigan, both for undergraduates (the *Gratz* case) and law school applicants (the *Grutter* case), but no one called the racial-quota supporters “liberals.” It helped that military officers and corporate chieftains — each seen as stereotypically right-wing — filed supportive briefs in favor of, to use the media code word, “affirmative action.” Liberals favored “affirmative action,” while conservatives were often cast as “opponents of affirmative action.”

During live coverage of the decision, ABC’s John Cochran relayed from the White House that the two sides of the debate were “conservatives,” and on the left, “civil rights supporters.” He explained that President Bush took “the side of the white plaintiffs in this case. That angered many civil rights supporters around the country and it pleased very much a lot of conservatives. However, when the administration actually filed its brief, it was much narrower than conservatives have wanted.”

That approach was also employed in dividing the Court. On CNN, legal analyst Jeffrey Toobin explained “Affirmative action has become a mainstream cause, and that’s why Sandra Day O’Connor, a mainstream justice, voted the way she did.” On CBS’s *The Early Show* the next morning, reporter Bob Orr found an unlabeled Sandra Day O’Connor voted for a “narrowly tailored” use of race, but “the Court’s conservatives dissented.”

On June 26, the Supreme Court voted 6-3 in *Lawrence v. Texas* to strike down state laws against sodomy, and again, the networks split the case into “gay rights activists” and “conservatives” — or worse.

ABC led off with Jackie Judd, who found “activists literally cried for joy,” while “social conservatives mourned today’s ruling.” Legal reporter Cynthia McFadden followed suit: “Those in favor of gay rights considered the opinion a triumph...while on talk radio, conservatives called the decision a travesty.” McFadden concluded: “Gays and lesbians are clearly encouraged, but given some of the ferocious language on the other side, full equality may be a good ways off.” The next morning, *Good Morning America* reran the Judd story, but anchor Dan Harris added an introduction also pitting “gay rights activists” against “conservative groups.”

On CBS, reporter Richard Schlesinger said the gay Texas plaintiffs were “reluctant symbols for gay rights activists who are ecstatic with the decision....Conservative groups quickly condemned the decision.” In a second story, reporter Bob McNamara described talk show host Marlin Maddoux as one who has “championed conservative causes for years, and he concluded that “conservatives” were already promising to “undo the controversial ruling.”

On NBC, legal reporter Pete Williams led off with how “Gay rights groups were jubilant,” while “Conservative groups today roundly criticized the ruling as overreaching.” Next, reporter Roger O’Neill found only one fringe: “On the extremes, Rush Limbaugh lambasting the court, agreeing with Justice Anthony [sic] Scalia’s dissenting opinion that the court has taken sides with gays in America’s cultural wars.”

These legal controversies underline how the media slants its coverage of social issues. On the epic political battles of our time, the sides are portrayed as the civil rights activists versus the “ferocious” conservative opponents “on the extremes.”

- JULY -

MEDIA SUGGEST 16 WORDS UNDERMINED ENTIRE IRAQ WAR: The White House acknowledged in July that President Bush had overreached in his State of the Union address when he cited a British report that Iraq had sought enriched uranium in Africa. Those 16 words: “The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa.” Some of the documents that supported such a conclusion turned out to be forgeries, and administration officials regretted that Bush overreached. But the media also overreached in concluding that this sentence qualified as a “vital argument” for the war.

“There is other reporting to suggest that Iraq tried to obtain uranium from Africa. However, the information is not detailed or specific enough for us to be certain that attempts were in fact made,” the White House said in a statement quoted in the July 8 editions of the *New York Times*.

But reporting that same night on the White House’s admission, ABC and NBC themselves overreached in broadly asserting that the concession undermined a “vital argument” for the war against Saddam Hussein. Over the next few days, the media perpetuated a self-fulfilling storyline, that the Bush administration was “being pressed to defend” its case for war, even as the press did most of the pressing.

“On *World News Tonight*,” Peter Jennings teased at the top of his July 8 broadcast, “the Bush administration admits that a vital argument for going to war against Iraq was not true.” At the same time, NBC’s Tom Brokaw announced: “Coming clean. The White House admits for the first time the President’s State of the Union claim about Iraq’s nuclear program might in fact be wrong.”

The day Senator Edward Kennedy questioned whether the war was “based on deliberate deception or outright lies,” Jennings expressed disappointment in what he saw as Democrats holding back their attacks, and rued how the public’s support of Bush limited the damage he might suffer: “Under certain circumstances this admission by the administration might have serious political consequences, but this is a popular President.”

But as David Martin pointed out on the July 8 *CBS Evening News*, while the specific example Bush cited may have been faulty, that did not mean that the Iraqis were not cheating: “Both [Colin] Powell and the CIA believed then and believe now there is plenty of other evidence to show Saddam was still pursuing a nuclear weapon.”

Martin reminded viewers: “An Iraqi scientist has led the CIA to his rose garden where twelve years ago he buried the plans and some of the parts needed to make bomb-grade uranium, convincing evidence Saddam intended to revive his nuclear weapons program.”

Other reporters refused to let the Bush-bashing moment pass so easily. On July 9, Jennings topped his newscast with the media’s questioning of the President: “On *World News Tonight*, the Bush administration is obliged again to defend its case for war in Iraq — from Africa to Capitol Hill.... Good evening, everyone. We begin tonight with the Bush administration’s credibility.

Today in Europe and Africa and in the Congress, the administration is being pressed to defend its public justification for going to war in Iraq."

On July 10, the *CBS Evening News* hyped a report that substitute anchor John Roberts suggested proved Bush's mendacity: "President Bush's false claim about Iraqi weapons. He made it despite a CIA warning the intelligence was bad." CBS's own Web site took the irresponsible accusation even further: "Bush Knew Iraq Info Was False," declared the headline over a posting on CBSNews.com. In the actual story, CBS's David Martin reported something far short of the "Bush knew" claim or that the CIA said "the intelligence was bad."

But most journalists weren't hunting for nuance. On Friday, July 11, NBC's Brian Williams kept up the drumbeat as he led off the *Nightly News* by smarmily linking the error with America's war dead: "It was just one sentence in a long State of the Union speech that the President delivered in January. But it was a major accusation, one part of the President's case for possible war with Iraq. The facts have turned out differently. The accusation was wrong. And now, with 148,000 Americans on the ground there, with over 200 dead and over a thousand wounded, the questions for this White House are heating up."

Over on ABC, Jennings was peddling a poll which reflected how effectively the media had spun the issue: "An ABC News/*Washington Post* poll which has just been finished, finds that 52 percent of Americans, a majority for the first time, find the level of U.S. casualties in Iraq unacceptable. And 50 percent of Americans believe the Bush administration in arguing for the war intentionally exaggerated the evidence that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction."

That weekend, *Time* put a photo of Bush delivering his State of the Union speech on the cover with the condemnatory headline, "UNtruth & Consequences." On Saturday's *World News Tonight*, ABC anchor Claire Shipman declared: "The firestorm over false intelligence that President Bush used to help justify war in Iraq is intensifying." The next day, July 13 CBS's John Roberts announced: "The White House tried to lay to rest today the swirl of controversy over whether it knowingly put dubious intelligence into this year's State of the Union address....But as Joie Chen reports, the issue refuses to go away."

"The issue refuses to go away"? Or the media refused to let it go?

