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NBC Anchor Boasted "We've Worked Hard to Drain the Bias" but Viewers Still Swimming in Liberalism

Marking Tom Brokaw's Twenty Years of Tilt

On Labor Day, 1983, Tom Brokaw stepped away from co-anchor Roger Mudd and began 20 years as sole anchor of *NBC Nightly News*. One reason for his longevity, he claimed in 1996, is "we've worked very hard to drain the bias out of what we do."

Not quite. While his advocacy is not as outrageous as either Dan Rather or Peter Jennings, Brokaw has celebrated the welfare state, lobbied for liberal campaign finance reform, praised an ex-Soviet dictator, and exhibited a partisan double standard on scandals.

On his 20th anniversary, we offer a replay of Brokaw's greatest episodes of liberal advocacy, on *Nightly News* unless otherwise noted.

THE REAGAN DISASTER

■ "I thought from the outset that his supply-side theory was just a disaster. I knew of no one who felt it was going to work." (*Mother Jones* interview, April 1983 issue)

■ "We wanted everything but the pain of paying for it....In a decade [the] deficit more than tripled. How? Ronald Reagan ran for President promising Americans more while asking for less: the Reagan Revolution." (October 5, 1990)

■ "Reagan, as commander-in-chief, was the military's best friend. He gave the Pentagon almost everything it wanted. That spending, combined with a broad tax cut, contributed to a trillion-dollar deficit....Social programs? They suffered under Reagan. But he refused to see the cause and effect." (Over video of homeless people on December 27, 1989 NBC News special *The Eighties*)

A "COURAGEOUS" AND "FUN" DICTATOR

■ "I think Gorbachev is a great man in the 20th century because he forced his country to look at the hypocrisy and the fraudulence of communism and to begin slowly to make a turn away from it...He can still light up any room that he walks into. The eyes are flashy, you know, and the great command of the language and the feel that he has, the very physical presence of him. It's still fun to be around him." (PBS *Charlie Rose* interview, May 2, 1996)

■ "From the perspective of the West, the former President of the Soviet Union of course was a courageous, far-seeing prophet whose reforms set in motion the collapse of the Soviet dictatorship and the end of the Cold War....We know that you've devoted your life to peace and to changing your country and those of us who have gotten to know you count ourselves among the privileged." (Opening and closing of MSNBC interview with Gorbachev, October 29, 1996)

"The idea that we would set out, consciously or unconsciously, to put some kind of an ideological framework over what we're doing is nonsense."

— Brokaw on C-SPAN's *Washington Journal*, May 25, 2001.

THOSE SCARY REPUBLICANS

■ "You're opposed to abortion in any form. You also have opposed the E.R.A., and you're opposed to increasing the minimum wage, which is important to a lot of women out there. Aren't you going to have a hard time selling Dan Quayle to the women of this country?" (To Quayle, August 17,

1988 convention coverage)

■ "A lot of people said, 'Just too much red meat there [in the speech].' You gave the impression that if you're not a white, heterosexual, Christian, anti-abortion, anti-environment, you're somehow not welcome in the Republican Party." (To Pat Buchanan, August 18, 1992 convention coverage)

■ "There are many people in the Republican Party who believe that the Republican National Convention in Houston, at which you were a prominent part, was simply too extreme, too strident in its positions, and they cite your speech and Pat Buchanan's speech as well." (To Pat Robertson on election night, November 4, 1992)

■ "Is the Republican Party held hostage, in your judgment, Christie Whitman, by its views on abortion? So that people like you, who believe that there ought to be some choice, can never be considered for Vice President?" (To Whitman during MSNBC's convention coverage, August 2, 2000)

■ "Colin Powell, the most influential African-American in the Republican Party, will be talking to these delegates, reminding them that they have to think about minorities every day, not just every four years." (Convention coverage July 31, 2000)

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20 YEARS OF TOM BROKAW'S TILT (cont.)

