



Campaign 2004

# Media Reality ✓ Check

Expert Documentation of the Latest Liberal Media Bias ✪ Wednesday, May 12, 2004

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MRC Study: NBC Devoted Ten Times More Airtime to U.S. Humiliations Than Saddam's Mass Murders

## Prison Abuse Trumps Saddam's Mass Graves?

The national media pride themselves on their ability to make fine distinctions and appreciate subtle nuances. But their incessant repetition on the Abu Ghraib prison-abuse story, accompanied by the same rotating set of photographs, lacked context — until the story emerged Tuesday of the savage beheading of American citizen Nick Berg in Iraq.

Before that, network reporters tried to compare prison-abuse photos with Vietnam-era images of point-blank assassinations and the massacre at My Lai. But none of the networks could show the grotesque snuff-film footage of Berg's murder, although CBS came closest, showing Berg as he was pushed to the ground and holding the still frame as they played the audio of his last screams.

There is a vast difference between sexual humiliation and brutal murder. But to the national media, there is also much greater outrage for U.S. prisoner abuse than there is for the enemy's murders. Viewers received a false picture of moral equivalence, with only American offenses amplified.

To illustrate a fraction of the bias problem, we counted the number of prisoner-abuse stories on NBC's evening and morning news programs (*NBC Nightly News* and *Today*) from April 29, when the story emerged, through May 11. There were 58 morning and evening stories. Using the Nexis news-data retrieval system, we counted the number of stories on mass graves found in Iraq from the reign of Saddam Hussein in 2003 and 2004. The number of evening and morning news stories on those grim discoveries? Five.

On the May 6, 2003 *Nightly News*, Jim Maceda reported a very pointed story, suggesting as many as 300,000 may be buried in groups around the country. Tom Brokaw's show also had a report on May 14, and two more on the weekend

of June 7 and 8, when a mass grave was uncovered at Salman Pak. Then, NBC aired nothing until December 16, when reporter Pete Williams mentioned mass graves in a story on an impending trial for Saddam Hussein. NBC has aired no stories on mass graves since then. *Today* never aired a story in 2003 or 2004 on mass graves in Iraq.

**NBC's morning and evening news shows aired 58 prisoner-abuse stories since April 29. In all of 2003 and 2004, NBC has aired only five stories on the mass graves discovered after the fall of Saddam Hussein, despite an estimated body count of as many as 300,000.**

*Today* has used the Abu Ghraib pictures to insist on political damage to the Bush administration. NBC was in a rush to punish. Co-host Katie Couric opened last Wednesday's show in full scandal mode, demanding: "What did administration officials know and when did they know it?"

Couric and co-host Matt Lauer have asked repeatedly about whether Defense Secretary Donald

Rumsfeld should resign. On Tuesday morning, Pentagon reporter Jim Miklaszewski insisted "there's a steadily growing political and public opinion drumbeat calling for Rumsfeld's resignation," even though the latest Gallup poll numbers disagree, 64 to 31 percent.

If Americans didn't want Rumsfeld ousted, how about the world? On Monday night, NBC's Fred Francis suggested: "In the Arab street and much of the world, outrage has produced a consensus: Rumsfeld must go." Francis quoted what he called a "moderate journalist" from Egypt saying Rumsfeld "is reminding me of a sort of neo-Nazi character." Francis also relayed an unnamed "Arab businessman" commenting on the omnipresent prison pictures: "That is not Jeffersonian democracy. It's more like a lesson from Hitler's book, *Mein Kampf*."

Aren't the NBC-selected Hitler comparisons a bit misplaced when the Baathists are the mass murderers?

— Tim Graham and Ken Shepherd

To schedule an interview with an MRC spokesman, please contact Katie Wright at (703) 683-5004