MEDIA MAKE "CENTRIST" DEAN THE LATEST CRAZE: By mid-summer, former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean's campaign was on fire in the media. As Dean's trial balloon swiftly rose, reporters

Even Democrats See a Liberal Media

"Most Americans (53%) believe that news organizations are politically biased, while just 29% say they are careful to remove bias from their reports. When it comes to describing the press, twice as many say news organizations are 'liberal' (51%) than 'conservative' (26%) while 14% say neither phrase applies. This was also the case in surveys conducted in the mid-to late-1980s and, not surprisingly, there is a significant partisan cast to these perceptions. Republicans see the press as more liberal than conservative by nearly three-to-one (65%-22%). Among independents, the margin is two-to-one (50%-25%). And while a third of Democrats say there is a conservative tilt to the American press, a slight plurality (41%) says the press is more liberal than anything else."

— Report from the Pew Research Center for The People & The Press, July 13.

acknowledged his heightened chances by avoiding or rebutting the idea that he was liberal, let alone ultra-liberal.

As the year began, Howard Dean's presidential campaign was seen as a left-wing lark, an implausible dark-horse candidacy. In January, the *New York Times* asked: "Why should anyone take him seriously?" He appeared to be what political reporters call "out of the mainstream." Dean told abortion advocates that partial-birth abortion was "an issue about nothing. It's an issue about [pro-life] extremism." In Vermont, Dean signed a bill in 2000 installing "civil unions" for gay men and lesbians. He proposed repealing the Bush tax cuts to fund more socialized-medicine schemes like Hillary Clinton's. Most dramatically, he opposed military action against Saddam Hussein, saying on the April day Baghdad was liberated, "I suppose that's a good thing."

But Dean's Vermont record was regularly promoted as moderate. CBS *Early Show* co-host Hannah Storm told Dean: "You have opposed the war on Iraq. You oppose the President's tax-cut package, and yet you are [sic] a centrist governor." On ABC's *This Week* July 6, reporter Michel Martin replied to Paul Gigot's insistence that Dean was driving the other contenders left by claiming, "The irony being, of course, that he wasn't a terribly liberal governor. He was, in fact, a moderate."

This same pattern extended to national newspapers and magazines. A July 6 front-page *Washington Post* profile by Evelyn Nieves was headlined "Short-Fused Populist, Breathing Fire at Bush." The word "liberal" did not appear until three-fourths the way into the story, and then only in a quote of denial: "'His being called a liberal is one of the great white lies of the campaign,' said Tom Salmon, a fellow Democrat and governor of Vermont for two terms during the Nixon-Ford era. 'He's a rock-solid fiscal conservative.'" Nieves allowed Dean to deny the tag. "'I think it's pathetic that I'm considered the left-wing liberal,' Dean said."

Time magazine suggested Dean's supporters aren't ideological, just "a seam of online middle-class resentment...made up of passionate and often disgruntled believers." *Newsweek's* Howard Fineman wouldn't describe Dean as liberal, but he did pronounce him a sage: "As an early foe of war in Iraq, he made acerbic comments that now look prescient."

When Dean hit the big time in early August — with cover stories in *Time* and *Newsweek* and a major inside spread in *U.S. News & World Report* — he was introduced as a centrist. *Time's* John Cloud insisted "he is a rock-ribbed budget hawk, a moderate on gays and guns, and a true lefty on only a few issues, primarily the use of U.S. military power." Cloud also asked: "So is he a liberal, a conservative, or something in between? The answer is, all of the above." Dean's plan to create universal socialized medicine is "modest by Democratic standards." Dean's civil-unions law was somehow "a moderate compromise."

Newsweek's Jonathan Alter tried an old trope: "The old labels are increasingly useless. Dean, for instance, is hardly an old-fashioned big-spending liberal. As governor from 1991 to 2002, he repeatedly balanced the budget, though Vermont is the only state that doesn't require him to do so by law." Alter explained, he "developed a reputation as a centrist." Alter added that in Vermont, "Dean focused on fiscal responsibility" and unbelievably, considering the "civil unions" bill, suggested "On social issues, he resisted most liberal blandishments." In a related *Newsweek.com*

Web chat, Alter aggressively defended Dean: “On fiscal issues, he’s far to the right of [Ted] Kennedy.”

U.S. News political writer Roger Simon located those who “find Dean’s style invigorating,” including self-declared Republican Joe Mathews, who says he’ll vote for Dean “because he admires the fiscal conservatism Dean displayed in 11 years as governor. Matthews added: “ Dean is not particularly left wing. And as far as checkbook issues, he is to the right of George Bush, because if it isn’t in the bank, Dean doesn’t spend it.”

Media outlets did not balance the “rock-solid fiscal conservative” angle with the the report from the Cato Institute’s annual report card on state fiscal performances. Cato gave Governor Dean a “D” for fiscal matters in 2002. They noted: “He supports state-funded universal health care, generous state subsidies for child care, a higher minimum wage, liberal family leave legislation, and taxpayer-financed campaigns....After 12 years of Dean’s so-called ‘fiscal conservatism,’ Vermont remains one of the highest taxing and spending states.”

Reporters wishfully confused a balanced budget – which could entail massive government spending, balanced by massive taxation – with the word “conservatism,” which should be defined as a preference for small and limited government, or at the very least static spending levels.

~~-AUGUST-~~

PRESENTING GAY BISHOP AS A COURAGEOUS PIONEER: Religion is hardly a favorite topic for a largely secular media elite, especially news from within the potpourri of Protestant denominations – unless the topic is sexual. In August, U.S. Episcopal Church leaders voted to accept the election of an openly gay bishop from New Hampshire, Gene Robinson.

True to the secular liberal vision that making homosexuals part of the Christian clergy is merely the latest “civil rights” barrier to be broken by a courageous pioneer, Canon Robinson was the center of televised attention. A head count of guests included ten from the Robinson camp, one opponent, and one official spokesman for the Episcopal Church USA.

Between them, the networks’ daily and Sunday morning programs gave Canon Robinson six unopposed interviews to promote his gay-left platform. NBC’s *Today* gave Robinson four interviews (June 10, August 4, August 6, and November 4, the last one featuring his partner Mark Andrew and his delighted daughter Ella). ABC’s programs had two (the August 6 *Good Morning America* and the October 26 *This Week with George Stephanopoulos*), and CBS’s *The Early Show* had one (also August 6).

Only two segments featured opposing sides. On August 5, NBC’s *Today* featured two other Episcopal bishops – Robinson supporter M. Thomas Shaw of Massachusetts and Robinson opponent Edward Salmon of South Carolina. On the same day, ABC’s *Good Morning America* featured Rev. Susan Russell, a Robinson supporter, and Daniel England, a church spokesman, who didn’t oppose Robinson, but neutrally explained church procedures. Both of these interviews came

on a morning when Robinson was being investigated briefly for inappropriate touching, charges the church dismissed.

Not only did Robinson and his partisans get the lion's share of interviews, CBS and NBC never described Robinson's partisans as liberals, while reporters regularly tagged his opponents as "conservative." On the August 6 *World News Tonight*, substitute anchor Elizabeth Vargas framed the two sides as being either "inclusive" or "conservative." She relayed: "Some conservative Episcopalians say homosexuality is contrary to scripture and therefore totally unacceptable. But supporters of the decision call this a step toward a more open and inclusive church."

The same insistence upon labeling only one side of the debate occurred earlier that day on the morning shows:

■ *ABC's Good Morning America*. Claire Shipman: "After weeks of lobbying and controversy, the Episcopal Church has elected its first openly gay bishop, and some conservatives are threatening to leave the church rather than accept the Reverend Gene Robinson."