THE WELFARE STATE IS A "GODSEND"

■ "When *NBC Nightly News* continues: in Washington, if they cut food stamps, who doesn't eat?" (March 22, 1995)

■ "Medicare, the health care program that has been a godsend to the elderly in this country, even with all its financial difficulties. Tonight, the President wants to dramatically expand its coverage to millions more." (January 6, 1998)

EVEN BILL CLINTON WASN'T LIBERAL ENOUGH

■ "I wanted to follow up just for a moment on welfare if I can. If in fact you sign the Republican bill that's likely to come down from the Hill, all the projections show that that will push, at least short term, more than a million youngsters in this country below the poverty line. That's a high risk for youngsters in this country who are already in peril." (To Bill Clinton on MSNBC, July 15, 1996)

APPALLED BY REPUBLICAN SCANDALS...

■ "And when the public phase of those hearings ended today with the testimony of Secretary Weinberger, we were left with an astonishing record of deceit, ignorance, naivete, good or bad intentions, failed policies, and discredited public servants, and this story is not yet complete." (On Iran-Contra hearings, August 3, 1987)

...AND THOSE WHO INVESTIGATE DEMOCRATS

■ "Still ahead tonight. Investigating the President. A growing backlash against independent counsel Kenneth Starr. Is he out of bounds or just tone deaf?" (February 16, 1998)

SEXUAL HARASSMENT: A GOP TERRORIST...

■ "We begin tonight with U.S. Senator Bob Packwood of Oregon, a man who championed women's rights on the floor of the Senate and sexually terrorized members of his own staff." (September 7, 1995)

...BUT AN "ANCILLARY ISSUE" FOR CLINTON

■ "Do you think the press has been too fascinated with other ancillary issues...like Whitewater and Paula Jones?" (To Tim Russert after a Clinton press conference, November 9, 1994)

ON "REFORM," HE'S AS OBJECTIVE AS JOHN MCCAIN

■ "Beyond the tedium of the day to day campaigning, there's another much more alarming development this year — money. Huge amounts of money pouring into both parties, raising very serious questions about influence and conflict of interest." (October 29, 1996)

■ "For all the rhetoric and the outrage about what happened in the '96 campaign, a bill that would overhaul the system was all but killed off today in a partisan battle." (October 7, 1997)

■ "The Republicans were outraged by the fundraising practices of the President and the Democratic National Committee — but not so outraged that they felt the need for campaign finance reform." (In a *New York Times* column, February 7, 1998)

POPE & HELMS VETOED A GREAT VP CANDIDATE

■ "You put Tom Ridge out there for example, the governor of Pennsylvania, big and important state, a guy with a great record, pro-choice, immediately the Catholic Church and Jesse Helms said no way." (To George W. Bush, July 24, 2000)

REPORTERS ARE NOT BIASED...

■ "Now to your larger question about, 'Are reporters biased?' No, I really don't think that they are. I think that most of us are registered, as I am, which is [to] decline to, or [register] as independents. I never have revealed who I've ever voted for. But I can tell, it crosses back and forth between party lines. And I think most people feel that way who are reporters." (CNN's *Larry King Live*, Mar. 6, 2000)

...UNLESS THEY WEAR THE AMERICAN FLAG

■ **Tom Brokaw:** "I wear a flag in my heart, but I think if you wear a flag, it's a suggestion somehow that you're endorsing what the administration is doing at the time. And I don't think journalists ought to be wearing flags."

Phil Donahue: "And I say hear, hear, hear." (On MSNBC's *Donahue*, July 25, 2002)

— *Tim Graham and Rich Noyes*

"Promise Kept" vs. "Controversial Note"

"Today President Clinton kept a campaign promise and it came on the 20th anniversary of *Roe vs. Wade* legalizing abortion."

— *Brokaw on Clinton's revoking President Reagan's executive order barring funding for overseas abortion, January 22, 1993.*

vs.

"We'll begin with the new President's very active day, which started on a controversial note."

— *On George W. Bush keeping his promise to reinstate the Reagan policy, January 22, 2001.*

L. Brent Bozell III, Publisher; **Brent Baker, Tim Graham, Rich Noyes**, Editors; **Geoffrey Dickens, Jessica Anderson, Brad Wilmouth, Brian Boyd, Ken Shepherd**, Media Analysts; **Kristina Sewell**, Research Associate; **Liz Swasey**, Director of Communications. For examples of Peter Jennings and Dan Rather's bias, visit www.mrc.org.