



Campaign 2000

# Media Reality Check

Expert Documentation of the Latest Liberal Media Bias **W** Wednesday, June 21, 2000

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If Conventions Are Un-Newsworthy "Foregone Conclusions," What Was the "Million Mom March"?

## Pumping Protests, Dumping Conventions

Are the networks preparing to cover the party conventions? From the sound of their quotes, they're preparing to avoid them, disparaging them as party "infomercials." But what about this spring's liberal protests, especially the "Million Mom March"? Each of the Big Three networks devoted major air time to that infomercial. An MRC study of protest coverage follows on Page 2. As usual, though, the networks avoided covering the actual speakers at the protests.

Everywhere you look, network stars are badmouthing the conventions. On CNN's *Larry King Live*, Dan Rather predicted: "I think there will be less coverage of the conventions of the over-the-air networks this year than there's ever been." Rather blamed the parties: "As long as the parties insist on not deciding very much at these conventions and trying to make them into the equivalent of political infomercials, then people like myself, who argue, listen, we should be covering them more, are sort of left out there hanging."

In Monday's *Los Angeles Times*, CBS spokeswoman Sandra Genelius echoed: "We're not in the infomercial business." NBC's Bill Wheatley declared only the nominees' speeches were important: "A lot of the rest is simply staged political theater." ABC special events producer Marc Burstein pronounced "It simply no longer makes sense for a commercial broadcaster to pre-empt its prime-time programming....It's not what we do in the year 2000 for a non-news event."

ABC's Ted Koppel also left the 1996 GOP convention in a huff: "This convention is more of an infomercial than a news event. Nothing surprising has happened, nothing surprising is anticipated." As for this year's events, Koppel told *Philadelphia Inquirer* TV writer Gail Shister that unless "there's an outbreak of real news," he will stay away, since "these conventions will probably be, as the last ones were,

pretty much foregone conclusions." Even in prime time, Koppel said, the major networks shouldn't cover the conventions "unless there's breaking or major news, not simply three days of the parties having a good time."

Already, ABC has announced it will air preseason *Monday Night Football* games during the convention weeks. Isn't it odd for ABC to declare they don't cover "foregone

conclusions" and "infomercials" when they've given an hour of one-sided air time this spring to Earth Day and all two hours of their morning show to the "Million Mom March"?

While a look at Koppel's choice of *Nightline* topics shows he touches politics and politicians with a ten-foot pole,

if at all, his attitude symbolizes a network hostility to unedited political speech on TV. In 1996, he complained in San Diego, "They have more control over what we put on the air this week than they have ever had before." But *USA Today* reported ABC gave the GOP convention podium only 34 of 60 minutes on Monday night in 1996. The next night, it gave convention speakers just 26 minutes of 66. The rest was network analysis and ads.

While the networks promoted the protest causes this spring, they failed to report rally speakers regularly told the crowds to vote for liberal Democrats in the fall. Rob Glaser of Real Networks told the Earth Day audience: "Vote. Get great people like Al Gore, or Maria Cantwell in our Washington state, elected." At the gay march, Human Rights Campaign boss Elizabeth Birch declared: "This election year we must elect Al Gore as President of the United States." Unlike media treatment of the GOP, no one connected the radicalism of these events to an "extremist" Democratic base which might alienate moderate voters.

➔ Turn to next page for protest study breakdown

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## Network Promotion of Liberal Protest “Infomercials” Leading Up to Campaign 2000

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### **Million Mom March, May 14:**

**Story count:** 19 evening news stories and 40 morning news stories on the Big Three (ABC 8/18, CBS 5/10, NBC 6/12). ABC’s numbers include a two-hour special *Good Morning America* live from the White House.

#### **Rally quotes that didn’t make TV news:**

■ **Actress Susan Sarandon:** “Watch out. We are pissed off!” Then women on stage as well as the crowd chanted repeatedly “We are pissed off!”

■ **Activist Kerry Kennedy Cuomo:** “So how do we stop the violence? There are steps each of us can take. First, get rid of as many guns as possible.”

■ **Singer Ted Christopher:** “Put all these guns in the ground. We just can’t shoot them anymore....Throw these guns away. Throw these guns away. They’ve caused this world too much pain.”

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### **Millennium (Gay) March, April 30:**

**Story count:** Three evening news stories (one per network) and one morning interview on NBC.

#### **Rally quotes that didn’t make TV news:**

■ **Comedian/Actress Margaret Cho:** “I am so excited today that I am going to use the Washington Monument as my own personal strap on dildo.”

And: “I believe that a government that would deny a gay man the right to bridal registry is a fascist state.”

■ **Actress Kathy Najimy:** “I have a 3 year old daughter who is perfect and she has, this is a true story, an imaginary friend named Alexandra. I come here because should she choose to have an imaginary kiss with Alexandra, I want her to have that right. Should she choose to grow up and hold hands or move into an imaginary house with Alexandra, I want her to have that right. And should she choose, I promise you, I am going to sing at her goddamn imaginary wedding to Alexandra.”

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### **Earth Day, April 22:**

**Story count:** Thanks to the INS morning raid on the Miami relatives of Elian Gonzalez, Earth Day events were wiped off the media map, although ABC aired one evening story, one morning story, and a one-hour Saturday night

special, *Planet Earth 2000*, that included the infamous Leonardo diCaprio interview with President Clinton. The special included only 41 seconds of an opposing opinion, although ABC reporter John Stossel offered a segment of opposing opinion six days later on 20/20.

#### **Rally quotes that didn’t make TV news:**

■ **Robert F. Kennedy Jr. (Natural Resources Defense Council):** “All the mainstream scientists in the world know that global warming is happening. We all see anybody with common sense knows that global warming is happening.... This, ladies and gentlemen, this battle that we are fighting for today, that you’re the front lines of, this is Armageddon. This is the final battle.”

■ **Indian rights activist and Ralph Nader’s Green Party running mate Winona LaDuke:** “You know what it is like being an Indian person in this country and talking to the U.S. government or talking to a multinational corporation? It is like sitting down and talking to a cannibal.”

And: “What I am afraid is that only when white men realize that their testicles are shrinking is when we will make changes in how we treat the environment.”

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### **IMF/World Bank protests, April 16:**

**Story count:** 14 evening news stories and 13 morning news stories (ABC 5/5, CBS 6/4, and NBC 3/4).

#### **Rally quotes that didn’t make TV news:**

■ **John Bell (Philadelphia ACT UP):** “Today Zimbabwe has, more than 1 in every 5 person between the ages of 15 and 49 have HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. This is due to the IMF-imposed structural adjustment program.”

Despite the wild left-wing tone of these protests, and the touting of Democratic candidates in the last three marches, reporters almost never applied even a “liberal” label to the protesters. One exception came from CBS’s Wyatt Andrews on the April 15 *Evening News*, noting the oddity of “latter-day radicals” standing with hard-hat steelworkers. — *Tim Graham and Joyce Garczynski*

L. Brent Bozell III, Publisher; Brent Baker, Tim Graham, Editors; Jessica Anderson, Brian Boyd, Geoffrey Dickens, Ted King, Paul Smith, Brad Wilmoth, Media Analysts; Kristina Sewell, Research Associate; Liz Swasey, Director of Communications. Stay on top of campaign TV trends at [www.mrc.org/campaign2000/welcome.html](http://www.mrc.org/campaign2000/welcome.html)