■ *CBS's The Early Show*. Cynthia Bowers: "The vote was close and, as anticipated, a group of conservative bishops walked out saying they cannot abide by this decision."

■ On *NBC's Today*. Ann Curry pounded home the imbalance: "Shockwaves from the vote are deeply dividing the Church with conservative, conservatives, rather, saying their grief is quote, 'too deep for words.' NBC's Jim Avila reports."

Later that morning, Curry did it again:

"Conservative members had threatened to leave the Church if Robinson was elected. Well, earlier on *Today*, Matt asked Bishop-elect Gene Robinson about that rift...But conservative bishops unhappy about last night's vote are asking the Archbishop of Canterbury to intervene." She repeated in another news update: "Conservative bishops who oppose the confirmation are now asking the Archbishop of Canterbury to intervene. Robinson was elected after being cleared of last minute allegations of sexual misconduct."

On ABC, Tamala Edwards did use the L word in two stories. On the August 3 *World News Tonight/Sunday*, Edwards reported "Conservatives argue that most Episcopalians, who are part of the world's 75 million Anglicans, believe the Bible condemns homosexual behavior as a sin....A split could cause the church to lose members and influence around the world. Church liberals are hopeful they will win, and that the church will stay united." On the next night, as the charges against Robinson surfaced, Edwards concluded: "Now, no matter how this turns out, it appears the dividing lines have grown only deeper between church liberals and conservatives."

The most interesting double standard that emerged in the Robinson story came from his encounters with God's will. Over the years, reporters have mocked religious-right figures like Pat

Saint Gene

"To read the biography of Rev. Gene Robinson is to follow a chronology of goodness, virtue, and civic involvement: his work to support clergy wellness, his anti-racism training, his AIDS work in Africa, his help for the uninsured. It's the last line of his biography that's made him a lightning rod in the meeting of Episcopalians in Minneapolis. It reads like this: 'The father of two grown daughters. He lives with his partner, Mark Andrew.'"
— Aaron Brown on CNN's *NewsNight*, Aug. 1.

Robertson for describing how God sent them a message — as in Robertson’s declaration that God told him President Bush will be easily re-elected. But Canon Robinson can say God is guiding him, and liberal media figures don’t blink.

On CBS’s *Early Show*, Robinson declared, “I felt this calling from God for a long time, and now I have been honored by being called by the people of New Hampshire to the office of bishop.” He later added: “I do believe that God is doing a new thing in the world, both in the — in the culture and in the church. And I think this is but a momentary blip on an ever-increasing inclusiveness in the society, and an acceptance of gay and lesbian people as full members of society and full members of the church, including its leadership.”

When God is seen as embracing the progressive view, His presence is somehow never in doubt.

TV PRESENTS ENVIRONMENTALISTS AS NONPARTISAN TRUTHTELLERS: When the Bush administration changed an EPA rule to let older power plants undertake some beneficial modernization without having to install complete air scrubbing devices as required by the Clean Air Act, the networks all emphasized the denunciations of liberal environmentalists. On August 27, CBS’s Wyatt Andrews gave the left-wing Natural Resources Defense Council’s John Walke a forum to attack the President’s policies, and Walke relished the moment.

“Today is the worst assault on clean air and the biggest enforcement scandal ever to rock EPA,” he declared.

“Ever?” Andrews helpfully asked.

“Ever,” Walke continued. “A gaping loophole has been carved out of that program and the public will suffer.”

Walke showed up on NBC, too, where correspondent Robert Hager broadcast his claim that “this action will result in hundreds of thousands of asthma attacks, bronchitis attacks, heart disease, strokes and heart attacks among senior citizens, as well as Americans dying early from air pollution.”

In fact, the old EPA rule discouraged plants from introducing some less-polluting new equipment because any plant that did so was obligated to completely revamp its entire systems. Therefore, by making modernization easier and less expensive, the Bush action would result in less pollution-related disease, not more.

But the media took their cue from Bush’s liberal opponents. On August 31, CBS revisited the issue on *Sunday Morning*. After showing Bush stating his goal of protecting the environment, reporter Jerry Bowen undermined the President: “As he spoke, Mr. Bush had already rejected the Kyoto Treaty for controlling global warming, had weakened levels on arsenic in drinking water before reversing the decision under public pressure. He would try and fail to open ANWR, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, to oil drilling to meet America’s energy needs.”

The networks' generosity towards left-wing environmental activists echoed another media-hyped flap that occurred in June, when ABC, CBS, CNBC, CNN and NBC all treated the changing of a sentence in an upcoming EPA report, which few ever heard of and fewer ever would have read, as a major scandal worthy of full stories on their evening newscasts. The network stories all presented liberal stand on global warming as sacrosanct, and implied that only those who challenged it were playing politics.

On June 19 the *New York Times* ran a politically-loaded front page story by Andrew C. Revkin with Katharine Q. Seelye, based on internal documents fed to them by a disgruntled bureaucrat. Their lead sentence: "The Environmental Protection Agency is preparing to publish a draft report next week on the state of the environment, but after editing by the White House, a long section describing risks from rising global temperatures has been whittled to a few noncommittal paragraphs."

According to the *Times*, environmentalists were mad that a sentence in the EPA report which read, "climate change has global consequences for human health and the environment," was replaced with, "the complexity of the earth system and the interconnections among its components make it a scientific challenge to document change and diagnose causes," a perfectly reasonable summary of why scientists continue to disagree about the causes and severity of any warming.

Networks committed to balanced environmental coverage would have interviewed one or more of the many respected scientists who dissent from the liberal line on global warming. But that night, all of the networks except the Fox News Channel sided with activists and treated the shift in EPA language as a major scandal. Aside from CNBC's Forrest Sawyer, none of the networks questioned the assumptions of environmentalists, and all of them excluded scientists who disagree with the liberal global warming line.

CNN's Aaron Brown even attempted an historical analogy to show how Bush's EPA was trying to punish unpopular but correct scientific dissidents. "Once upon a time," Brown told his *NewsNight* audience on June 19, "a scientist named Galileo said the Earth was round, and the political leaders of the time said, 'No, no, Galileo it's flat,' and Galileo got life under house arrest for his little theory. Today, the vast majority of scientists will tell you the Earth is getting warmer and most would agree that industry is at least in part to blame. So far nobody's gone to jail for saying that, which doesn't mean the idea isn't squarely at the center of a political dust up — and not an insignificant one at that because, if the charges leveled against the White House are true, an important environmental question is being twisted or ignored for the sake of politics."

But Brown's analogy fell flat on two accounts. First, Galileo's true heirs in this debate are climatologists such as Patrick Michaels and Fred Singer, who challenge the left-wing orthodoxy that global warming is largely man-made, extremely dangerous, and can only be cured by a massive curtailment of modern industry.

Second, Galileo was born long after Magellan sailed completely around the globe, demolishing once and for all the idea that the world was flat. Galileo was actually punished by the Catholic Church for saying the Earth revolves around the sun. CNN viewers have yet to hear Brown's correction.

- SEPTEMBER -

SPINNING IRAQ AS VIETNAM-LIKE QUAGMIRE: In a televised address to the nation on September 7, President Bush asked Congress for \$87 billion to continue military operations in Iraq and to begin rebuilding the country's damaged infrastructure. Bush's desire to spend the resources required for a successful outcome prompted a rise in the number of media mavens who sought to detect a comparison between the liberation of Iraq and the failed mission in Vietnam that cost tens of thousands of American lives in the 1960s.

