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Worst Spin Came From CBS's Four Horsemen of Liberal Bias — Rather, Gumbel, Schieffer and Roberts

Grading TV Coverage of Bush's 100 Days

Television's self-styled experts on everything are busily producing flashy retrospectives of the first 100 days of George W. Bush's presidency — *Nightline* has a four-night mini-series this week — but how good a job have the networks done? MRC analysts went back to the videotape, identifying the best and worst coverage from ABC, CBS and NBC from the past three months:

■ **Biased CBS Gets an F:** As Dan Rather might say, you'd find more liberal spin on CBS than blackberries at a bake-off in Altoona. Rather himself frequently denigrated Bush's policies, calling his tax program a "gamble" and a "cut-federal-programs-to-get-a-tax cut plan." *Early Show* host Bryant Gumbel tried in vain to convince a market expert that "the Bush White House has done very little about this [stock market decline] with the exception of seemingly adding fuel to the fire with talk of a worsening economy." Instead of holding liberals equally accountable, Bob Schieffer's "Real Deal" segments typically blandly relayed only the anti-Bush complaints of partisans like Tom Daschle as on March 21: "The President reversed a campaign promise to require power plants to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and delayed a ban on logging and road building on a third of federal lands. But Daschle says the canceling of the protections for drinking water is the worst of all."

■ **CBS's John Roberts was the most biased White House correspondent of the first 100 days.** Uniquely, he sought out a liberal activist to show how bad Bush's policies would be: "Bob McIntyre of Citizens for Tax Justice can't forget the last time Congress went on a tax cut spree in 1981; America is still paying the bill." Roberts also showcased two tax cut critics from Omaha to illustrate negative public reaction to Bush's budget speech in late February — despite CBS's own post-speech poll showing wide support. The *Evening News* never reported the pro-Bush findings of that poll.

■ **ABC Ekes Out a C-minus:** This network had plenty of biased moments, too. Peter Jennings wondered aloud whether the Bush administration's "very militant" rhetoric had worsened the early April stand-off with China. Reporter

Linda Douglass blamed Bush's allegedly tough tactics for ruining Washington's tone (always so pleasant during the Clinton years): "So much for bi-partisanship," she griped on *World News Tonight*. White House correspondent Terry Moran oddly complained about Bush's use of the phrase "energy crisis," although ABC used those exact words the next night in a promo for an upcoming story.

But Moran was fair-minded enough to report on February 8 that the liberal spin that Bush's tax cut favored the rich was only true using one set of statistics; presented another way, the tax cut gave more benefits to lower- and middle-income earners.

■ **B-minus for NBC:** In an interview shown Wednesday morning, *Today's* Matt Lauer demanded Bush "look me in the eye and say that you are a President committed to cleaning up the environment." Lauer's power trip notwithstanding, NBC was actually fairer than either ABC or CBS. *Meet the Press* host Tim Russert, for example, challenged California's Democratic governor, a Bush critic: "If you don't cut taxes, Governor Davis, won't Congress spend the money?"

■ **By process of elimination, NBC White House reporter David Gregory was least imbalanced** — although that's a lot like saying Kermit is the cutest frog in the swamp. Compared to Moran and Roberts, he took fewer liberal swipes, and he even defended Bush's tax cut on February 5, sort of: "What about the charge that the plan mostly benefits the rich? Not so, say some experts."

The networks weren't just being tough: they complained only about conservative aspects of Bush's program and didn't haze the freshman President on any of his new spending or regulation plans. During Bush's first 100 days, the networks were cops who mainly patrolled just the left side of the street. — Rich Noyes

Grading the Networks, First 100 Days	
ABC	C-
CBS	F
NBC	B-
Best WH Reporter:	David Gregory
Worst WH Reporter:	John Roberts

L. Brent Bozell III, Publisher; Brent Baker, Rich Noyes, Editors; Jessica Anderson, Brian Boyd, Geoffrey Dickens, Paul Smith, Brad Wilmouth, Media Analysts; Kristina Sewell, Research Associate; Liz Swasey, Director of Communications. For more complete descriptions of each network, go to "Report Card on the Media," at www.mrc.org.