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Journalists Refused to Tilt in America's Favor after 9/11, But Are Praised For Biased Hurricane Coverage

## Celebrating the Media's Bush-Bashing "Passion"

The misery and loss of life following Hurricane Katrina and the flooding of New Orleans make it the worst calamity to hit the United States since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. But after 9/11, many journalists insisted that their correct stance was rigid neutrality, refusing to call terrorists "terrorists" and insisting objectivity would be compromised by wearing lapel pins with the American flag. In contrast, journalists showed no similar desire for neutrality in covering this disaster.

As television showed thousands of hurricane victims suffering in designated shelters without food or water, distressed reporters dropped any pretense of neutrality and began lambasting the Bush administration's response — even though it was not at all clear whether the failure was with the federal, state or local governments, or some combination of all three. That didn't matter to media critics, many of whom cheered the new "passion" of TV's journalist/activists.

"Katrina rekindles adversarial media," read the approving headline in Tuesday's *USA Today*. "For once, reporters were acting like concerned citizens, not passive observers," enthused the *Washington Post's* Howard Kurtz, adding "maybe journalism needs to bring more passion to the table." *The New York Times's* Alessandra Stanley was cheered to see "normally poised, placid TV reporters now openly deplore the government's failure to help the victims adequately....[It was] a rare sense of righteous indignation by a news media that is usually on the defensive."

Compare today's open advocacy with the media's demand for moral equivalence after the disaster of 9/11:

■ Even though the flag is symbolic of the entire country, ABC News decided flag pins were too partisan. "Especially in a time of national crisis, the most patriotic thing journalists can do is to remain as objective as possible," ABC spokesman Jeffrey Schneider told the *Washington Post* in September 2001. "We cannot signal how we feel about a cause, even a justified and just cause."

■ The Reuters wire service decided that calling the 9/11 hijackers "terrorists" was too biased. "We're trying to treat everyone on a level playing field, however awful and cataclysmic for the American people and people around the world," Steven Jukes, Reuters' global head of news, told the *Washington Post's* Kurtz in September 2001.

■ The safety of American soldiers ranked low for NPR's Loren Jenkins, who told the *Chicago Tribune* he would reveal the location of any U.S. commando units he found covering the war in Afghanistan. "The game of reporting is to smoke 'em out," Jenkins told the *Tribune's* Steve Johnson.

■ ABC News President David Westin told journalism students that a good reporter would not say it was wrong to bomb the Pentagon. "I can say the Pentagon got hit..., but for me to take a position this was right or wrong, I mean, that's perhaps for me in my private life," Westin said on October 23, 2001. "But as a journalist, I feel strongly that's something that I should not be taking a position on." Eight days later, Westin changed his mind: "Under any interpretation, the attack on the Pentagon was criminal and entirely without justification."

■ When the issue was America's war, the liberal media did complain about one network. "The Fox News Channel is the incarnation of a school of thought that the morally neutral practice of journalism is now inappropriate," wrote Jim Rutenberg in the December 3, 2001 *New York Times*. "It has thrown away many of the conventions that have guided television journalism for half a century."

When our enemies were the terrorists and the Taliban, critics thought it terribly unprofessional for FNC's anchors to openly side with America. But now they cheer reporters blaming Bush for the hurricane's terrible toll. — *Rich Noyes*

**Since Katrina, media critics have cheered the "passion" and "activism" of Bush-bashing reporters. But in the weeks after 9/11, many journalists insisted on maintaining a "neutral" stance, refusing to side with the United States of America against terrorists who killed thousands.**

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