The Vietnam analogies did not start with Bush's budget request, of course. CBS's Jim Acosta, on the July 19 *CBS Evening News*, suggested that the President was an LBJ-style liar: "This is not the first time the U.S. has gone to war based on facts that later turned out to be questionable. Almost 40 years ago, President Johnson pointed to unconfirmed reports of attacks on American ships in the Gulf of Tonkin to convince the Congress to widen the war in Vietnam."

A couple of days before Bush spoke, Dan Rather interviewed the general running the military mission in Iraq, Ricardo Sanchez. In excerpts of the interview shown on the September 4 *Evening News*, Rather confronted Sanchez with the defeatist Vietnam analogy: "A woman in South Carolina is quoted today as saying, 'We've got a tar baby on our hands.' Others have used the word 'quick sand' and 'quagmire' out of the Vietnam era."

To his credit, Rather then asked the general to point out "the biggest mistake or inaccuracy that the press in general is making about the situation here?" Sanchez told Rather that the biggest problem was "the fact that the press does not focus at all on the successes of our great American soldiers and sailors, airmen and Marines that are operating here in this country."

After Bush's speech, many in the media wrung their hands raw worrying about another Vietnam. On CNN's *NewsNight*, Brian Cabell noted that "It's an argument that seems likely to become louder in the months ahead: Is this truly a continuation of the war against terrorism, or is it possibly another drawn-out, inconclusive Vietnam War in the making?"

On ABC's *Nightline* on September 25, Ted Koppel advertised his bias when he asked retired General Anthony Zinni, a critic of the war, whether "the whole notion of the weapons of mass destruction, the connection with al-Qaeda...was [that] as phony as the Gulf of Tonkin resolution?"

Perhaps the most ridiculous attempt to link Iraq and Vietnam came September 14 with the debut of the newly-revamped *This Week with George Stephanopoulos*, which featured a gimmicky new feature called "The Briefing." Stephanopoulos announced: "We begin our morning briefing examining something that's being heard more and more — that Iraq is starting to look like Vietnam." He insisted, before George Will was allowed to undermine the premise: "There are also some striking similarities between the speeches of Lyndon Johnson and George Bush."

ABC viewers were then treated to a series of back-to-back clips of Presidents Lyndon Johnson (in black and white) and George W. Bush, with no dates noted for either set of clips, in order to suggest eerie similarities. In fact, the clips showed only the superficiality that passes for real thinking at ABC.

The three pairs of clips:

- **President Johnson:** “The result would be increased unrest and instability and even wider war.”
President Bush: “Retreat in the face of terror would only invite further and bolder attacks.”
- **President Johnson:** “World War II was fought in both Europe and Asia and when it ended we found ourselves with continued responsibilities for the defense of freedom.”
President Bush in his September 7 address: “Following World War II, we lifted up the defeated nations of Japan and Germany and stood with them as they built representative governments. We committed years and resources to this cause.”
- **President Johnson:** “For our part, I will ask the Congress to join in a billion dollar American investment in this effort as soon as it is underway.”
President Bush: “I will soon submit to Congress a request for \$87 billion.”

That last one is a real plum — Stephanopoulos or someone else at ABC must think it’s telling to point out that both Presidents asked for money from Congress. Didn’t Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson, FDR and Truman also ask for appropriations for military endeavors that turned out to be successful?

And since when do liberals like Stephanopoulos think that money equals failure?

RECALL, PART I: NO SCRUTINY OF DEMOCRATIC FRONTRUNNER: When California’s recall election was certified on July 23, the first few weeks of media coverage focused on the “circus.” CBS’s *Early Show* invited on joke candidates like child actor Gary Coleman, and ignored more serious candidates like conservative state senator Tom McClintock. By September, national news reports focused on a few potentially electable candidates, with liberal Democratic Lieutenant Governor Cruz Bustamante in the lead. But the networks applied no scrutiny to the then-frontrunner, despite his well-known racial controversies.

In 2001, Bustamante said “n-gg-r” when he said he meant to say “Negro” in the title of a black labor organization. In college, Bustamante was an active member of MEChA (the Chicano Student Movement of Aztlan), whose symbol is an eagle clutching a dynamite stick and a machete-like weapon in its claws. Their motto: “For the Race, everything. For those outside the Race, nothing.” The group believes in reclaiming the mythical land of Aztlan, or most of the southwestern United States, for the “bronze race.”

Neither ABC nor NBC mentioned Bustamante’s MEChA ties, even though both interviewed him at length. When CBS’s Bob Schieffer and *Los Angeles Times* reporter Doyle McManus grilled Bustamante on the August 31 *Face the Nation*, they both skipped MEChA. Instead, Schieffer invited the frontrunner to pile on second-place GOP candidate Arnold Schwarzenegger for his raunchy comments in a 1977 issue of the pornographic magazine *Oui*. (See box.)

CBS's Hattie Kauffman was the only network reporter to raise the MEChA issue, when she questioned Bustamante on the September 3 *Early Show*. After mentioning Schwarzenegger's 26-year-old *Oui* interview, Kauffman added: "There are ghosts in Bustamante's past as well. He was once a member of a radical group called MEChA. This was a Chicano student group that advocated a separate nation for Mexicans in the American Southwest. Did you know that when you joined?" Bustamante avoided a direct answer and would not disavow the group.

Instead, all the scrutiny was applied to Schwarzenegger. On the September 9 *CBS Evening News*, reporter Jerry Bowen suggested why Arnold was lagging: "The poll shows he trails Democrat Bustamante among women voters by 13 points, a gender gap aggravated perhaps by his past comments on sex and women that have drawn protesters to his campaign headquarters...And now in an *Esquire* magazine interview Schwarzenegger gave last spring, in which he expressed interest in the governorship, he remarked how bodybuilders are often thought to be dumb because of their appearance, same for women, he suggested."

Bowen brought on Katherine Spillar of the Feminist Majority Foundation to denounce Arnold, never noting whether her group was more partisan than principled. On April 2, 1998, Spillar showed a different take when the target was Bill Clinton, telling the *Washington Post* there was nothing to the Paula Jones allegations: "We have said all along that we thought it was a weak case."

Network reporters also had a tendency to only label conservatives, especially Senator McClintock. On September 25, Bowen described a TV debate: "The other three candidates — conservative Republican Tom McClintock, the Green Party's Peter Camejo and Democratic Lieutenant Governor Cruz Bustamante — were subdued by comparison."

This labeling imbalance was strange, since the views of Bustamante and Camejo on many matters was the polar opposite of McClintock's positions. Two days earlier on ABC's *World News Tonight*, reporter Linda Douglass noted: "Schwarzenegger is also battling another Republican, conservative state senator Tom McClintock. If Davis is recalled and they split the vote, Democrat Cruz Bustamante could win."

But the liberal policies that actually overturned Gray Davis were rarely a focus of national network scrutiny. ABC, CBS, and NBC never did a morning or evening news story on the tripling of the car tax. On ABC, reporter Jake Tapper made a passing reference to how Tom McClintock "protested the recent tripling of the state car tax." CBS was silent on the issue until October 1, when reporter Jerry Bowen noticed "the struggling governor is a victim of self-inflicted wounds. Signing a bill to give driver's licenses to illegal immigrants backfired. And long lines yesterday punctuated his problems. Motorists registering their cars ahead of today's tripling of the car tax, a

Let Me Slime Arnold For You

"Let's shift to the news of the week out there and that was this article that appeared — that somebody dug up about Arnold Schwarzenegger back in his single days when he gave an interview and talked — sort of boasted about having group sex in a gym. Since then, some women's groups have said that he needs to apologize. Some family values groups have said he needs to repent. Some people are saying that this shows he's a sexual predator. What is your response to all that, Governor?"

— **Bob Schieffer to Schwarzenegger rival Cruz Bustamante on *Face the Nation*, August 31.**

budget-balancing tool that's infuriated voters." Of the Big Three, only NBC reported one story on Gray Davis moving to give illegal aliens driver's licenses.

- OCTOBER -

RECALL, PART II: MASSIVE SCRUTINY OF

REPUBLICAN FRONTRUNNER: As the October 7 election date in California drew near and polls showed Gov. Gray Davis sinking and Arnold

Schwarzenegger rising, something less than unexpected intervened to threaten the dynamic: the *Los Angeles Times*. In the last days of the 1992 election, the *Times* declined to investigate sexual allegations against Bill Clinton, describing them as "toxic waste." But five days before the election, the *Times* published a story using two on-the-record women and four off-the-record women claiming the movie star had groped them, with some of the claims reaching back into the mid-1970s.

By the weekend, Arnold was granting interviews to network anchors, who are not in the habit these days of interviewing governors or gubernatorial candidates. The anchors were remarkably harsh in their questioning, especially in light of the dramatically different standard for sexual scrutiny they set for President Clinton in the last century. Peter Jennings asked: "It cannot be easy to spend the last few days of this campaign having to deal constantly with being called a serial groper or a serial abuser of women and...your admiration for Hitler. Is that tough?"

What Arnold didn't know before answering is that a Nexis search couldn't find the words "serial groper" or "serial abuser of women" in the archive of ABC News transcripts at any time during the Clinton years. That would include the occasions on which Jennings interviewed Bill Clinton.

NBC's Tom Brokaw lectured: "A lot of these women have made very specific accusations about grabbing them sexually and making lewd suggestions. You described it as playful and rowdy and the kind of mischief that you engaged in when you were a younger man. But based on their descriptions, in many states, what you did would be criminal, it would be a sexual assault of some kind."

This exchange marked a glaring and dramatic political bias, since in 1999, far from any Election Day, Brokaw refused to run a story on NBC's *Nightly News* about Juanita Broaddrick. In the story's only mention — a brief plug for the *Dateline* interview — Brokaw only referred vaguely to "controversial accusations." President Clinton was never required to provide any specific answers about those allegations.

On CBS, Dan Rather did not conduct a pre-election interview with Schwarzenegger, but the *Evening News* did pound on the story from Thursday night to Monday night. Back in 2001, Rather told FNC's Bill O'Reilly that he didn't want to touch the Broaddrick allegations because "when the

Arnold's Failing, or ABC's?

"Rule number one in American politics is, if you're a politician and you find yourself spending a disproportionate amount of time insisting that you don't like Adolf Hitler, your campaign has veered seriously off message."

— ABC's Jake Tapper after repeating Linda Douglass's misquotation of Schwarzenegger's Hitler remarks, October 3 *Good Morning America*.

charge has something to do with somebody's private sex life, I would prefer not to run any of it." On the night before the election, CBS at least highlighted the hypocrisy of feminist groups which defended Clinton on sexual allegations but attacked Schwarzenegger.

As the race staggered to an end, descending Governor Davis was offered life-raft questions by the networks. On the Friday before the election, ABC's Brian Rooney was advising Davis to get harsher with the GOP: "He denied some of it, admitted some of it and apologized. He may have admitted some things that are a criminal offense — it's sexual assault." When Davis suggested they wait for more proof, Rooney urged: "Back in August, Schwarzenegger's campaign chief told the *Sacramento Bee* that this is not a position election, this is a character election. If they established it as a character race, why not meet them on those terms?"

On Monday, October 6, NBC's Campbell Brown gave Davis easy inquiries: "Can you state, unequivocally, that no one in your campaign, no one in the Democratic party, that you're aware of, is behind these stories?" And: "Schwarzenegger also told Tom Brokaw, in this interview, that he would not respond to specific allegations until after the election. What do you think about that?"

ABC's Linda Douglass lobbed the nastiest mudball on the October 2 *World News Tonight* when she misquoted Schwarzenegger as saying once of Adolf Hitler, "I admire him for being such a good public speaker and for what he did with it," even displaying the offensive quote on the screen.

It soon emerged that George Butler, the source of the quote, said Arnold had said "I don't admire him for what he did with it." The *New York Times*, which ran the same bad quote in its early Friday editions, rapidly corrected the error after talking to Butler. But Douglass let the smarmy charge linger, ignoring the error in her story for the next day's *World News Tonight*. On the October 5 *This Week*, Douglass refused to acknowledge an error, only noting that Butler had a less anti-Arnold interpretation and not hinting at her own faulty reporting.

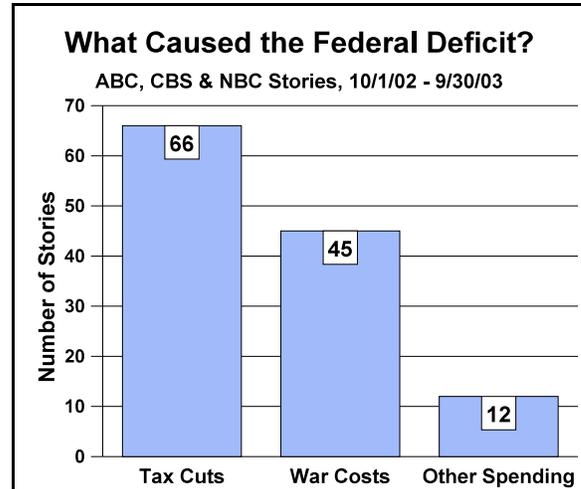
TV WON'T BLAME BIG SPENDING FOR BIG DEFICITS: When the final figures on the federal government's 2003 overspending were released on October 20, both NBC and CBS carried reports on the \$374 billion budget deficit, with NBC ominously warning that the deficit for the following year promised to be even greater. TV reporters seldom linked the huge increases in spending over the past several years with those supposedly deplorable deficits. Indeed, the broadcast networks frequently featured horror stories about the harm that would come to citizens if politicians could not spend all that they wished.

"The federal budget deficit hit a record of \$374 billion this fiscal year," anchor Tom Brokaw announced as he blamed everything but the high rate of federal spending: "The tax cuts, the war on Iraq and a weak economy are the main reasons for the red ink which is expected to be even higher next year — as high as \$500 billion, another record."

In October, MRC researchers studied 108 federal deficit stories plus another 64 stories on state government deficits aired between October 1, 2002 and September 30, 2003 (the federal fiscal year) on ABC's *World News Tonight*, CBS *Evening News* and NBC *Nightly News*.

The study found the networks usually cited President Bush's tax and war policies as causing the federal deficit, while they largely exonerated state government policies, as TV reporters blamed the states' budget shortfalls on the slow-growing U.S. economy. Overspending was rarely cited as a cause of either the federal or state budget gaps.

Crunching the numbers, a total of 66 network stories linking the federal budget deficit to the tax cuts, followed by 45 that blamed the war on terrorism, homeland security costs or the war in Iraq. (Some stories suggested more than one cause.) Only 12 stories mentioned non-war related federal spending as a reason for the rising red ink, even though such spending has risen sharply in the past three years.



Indeed, an August 2003 report by the Cato Institute's Veronique de Rugy and Ted DeHaven, for example, unfavorably compared Bush's budget requests with those of Ronald Reagan.

The scholars found that Bush's requests for new spending were hardly limited to the war on terrorism: "While Reagan attacked the 'destructive pattern of runaway spending,' as he called it in his second budget, Bush has expanded a wide array of 'compassionate' welfare state programs," they wrote. "Real spending in nearly every department has increased substantially, sometimes exorbitantly, under Bush."

But while network reporters were aggressive at faulting Bush's conservative tax-cutting policies, they rarely spotlighted his more liberal record on domestic spending. As far as the networks were concerned, deficits weren't caused by politicians who spent too much, but by politicians who confiscated too little from taxpayers.

ABC's Peter Jennings reflected the media mentality perfectly on December 9, 2002 when he remarked of the new Treasury Secretary John Snow, "He is said to be in favor of further tax cuts, but against deficits. Doesn't one lead to the other?"

The media's fixation on tax cuts was misplaced, according to free market experts. In a Heritage paper published in June, budget analyst Brian Riedl calculated "the 2001 recession and new government spending caused 78 percent of the declining surplus projection," with tax cuts accounting for just 22 percent of the shortfall.

While the networks blamed Bush for the federal shortfall, state governments were victims of happenstance. Few stories about the federal deficit (just 4 out of 108) mentioned the recession as a cause, but the weak economy was the most often cited reason for state budget gaps (14 out of 64 stories, or 22 percent). "A faltering economy has left state budgets deep in the hole," ABC's John Berman announced on November 3, 2002. That same slowdown hurt federal receipts, too, but the networks rarely said so.

Only nine of 64 stories cited high spending as a cause of state budget woes. One of those was on January 11, when ABC's *World News Tonight* reporter Judy Muller, in a story on California's budget problems, ran a sound bite from economist Peter Navarro: "The Davis administration and the Democratic legislature spent like drunken sailors."

But in other instances, reporters gave state officials a pass by euphemistically referring to "rising costs," as if politicians played only a passive role in the budget-busting process. Muller on June 30, for example, referred to "states hit by the double whammy of a huge increase in required health care costs and a huge revenue loss from the collapse of the high-tech economy."

Instead of exposing the state's profligate spending, network news often featured alarming anecdotes to illustrate the horrors of budget cuts. On February 8, ABC's Muller told viewers that "for a snapshot of the budget crisis facing almost every state, look at Oregon." She then played a sky-is-falling soundbite from an Oregon health official: "It's a catastrophe. It's a catastrophe for people with chronic illness, poor and vulnerable populations, and most of all, for the frail elderly."

"And they're not the only ones," Muller continued. "In addition to slashing health care and welfare, Oregon is drastically cutting school funds." Then, a soundbite from a student: "The education in Oregon is, you know, completely dwindling, it's fading, it's anoxic." Maintaining her fearful drumbeat, Muller added: "Jails are releasing nonviolent offenders as a cost-saving measure. And the Oregon state police laid off 20 percent of their troopers."

According to Muller, the cause of those agonizing spending cuts was greedy taxpayers: "The \$315 billion in budget cuts were ordered after Oregonians rejected a ballot measure calling for an income tax increase....Health officials in Oregon warn that cutting so close to the bone will soon cause very real pain."

But a February 2003 Cato Institute study by Chris Edwards, Stephen Moore and Phil Kerpen documented how state governments took in more than enough tax revenue during the 1990s. "Between fiscal years 1990 and 2001, state tax revenue grew 86 percent – more than the 55 percent of inflation plus population growth," they calculated. "If states had limited spending growth to that benchmark, budgets would have been \$93 billion smaller by FY01, representing savings roughly twice the size of today's spending gaps."

- NOVEMBER -

JOURNALISTS MOURN CBS'S "CENSORSHIP" OF *THE REAGANS*: With their heavy emphasis on popular entertainment, the broadcast network morning shows – NBC's *Today*, ABC's *Good Morning America*, and CBS's *The Early Show* – often bear more resemblance to *Access Hollywood* than the evening news. But when the *New York Times* revealed October 21 that the script of CBS's then-upcoming mini-series *The Reagans* was loaded with cheap shots against the ailing former President and his caretaker wife, none of the morning shows found that show-biz controversy worth reporting, and none of the shows acknowledged the copious complaints from Reagan's allies that accumulated over the next two weeks.

The morning shows delayed their reporting until November 4, when CBS's owner Viacom announced the movie was being moved to the pay cable network Showtime. As the morning hosts told the story, however, the controversy was not the mean-spirited content of the movie or the appropriateness of its timing. They seemed far more appalled by the idea that a network had agreed with the complaints of Ronald Reagan's family, friends, and supporters.

But this liberal spin was undermined when the movie finally aired on Showtime on November 30. Just as conservatives had feared, it denigrated Ronald Reagan as a vapid dolt who was manipulated by his wife and scheming advisors, while Nancy was portrayed as mean and neurotic. The film gave short shrift to President Reagan's many accomplishments, while the Iran-contra scandal and AIDS epidemic got top billing.

"Upon seeing the finished product, I felt the movie was quite biased against the Reagans," CBS Chairman Les Moonves, a liberal, told a Yale University audience on November 5.

In the immediate aftermath of Viacom's decision, disgruntled journalists portrayed it as a free-speech controversy, not a matter of political bias and poor taste. On ABC's *Good Morning America* November 5, co-host Charles Gibson asked Ronald Reagan's son, Michael: "Your dad comes, came from the Hollywood community, and he knows what the issues of artistic freedom are. How do you think he'd react?"

Recalling past movies about Presidents, Gibson inquired: "Is a different standard being applied?" Then, referring to a widely-reported quote from the original script that wrongly implied that Reagan was a hateful homophobe, Gibson rationalized: "A lot of people feel, for instance, that your dad was slow to recognize the AIDS crisis, that it had festered for quite a period of time before he addressed it. So if you fictionalize that, is that necessarily wrong?"

That same day on the *Early Show*, CBS's Harry Smith mimicked using a TV remote control as he suggested to Michael Reagan that those who complained were just thin-skinned: "Why the vehemence, why the anger? I mean, we live in a, hang on, we live in this multi-channel, digital universe of hundreds and hundreds of choices. All you have to do is go like this, if you don't like it, you just go like that."

Smith also gave air time to some whining from Barbra Streisand, as he asked Syracuse University professor Robert Thompson: "Barbra Streisand said today marks a sad day for artistic freedom. Do you think CBS allowed themselves to be bullied by this?"

The drumbeat continued the next day on *Today*, as Katie Couric framed the debate this way: "Is Ronald Reagan untouchable?"

"While he was in office, he was known as the Teflon President, Ronald Reagan," Couric pronounced at the start of the program. "Now that CBS has pulled a controversial miniseries about him, some are wondering if the former President is totally off-limits to criticism these days." In a later interview, she challenged former Reagan aide Ed Rollins: "Does it bother you at all, that, that one group in America or many Americans...can basically exert this kind of political pressure and create an environment where, perhaps, free speech is not exercised?"

The anger that *The Reagans* had been taken off CBS's schedule was not confined to morning television. On CNBC November 4, future *NBC Nightly News* anchor Brian Williams blamed "mostly Republican pressure groups" for the movie's cancellation, asking former Reagan aide Mike Deaver whether CBS's decision was "dangerous." He asked *New York* magazine's media critic Michael Wolff, "Do you believe what has happened here with this mini-series on CBS amounts to extortion?"

"Certainly capitulation," Wolff agreed, warning: "There is no group as well-organized as the right wing in America at this point in time."

A November 5 *New York Times* editorial accused Reagan supporters of creating a "Soviet-style chill." The *Times*, with a sudden concern for communist-like oppression, worried, "His supporters credit him with forcing down the Iron Curtain, so it is odd that some of them have helped create the Soviet-style chill embedded in the idea that we, as a nation, will not allow critical portrayals of one of our own recent leaders."

Philadelphia Daily News TV critic Ellen Gray voiced her disgust to the *Washington Post*'s Lisa de Moraes in a quote that appeared November 4. Referring to CBS's May mini-series on the Nazi dictator who killed millions, Gray grumbled, "If Hitler had more friends, CBS wouldn't have aired [its Hitler mini-series] either."

"Gutless CBS," read the headline over an online piece by *Newsweek*'s Jonathan Alter who complained: "It's a big victory for the 'Elephant Echo Chamber,' the unholy trinity of conservative talk radio, conservative Internet sites and the Republican National Committee."

USA Today's Robert Bianco argued: "If nothing else, this act of creative sabotage should put to rest the idea that the media are liberal." But if the media were not liberal, CBS would never have produced such a derogatory biography of Ronald Reagan. It's more logical to argue that CBS's cancellation is the exception which proves the rule.

Indeed, the *Chicago Tribune*'s Vincent J. Schodolski, John Cook and Frank James reported the day after the decision: "A CBS executive who spoke on the condition of anonymity said the liberal political views of most CBS executives blinded them to the possibility that Reagan supporters might latch on to the movie as a political issue. 'I don't think most people saw it coming,' the executive said. 'It's part of the bubble that we live in.'"

A bubble that apparently includes Bianco, Alter, the *New York Times* and a host of network journalists.

Simplistic, Cartoonish Nastiness

"Nancy Reagan as Cruella De Vil and Ronald Reagan as the nearsighted Mister Magoo? There are those who will probably find the depictions of the former president and first lady in *The Reagans* just that simplistic and cartoonish....The film, while not a hatchet job or unrelentingly vicious attack, definitely makes the Reagans rather freakish creatures, Nancy with her fanatical reliance on an astrologer and her tendency to sob and rant in the bathtub, Ronald haunted by nightmares of being a lifeguard, as he was in his youth, and being unable to 'save,' among others, figures in his administration who go down in disgraceThere's enough nastiness and character assassination in the film — even without the line about AIDS — to make CBS look wise in pulling it off the network and foolish in having scheduled it in the first place."

— *Washington Post* critic Tom Shales in a Nov. 30 review of Showtime's *The Reagans*.

When the re-edited version of the movie finally aired on Showtime, its anti-Reagan agenda was evident to all but the most ardent leftists. (See box.) Showtime hosted a panel discussion about the movie on December 1, during which two former liberal reporters, Marvin Kalb and Lou Cannon, denounced the unfair and inaccurate portrayal.

Cannon, a former *Washington Post* reporter Lou Cannon, who penned several biographies of Ronald Reagan, argued that “it’s hard to imagine a cartoon that could be that bad....Remember the famous debate where Lloyd Bentsen says to Dan Quayle, you know, ‘I know John F. Kennedy and you’re no John F. Kennedy’? Well, I do know Ronald Reagan. This isn’t Ronald Reagan.”

“TURKEYGATE” — REPORTERS MAR BUSH’S BAGHDAD TRIP: Faced with a traditionally slow news day on Thanksgiving, President Bush surprised everyone but the Secret Service and a small press pool by showing up in Baghdad to celebrate the holiday with the troops in Iraq. Like Bush’s plane landing in May, the immediate reaction was electric and positive, which the media elite then felt compelled to drown out with Democratic attack lines.

By Friday morning, the three network morning shows were sharpening their knives for National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, demanding to know about the trip’s political motivations and implications. They began with how the secret trip was accomplished, but then turned tougher. ABC’s Charles Gibson insisted: “Dr. Rice, there’s obviously great symbolism to this trip. Because it is important for a Commander-in-Chief to come and see his troops. But so is there symbolism that the things are so unstable that he had to sneak in, in darkness, that, that he never left the airport, that could only stay two and a half hours.”

Gibson followed up: “I guess I’m asking, isn’t there symbolism in the fact that it points up that not much has changed in eight months?”

CBS’s Harry Smith stated as fact that there was no connection between 9/11 and Saddam Hussein, and implied there are no terrorists in the world who want to kill Americans other than the ones who attacked on 9/11, as he challenged Rice: “Certainly the soldiers that were interviewed said it was a major morale boost, to have the President, have the Commander-in-Chief there. But you brought something up, an interesting point, why they’re there. The President said during his remarks to the troops, he said: ‘You’re defeating terrorists in Iraq so we don’t have to face them in our own country.’ Now, there’s no connection between Iraq and 9/11. Why does the President persist in tying those two together?”

Over on NBC’s *Today*, Matt Lauer suggested dark motives: “Let’s talk about some criticism that’s been leveled at President Bush as of late, Dr. Rice. And that is that because he did not attend any of the funerals of the fallen soldiers in Iraq, some family members felt he was not showing compassion or a connection to the suffering that they have felt as a result of this war. Was this trip an effort to blunt that criticism?”

In the week that followed, some network reporters tried to turn the trip into a controversial moment. Presidential press secretary Scott McClellan was hounded about inconsistencies in the early versions of how the trip happened and which planes had made contact with Air Force One.

NBC's Norah O'Donnell suggested "Do you think, though, that this third revision of this story now, takes some shine off the President's surprise visit to the troops?"

CBS's John Roberts added: "What are the legalities of filing a fraudulent flight plan?"

As with May's "Mission Accomplished" speech, CNN's Aaron Brown was one of the most enthusiastic pseudo-scandal manufacturers. When *Washington Post* reporter Mike Allen wrote that the turkey that President Bush held up for cameras was a roasted display turkey that was not eaten, Brown invited Allen to discuss the less-than-Earth-shaking matter on CNN.

Leading off two segments lasting eight minutes, Brown joked: "The troops didn't get a taste of it, and so tonight we ask: does this constitute, get ready, Turkeygate?" Brown pressed former Bush aide Mary Matalin: "Do you worry that, when the White House at one point said, well, when the President flew to the aircraft carrier, he had to fly in a jet, and then later had to retract that, that it raises questions about the veracity of the White House itself, not just the President?"

But Clinton Was a Thanksgiving Hero

"A warm welcome in winter's cold. President Clinton, a hero in Kosovo, but the people struggle to survive, hatred remains."

— *NBC Nightly News* anchor Tom Brokaw, November 23, 1999, as Clinton prepared for a pre-Thanksgiving meal with U.S. soldiers at Camp Bonesteel in Kosovo.

"A hero's welcome for President Clinton in a community gym packed with Kosovar Albanians. He was introduced as a special friend, who saved them from danger and death. Hundreds waited outside in the first snow of the season."

— Bob Kur, later in the same broadcast.

- DECEMBER -

SADDAM CAPTURED, BUT REPORTERS STILL GLOOMY: Americans woke up on Sunday, December 14 to the shocking news that Saddam Hussein had been captured alive, found in a tiny "spider hole" with a few candy bars. Iraqis waved red flags in the streets and celebrated. It was a great moment of achievement for the military, but not a great moment for the media.

In their perpetual attempt to see only problems, even in the midst of a dramatic solution, ABC News quickly identified the headaches to come. At 8:10 in the morning, little more than an hour after Saddam's capture was announced, ABC's Terry Moran was finding the dark clouds, with no silver linings:

"What happens to Saddam Hussein now becomes an international political problem for this administration in two ways: First, Saddam Hussein was at the heart of Iraqi politics for 30 years really. He was President since 1979, but really in power before then. And for about 15 of those years the United States had an interesting relationship, to say the least, with the Iraqi government. Secretary Rumsfeld was over in Baghdad meeting with Saddam Hussein years ago. There are allegations that the United States provided weapons to Saddam Hussein's regime during the Iran-Iraq war. And all that could spill out in a big show trial." Moran's line of impending U.S. embarrassment was repeated on ABC's *Good Morning America* and *Nightline*.

This talk of the U.S. relationship with Iraq in the 1980s “spilling out” is a very odd formulation, since ABC — and the other networks — worked very hard in 1992 to blame the Reagan and Bush administrations for building Saddam up, leading to the first Gulf War. On October 28, 1992, six days before the presidential election, ABC *Nightline* host Ted Koppel declared that 18 months of ABC’s searching had revealed a series of “legal and illegal technology transfers” to Iraq.

Koppel began by underlining the massive legwork the major media had done to expose the Bush administration: “It’s a story that *Nightline* has revisited repeatedly over the past year and a half. The *Los Angeles Times* reported today that they have done more than 100 stories on the subject, over 90,000 words. This week’s *New Yorker* did a massive report. *New York Times* columnist William Safire has been relentless in pursuing the issue.”

Nightline aired at least eight shows on the Reagan-Bush tilt toward Iraq. ABC was quite involved in “spilling” on this story. Stuart Taylor, a legal analyst now with *Newsweek*, denounced these stories in 1994, finding “there wasn’t much beef in this gigantic scandalburger...This edifice of innuendo was erected on a foundation of factual errors and distortions that spread like a contagion.”

But the oddest denial of the capture’s meaning came on ABC’s prime-time special on Saddam’s capture. In Baghdad, reporter Martin Seemungal relayed how many Iraqis were joyful, but others were muted: “They feel cheated. They’re essentially saying that it would have been much better, they would have been happier to see him fight because it would have justified the fear that they had for him for these so many years.”

Without explaining his personal contact with Iraqis during the day, Jennings asserted: “On the other hand Martin, as people have suggested to us today, there’s not a good deal for Iraqis to be happy about at the moment. Life is still very chaotic, beset by violence in many cases, huge shortages. In some respects, Iraqis keep telling us life is not as stable for them as it was when Saddam Hussein was in power. Is that a factor today?”

To Jennings, “stability” under a tyrant who tortured and killed opponents was more desirable than the hard work of overcoming him.

Another strange moment came that night on CBS, when *60 Minutes* star Lesley Stahl interviewed Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. Stahl worried about the hospitality Saddam would receive: “Let me raise the whole question, for lack of a better term, torture. Let’s say he’s not forthcoming. Would we deprive him of sleep, would we make it very cold where he is, or very hot? Are there any restrictions on the way we treat him to get him to cooperate more than he has been?”

Pessimism Overflows

“I write about what I call this ‘oppressive pessimism.’ Look, we don’t want our reporters to be cheerleaders. I don’t think anybody wants Peter Jennings, for instance, to put on a short skirt and start waving pom poms around, you know. Maybe somebody does, but basically we don’t want that. But I don’t think we need them to be just oppressively pessimistic, either.”

— **Former CBS reporter and author Bernard Goldberg on MSNBC’s *Scarborough Country*, December 16.**

When Rumsfeld insisted we would we follow the Geneva Conventions, that wasn't good enough for Stahl who pressed: "Sleep deprivation, that kind of thing. You're ruling it completely out, is that what you're telling us?"

The next morning, Reuters correspondent Joseph Logan opened a dispatch from Baghdad: "Joy at the capture of Saddam Hussein gave way to resentment toward Washington Monday as Iraqis confronted afresh the bloodshed, shortages and soaring prices of life under U.S. occupation."

TALKING HEADS CELEBRATE "REFORM" BUT DEMAND EVEN MORE: In covering the Supreme Court's December 10 ruling upholding the McCain-Feingold campaign finance "reform" law, network stories matched the liberal agenda of campaign regulation advocates. Instead of showing any concern for the diminution of free speech rights, the networks presumed there's too much money in political campaigns, and ignored how the media remain exempt from the speech restrictions which regulate everyone else.

Indicating how some journalists may wish for still more restraints on other people's free speech, a number of reporters rued how "special interest money" will still be a factor in campaigns despite the law and court ruling.

ABC and CBS failed to even mention the limits on political ads 60 days before an election, a limitation which protects incumbents from speech they don't like.

While CBS, NBC and CNN at least cited dissenting Justice Scalia's free speech concerns, ABC didn't mention the views of the minority. Instead, *World News Tonight* held itself to a short item read by anchor Peter Jennings, who approvingly cited the Court's warning: "The majority warned that the law is not a cure all, saying that 'money, like water will always find an outlet.' And ABC's John Cochran reports the big money is already flowing and outside groups are preparing to spend large amounts of money to influence the next campaign."

The spin was the same on CBS. "The Supreme Court rules on campaign finance reform. The controversial law stands, but we'll show you the loophole where big special interest money can still get through," Dan Rather warned in teasing the December 10 *CBS Evening News*.

Wyatt Andrews warned: "Anyone who thinks this ruling ends soft money in politics is wrong. Political groups called 527s, tax-exempt groups not aligned with the political parties, are already organizing in droves to, guess what, raise unlimited soft money, mostly for ads. One left-leaning 527, MoveOn.org, is using soft money for this anti-Bush ad in four states. And this....anti-Dean ad is sponsored by a right-leaning 527, the Club for Growth, again with soft money. Despite the Court's ruling, unlimited cash will still flow into politics. It just won't be channeled through the parties."

NBC's Tom Brokaw opened his December 10 newscast by making the case for the so-called "reform" bill that five Justices had approved. "Many worry," Brokaw argued, that American politics "has been corrupted by the massive amounts of money pouring into campaigns, the

single-minded pursuit of money by politicians and the advantages all of that money brings to the wealthy and the special interests, especially so-called soft money which was unregulated.”

Naturally, Brokaw did not worry about the “special interests” NBC News is able to promote or denigrate, but how the rules benefit President Bush did worry him: “This ruling doesn’t remove the place of money from campaigns – far from it. In fact, many believe it will only help President Bush who has the built-in advantage of the White House for fundraising and the sky’s the limit because he chose not to accept the restrictions that come with federal matching funds for the campaign.”

On CNN’s *Inside Politics*, anchor Judy Woodruff celebrated with Senator Russ Feingold and then pressed him on whether McCain-Feingold’s restrictions on free speech were stringent enough: “Already you have these independent third-party groups, so-called 527 committees, that are out there raising money, putting money into this presidential campaign, both on the left and on the right, in effect, you know, making what the court decided today, you could argue, meaningless because money is finding its way back into these campaigns in an unregulated way.”

Over the past several presidential campaigns, network reporters in particular have sought to counter candidate advertising, attempting to negate its effect with “Ad Watches” and other editorial devices. At the same time, journalists became open cheerleaders for the types of campaign regulation embraced by McCain-Feingold, which restricts candidates, political parties, and other interest groups but not the media.

Reporters like Woodruff regularly describe the freedom to participate in the political process by giving money, forming groups and sponsoring their own advertising as some kind of “loophole” begging to be closed by new laws. Perhaps journalists’ itch to “reform” the political process won’t be completely satisfied until the media elite again dominate the political debate, as they did before conservative media watchdogs like the Media Research Center documented how their supposedly objective “news” was just so much liberal bias. □

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